

NOT QUITE EDEN  
by [machinist](#)

CHAPTER 1 The Hunt

The juniper thicket was dense. At least it would stop the wind. It would have to do, Clay decided. Maybe he could get a fire going with some of the papery bark and some dry needles, if there were some next to the tree trunks. It was cold and the wind was stinging his face with freezing rain. Or maybe it was sleet now. He could hear it hitting the dead leaves underfoot. His boots were letting in some water and his feet were wet. He was getting cold. Have to get some shelter up pretty fast, he thought.

If game wasn't so scarce, he would never have ventured onto this ridge where he wasn't acquainted. He knew his general location, but had never hunted here before. He remembered hearing there were some old ponds up this way. He had hoped to catch a deer drinking at one, following a game trail up the hollow and along the side of the ridge. He'd topped out on more nearly level ground when he ran into the cedar thicket.

Clay walked slowly into the tangled mass of dead blackberry briars, wild grapevines, and tall weeds seeking a small clearing where he could make a fire without setting the entire thicket ablaze. He ducked his head pushing through the prickly juniper limbs, using his hat brim to shield his eyes. He couldn't see ahead very well and was concerned about that. There were animals that sheltered in these thickets, too. It was getting dark. The rain blotted out any animal sounds that might have been heard. They were all holed up somewhere tight anyway, and would not be likely to move in this weather. He didn't want to surprise a bobcat, though.

Despite his caution, Clay bumped head first into a tree, he thought at first, then realized it was a log wall. The wind came along the length of it and was stinging his cheek, making his eyes water. Hoping to get out of the wind behind this wall, whatever it was, he fumbled his way to the right, away from the wind. A big cedar blocked the way, so he went around it and the wall was gone. He kept walking around it and found he was at the end of some old barn or something. A maple tree covered part of the entry.

Clay stepped over some roots and found himself inside a dry building. It was very dark in there, so he stopped in case something else had sought shelter here. He raised his rifle, hoping he wouldn't have to waste a shell just to claim a place for the night. His pocket flashlight was small, but it gave enough light to see there were no other occupants. All he could see was the other end wall of logs and some rusty barrels stacked along it. There was a plank door in the wall. He didn't see any window openings and there was no draft, so he decided he had found his shelter for the duration of the storm.

Overhead he could just see heavy rafters, hewed like the log walls. Some kind of boards covered them. The roof didn't leak, evidenced by the almost dusty dry dirt floor. He kicked some dirt around to clear an area of any forest trash that might burn, in a hurry to get a small campfire going. His boot scraped along a big flat rock. No, it was concrete. He puzzled over why a log building would have a concrete floor, but he was too tired to think about it. A fire was what he needed, and soon. He was exhausted, cold, and hungry.

Clay gathered the few dry twigs near the door opening, then went back outside to the big cedar where he peeled some dry strips of bark from the trunk and broke off some of the smaller dead lower limbs. It

wasn't long lasting firewood, but the aromatic stuff would start a fire very easily. He found a larger deadfall limb and dragged it inside, too. One end of it was pretty dry. With his rifle and backpack leaned against the wall, he began to carefully build a tiny cooking fire, thankful for finding a perfect shelter for the night this far from home.

He heated water from one canteen in the old GI cup on his homemade wire grille, then used his knife to shred some jerky into his cooking pot along with a mixture of cornmeal and other ingredients to make a thick stew. When the water was hot, he poured it into the stew mixture and put more water on to make a hot drink. While it was heating, Clay flipped his poncho back over his head and draped it over his shoulders to catch and reflect the heat of the fire. His hands were beginning to get warm by the time the cup was hot and the stew was finished cooking.

He listened with a woodsman's ear, only semi-conscious of the sleet falling outside, but heard no other noise. Animals would not be moving until the weather eased up. It was doubtful that there was any other human any closer than his house 4 or 5 miles away. That was too far to go on a night like this, so he planned to stay until daylight. He hadn't seen any deer sign closer to home.

A hot meal inside him made things look better. He could barely see outside with the firelight to notice the sleet had accumulated under the big maple tree by the door. It would probably be deeper out in the woods. He'd be lucky to find a deer moving in the morning if all the grazing got covered with ice.

Ice made him think about firewood, so he ventured out to look for more. It wasn't far to some deadfall limbs that were partly dry. He dragged them inside and proceeded to step on them to break them into manageable lengths, then laid them near the fire. A few green cedar boughs cut from the underside of smaller trees were soft enough to make him a camp bed, overlaid with his poncho and sleeping bag. Clay made certain the cedar was entirely covered by the poncho. He didn't want a stray spark to set his bed on fire in the night.

Feeling much better from the hot meal, Clay added new dry limbs to the small fire that lit the room. With his eyes adjusted to the dim light, he walked back to look at the barrels, wondering about this place, so long deserted. There were raccoon tracks and those of other small creatures, but no human tracks except his own. Only a layer of dust and some windblown leaves covered the concrete near the back wall. He walked to the plank door.

It was made like those he'd seen at restored pioneer villages, with boards and battens arranged in the shape of the letter Z, Heavy rusted hinges and a simple wood latch secured it. Light in hand, Clay lifted the latch and pulled. The door was of thick oak and swung heavily. He expected it to lead him outside, but there was a room instead. He swung the light in the room beyond and stared. A heavy wood workbench sat in the center of the room and shelves with wood and metal boxes of various sizes lined the walls. One large cabinet sat in a corner, with upper and lower pairs of doors. Large wooden chests were stacked against the side wall. Cobwebs hung everywhere over what looked to be a 19th century woodworker's shop.

Across from the door he had entered was one to match it, and on the other walls were thick wooden shutters made the same way, all of them pegged together. He walked across the room and raised the latch bar on a set of shutters and opened them expecting a cold blast of air, but found an intact glass window of many small panes. Through it he could see outer shutters that had protected the glass. He closed that again and went to the door.

This door was reluctant to open, fitted closely. A bump with his shoulder got it opened, to discover another room with large double doors on the far side. A blacksmith forge made of stone sat to one side

beneath a wide chimney. There were no windows in this room. Along one wall was a large drill press mounted to a post. An anvil of appreciable size stood on a stump near the forge, and beyond that was a bench with an old style leg vise. Throwing back a canvas tarp on the heavy bench he found black metal tongs, hammers, and other tools. Oddly, they showed no rust. The handles felt waxy. Clay could faintly hear the wind whistling outside, but he felt no draft from it. Along one wall was a machine made of wood and steel that he didn't understand, looking something like a lathe, but with a long spiral wood part extended from one end.

His light was flickering on and off. He knew the batteries were almost gone, so he went back to his pack to find more. He changed the batteries in the LED flashlight, then changed his mind about exploring any more tonight. Batteries were too hard to find. It could wait until morning. He closed the doors to the other rooms and made his way to bed beside his small campfire, the smoke naturally drafting out the door opening and into the treetops.

Clay Whitaker had grown up in these Indiana hills not that far from where he awoke. He thought he had covered most of the area on horseback as a kid, but this ridge was miles farther back in the wilderness by the old State Forest. It was poor country, sold long ago either to the timber companies or the State. Mostly it was overgrown with trash trees now, having been logged heavily in years past. The timber companies had taken all they could get from these hills and sold it off in small tracts where a few cheap houses had been built before the war. None of the occupants survived the diseases that had ravaged the country.

The fire had been coaxed back to life from a few leftover coals buried in the ashes. His morning tea was ready. He'd boiled the teabag until the brew was black and strong. Sitting on his heels and leaning back against the wall, Clay pondered how this building had stood for what must have been a very long time. The maple tree in the door opening had to be at least 20 years old.

Outside, the weather had cleared and warmed slightly. Ice was melting slowly and dripped from the trees, but some remained on the ground. Sunlight filtered through the thicket promising a bit of warmth.

He drank his tea and idly watched out the doorway where the ground sloped gently downhill. A flicker of movement caught his eye making him freeze in place. The deer was looking down and away from him, so he slid silently back out of sight and picked up the rifle. He held the sight picture longer than he should have to be sure of his aim and was afraid the deer would move. But it stood still looking at something. Clay squeezed the trigger and the .223 barked just as the white flag of a tail came up. The deer fell dead, dropping in a heap from the spine shot. As his scope settled back on target, Clay saw what the deer had been looking at. It was his own dog, sniffing along his back trail. The dog's big head looked at the rifleman's position for an instant, then dropped out of sight.

Less than a minute later, the dog barked once. Clay answered, "Jake! In here boy. Come on in."

He heard ice crunching and snuffling, then the black head poked cautiously around the door opening, sniffed once and came in for a welcoming session of petting.

"Whatcha doin' out here, boy? You was s'posed to stay home with Amy!"

The dog whined and looked to the northwest toward home. Then he came back and leaned in close against his master. Clay thought about this and decided he wanted to go home. The dog wouldn't be here unless he had a good reason and he thought he knew the reason.

"Let's get you something to eat. We gotta butcher that deer. Came all this way to find him, so we can't go home without him."

A few minutes later the deer had been gutted and skinned, the meat deboned and packed in its own hide, The legs of the hide were woven together through slits to a single end with a stick through it in the classic poachers' style. That, in turn, he lashed on near the top of his pack and tied the antlers to the sides while Jake enjoyed parts of the liver and heart. His pack back together, Clay set off down the point of the ridge, heading as straight as possible toward his home with Jake leading the way, tail at half mast. It was a long trek, but Clay thought at least it was downhill nearly all the way.

Leaving the ridgetop, Clay caught a glimpse of another old building through the trees. He was in too much of a hurry to investigate and kept on his way down the steep side of the ridge to the valley below. Then it was a matter of following the small creek back toward home.

The pack weighed less than 20 pounds, but with another 50 pounds of meat on top Clay was tired by the time he and the dog got close to their home two hours later. They stopped in the woods above the house on the hillside and had a careful look at the place before they walked quietly down.

Fifty yards from the house, Clay sent the dog on ahead saying, "Find Amy!"

The dog trotted confidently to the back door and looked back at him with a smile.

\*\*\*\*\*

## CHAPTER 2 Home

Amy greeted the dog and waved at Clay who slackened his pace somewhat, seeing that everything appeared to be all right. When he got to the back porch, he set his rifle against the wall and swung the pack off, collapsing on the porch steps.

"What's the matter that Jake came after me?"

"He got worried because I started labor pains and I yelled pretty loud, I guess. I don't think it's coming too soon, though. They're too far apart still. You didn't have to hurry so. I can take care of things here."

"I was afraid that's what it was. Woman shouldn't have to birth a baby alone," he said. "I would'na left but we was about out of meat." Clay was slowly beginning to feel better. "But this should keep us 'till it's over and you're feelin' better. I brought home most of the liver for ya. You'll need that."

He took a deep breath and tried to relax leaning back against a porch post.

"I got a kettle on. I'll make you some tea," Amy said.

He got up and followed her wearily into the kitchen.

"I should be making your tea. You need to take it easy."

"I need to be up and moving. That's what Mom always said," she told him. "When I have a contraction I'll sit down. You don't have to worry about it until they get to be 5 minutes apart. When they get closer together, I'll lay down. I told you all this before."

"Yeah, I know, but it's natural for a man to worry about his wife."

Clay thought of Amy as his wife, although they had never actually had a ceremony. There was no preacher around to do that. Hell, he thought, I only know of about a dozen people in the county. He wished there was at least a woman around to help her when she had her first baby. But the nearest people were Roscoe and Marta Beam about 8 miles up the big creek. That old woman wouldn't want to come out in this weather, and he wasn't sure if she knew any more about delivering babies than Amy did. He washed and sliced the meat then put it in tubs of cold water to chill on the enclosed porch. Later he drained it and started a slow fire in the smoker. When the meat was well drained, he soaked it in a marinade and laid it on the smoker shelves to start the process.

Doctors were just a memory. Damn the government and all their idiocy! He was sure they had let the weaponized flu loose and didn't tell anyone until it was too late. It killed damn near everybody, government included, as far as he knew. That was cold comfort when you needed help.

Amy leaned on the table and made a grunting sound. "UUNGH!"

She breathed deep a couple times and sat down across from Clay. "Well, they are getting closer together. That was about 20 minutes since the last one. They were an hour apart to start with this morning."

"Okay. If I've got a few minutes I need to tend that meat. I'll be just outside if you need something."

Just at sundown, Amy gave birth to Louisa May Whitaker. Clay felt utterly drained after the experience and wondered how exhausted Amy must be. He had kept some water warm on the back of the wood stove and washed the baby, now nursing at her mother's breast. Louisa had her mother's blue eyes and light brown hair and seemed to be as healthy as could be. Amy had been right that her wide hips had made the birth easier, she'd told him. Clay didn't understand how a woman could go through this and survive, but then he thought they had been doing it without doctors for thousands of years. Still, he wished Amy could have had the benefit of what medicine used to be.

Amy had learned from her grandmother about herbs that were useful for reducing the pain, helping to start the milk, stopping excess bleeding, and several other things. She'd had them all laid out on the kitchen counter with written directions for each one. Clay felt hopelessly incompetent at this. Thank God she didn't need any of it. She didn't even want anything for the pain. She said it would get into her milk and might make the baby sleep too much.

After a last trip to check on the meat, it was midnight before Clay felt like he could chance going to sleep. Jake laid at the bedroom door guarding his growing family.

\*\*\*\*\*

As Clay did morning chores he made a mental note that one old hen was getting broody. I hope she sets some eggs and raises us some more chicks, he thought. We need to get a new rooster, too, or they'll get inbred. He put the eggs in the willow basket Amy had made and went to the house to make some breakfast. He had a corncob fire blazing in the cook stove and eggs frying when Amy came into the kitchen carrying the baby. She was stooped a little, obviously sore and still tired. She sat down slowly

and leaned back with the baby close to her chest.

"Feel like eating something?"

"Yeah, some. Maybe fry me some of that liver to go with the eggs. It doesn't sound very good, but I probably need it."

"Okay. I'm frying the tenderloin for me. Yesterday was a long day for both of us."

They ate without talking, listening to the baby make soft sounds when she woke.

"Wish we had some sugar for the tea," Clay said. I ought to go to a town and see if I can find some."

"That's dangerous, isn't it? The Flu might still be out there."

"After two winters it should be gone for good. Has to have a person to live in, doesn't it?"

"I don't think so. I read something once about finding traces of the 1918 Flu virus somewhere."

"Hell, we have to find what we can before it's all gone, or ruined by something. There ain't nobody to fight over things, anyway. I been thinking I could maybe get the truck started. I hooked that little solar panel up to try and charge the battery. It was too dead last I tried it, but maybe it'll go after a few days of sun. Wish I had some fresh gas. Oh well, it's got that preservative stuff in it. Maybe it'll work."

"If you can get it going, I'd like to go along, if you'll wait a few days until I feel more like it."

"Let's see if I can get it going, first."

\*\*\*\*\*

### CHAPTER 3

He had a few tools in his pack along with the regular things. Clay recalled that it was about 4 miles to the little store at the crossroads by the river, so he should be able to walk it in a little over an hour. He hadn't been to this store since everybody died off. At first, they had tried to buy enough things so they could hole up and stay home, then they were too scared to go much of anywhere outside the farms in the creek bottom. Looking back, when the Flu got as far as their town, it would likely be everywhere. The fact that anybody lived was just chance and isolation, the best he could tell. Or maybe he and the other valley folks had been lucky to not be close enough to anybody that was contagious. Guess I'll never know, he thought.

Clay was thinking as he walked, that if the folks on this road hadn't lived like old times they would have starved by now. They had always canned their garden stuff and lived about half off wild game because they were poor. As it turned out only 4 families had survived, the rest having died from the flu. At the top of the highest rise on the valley road, Clay could see Chris Hamilton's place in the distance. There was a thin plume of smoke from their chimney. It was almost half a mile out of his way, so he wouldn't go to check on them, but it was good to know that somebody was still alive there.

The folks down here in the valley were poor, so they had always heated with wood. Cooking was a

problem right away because their LP gas ran out. They had been cooking over a fire outside. Clay had been looking for other things, so it was dumb luck finding the wood cook stove at the antique place. Getting the heavy old cooking range out of the antique shop and onto the truck had been a worrisome job. He'd been afraid he would break something he couldn't fix and afraid there might still be some flu germs in the place. There weren't any bodies, though. The place had been locked up tight. The bodies were in the house next door. He had smelled them. It was no good to dwell on stuff like that, he thought.

They had made several runs to town last year after the dying seemed to be over. Nobody was around, but the town was a mess. Some survivors had broken into a lot of stores and trashed them. He realized now that he hadn't looked closely enough at the stores. They should have taken every last scrap they could possibly use. Then they became afraid to go out anywhere, counting themselves lucky to have not caught the disease in these few trips. Maybe it was too late to find anything useful now. He wasn't sure.

Today their truck wouldn't start. It had been sitting so long the battery went dead. The solar panel hadn't done any good, so he was looking for a vehicle somewhere that might still have a good one, or one he could charge up.

Clay tramped on, getting closer to the crossroads store. Continuing to wonder about where he might find a good battery, he looked at the Neilson house and felt the revulsion that went with the dead smell. It was faint now, but it still made his stomach roll. As he passed the house, he realized he hadn't seen Tom Neilson's truck and decided that it might be in his garage. Until now, he hadn't looked in either the house or the garage because of the smell and just figured that with no vehicle around that Tom must have been gone and died somewhere else. Clay swallowed hard and walked up the driveway. The smell was almost gone. It was the memory of it that bothered him.

Sunlight shone in the small garage door windows. Clay could see the tailgate of Tom's white truck. He raised the garage door easily enough. There was only a musty smell inside, tinged with old engine odor. The keys were not in the truck. Probably in Tom's pocket, wherever he was. The truck was nearly new, so Clay was afraid he'd mess up the electronics if he tried to hot wire it. He had to find Tom if he wanted the truck, and he had decided he really wanted that truck. It was a Chevy half ton, and it was 4 wheel drive. He went to look for Tom's body.

He went outside and to the glass patio door, wondering how he could get it open. A push sideways on the handle and it slid open. He guessed nobody had worried about locking the door. The smell wasn't as bad as he thought it would be, then he realized that there were several windows open. It still stunk, but he thought he could stand it. Clay walked on through the kitchen into the living room and there he was on the couch, or what was left of him. His stomach rebelled and he ran outside, heaving.

Clay sat there in the tall grass on his hands and knees until the heaving stopped and his eyes cleared. He washed his mouth out with his canteen and sat on his heels for a while. It didn't look like Tom. It looked like something in a horror movie and he had never liked those. This was someone he KNEW. He'd never liked Tom Neilson all that well, being a little snooty, he thought. That didn't matter. It made him sick just to think about that thing on the couch.

But he decided that he would go back and get those keys. They really needed a good truck and Tom sure didn't need it now. Back inside, Clay didn't want to touch that dead body. He looked around for a tool of some sort and saw the fancy poker and shovel by the fireplace. Using the poker and a pair of fireplace tongs, he managed to tear open the pants pocket on the corpse. Lucky they were cheap dress pants and not jeans, he thought, or that would have been a lot harder. The key ring came out with some

help from the poker and the tongs. He didn't want to touch them, so he used the poker to carry them outside. There was a gas can beside Tom's boat in the garage. He took that out to the gravel driveway and poured some gas over the keys. He used the poker to drag them over onto the concrete floor and left them in the sun to dry off.

The gas smell helped clear his head. It was familiar and it got rid of the death smell. It was still chilly outside and that helped, too. Maybe 40 degrees, he guessed, then he noticed the big thermometer on the porch post. 44 degrees, it said. Not bad for a March day in Indiana. The keys were dry enough, although still smelling like gas. Clay picked them up and went to the truck. The low battery barely cranked the engine, but it finally decided to fire and sputter a while. The second try it almost didn't crank, but it fired and ran--pretty rough, but it RAN! He kept his foot on the throttle until it smoothed out some. The gas tank only showed a little over half a tank. Clay remembered the gas can and let the truck idle while he poured that in the tank, then set the can in the truck bed.

He backed the truck outside and put it in park so it could run while he rummaged in the garage. He found two more plastic fuel cans, jumper cables, half a dozen quarts of oil, and Tom's big zero turn mower. He had no use for that. Clay wanted a tractor that ran. But it had a battery in it, and it was a pretty big one, car-sized. He had enough tools with him to get the cables off and took the battery outside. He popped the hood open on the truck and set the battery on the ground to charge with the jumper cables. He didn't want to chance not being able to get it started again.

Now he had a plan. Clay methodically went through the garage and whatever he thought they could use, he loaded in the truck bed. A floor jack, 2 toolboxes, some nice fishing poles, some frog gigs, a huge tackle box, and a pair of hip waders. There didn't seem to be much else in there. Then he thought about his boots leaking and wondered what size shoes Tom wore. He went back into the house.

Tom's wife Angela was laying on the bathroom floor and Clay about lost it again. He closed the door quickly and went on past it. The big bedroom had what he sought. The closet had 2 pairs of work boots, one worn and one new. Size 11, they said. Clay wore a 10 1/2. Close enough. He took all the shoes in the closet out and looked around for some way to carry them. Back to the kitchen. Under the sink was a box of heavy trash bags. He packed up all the shoes in one and looked in the other closet. Amy wore a size 8 shoe. The ones he found were 9's, but he took them anyway. He packed all the clothes he found in more trash bags and began making trips out to the truck.

The truck bed was getting full. Then he remembered the boat on its' trailer. He would pack that full and tow it.

When Clay drove into his own driveway, Amy was looking out the window holding a rifle. He quickly shut the truck off and yelled, "It's me!" Jake came bounding out of the house and greeted him, with Amy following slowly.

"Where did you get that?"

"Tom Neilson's place. It was a mess. I got sick."

"I bet you did. Was it bad in there?"

"Bad enough, but the kitchen and the bedrooms were clean. I brought a lot of stuff home. I'm just gonna back it in the barn for now, in case it rains. We can sort it out later."

"I feel kinda funny about taking other people's things," Amy said.



Clay let out a sigh and said, "Better get used to it. That's all there is now. I don't think there's enough people left in the country to get it going again and make stuff. I turned on the truck radio on the way home and couldn't get anything on it. If there ain't a radio station going yet, it probably means there's nobody to run it, or no power to operate it. I think we are going to be on our own for a long time."

\*\*\*\*\*

## CHAPTER 4

"You really think the whole country is dead? That's too horrible to think about."

"Probably some folks left, like us, just not very many. How long's it been since the TV stations quit?"

Amy said, "I think it was right after we made that last trip to town last Spring."

"And there still ain't even a radio station going. Not even the weather channel. Tom's truck's got one of those fancy radios that has the weather channel on it. Didn't get anything there, either. How long's the power been off? Not long after the TV quit, wasn't it?"

Amy's face looked stricken. "Yeah, it was just a few days later the lights and the refrigerator stopped. So, is just everybody gone? Dead?"

"No, there's some folks here, we know that. We need to find out if there's more people around and where they are. Need to find out what kind of folks they are, too. Might be some that ain't so good, y'know? So we better be careful, but we need to do some lookin' around now that we got a way to get somewhere."

"That truck is gonna run out of gas. Can you get more?"

"I think I got that figured out. There's a truck down at the store I saw that had one of those farm fuel tanks in the bed. They got a battery powered pump on those tanks. I think I can use that to get gas out of the underground tank at the gas stations."

"Will the gas still be good?"

"Should be, as long as it's underground it should be good for a long time. It might get a little water in it, but we kept gas in the farm tank when I was a kid for a year or more and that tank was mounted up high in the sun. It will stay cool in the ground and not evaporate all the good stuff out of it. Least I think so. I'm goin' back to the crossroads store and try that. I'll see if he has some more good batteries around there, too, and oil and stuff."

"We oughta go see the neighbors and see how they're getting along," Amy said. "I haven't seen anybody since last Fall."

"Let me go to the store first tomorrow, then we can go visiting."

\*\*\*\*\*

"You don't need to be carryin' anything yet. You set down and take it easy," Clay said. "I got a lot of

stuff at the store and all you need to do is tell me where to put it."

"The kitchen is full with all the things you got yesterday at Neilson's place.

"I got room in the barn for most of this, but there's some canned goods and stuff. I got all the salt and pepper and that kind of thing he had. And there's some coffee and some tea. Got lots of sugar, too."

When Clay had the foodstuffs carried in, Amy said, "I don't know what to do with all this. We need someplace safe to keep things. Can't let the mice get into things. The cats can't get 'em all."

"Lemme work on that. I got some ideas while I was loadin' up there today. I want to find someplace that has some barrels that will seal up tight, and maybe find some big trailers i can pull home to put things in. I'm thinkin' we need to get stuff put away safe before roofs start leaking on all the houses and stores around. We need to talk to the neighbors about that, too."

"I can put some of the food in the spare bedroom upstairs, but we'll have to heat it enough next winter to keep it from freezing," Amy said.

"That'll do for now. I need to work in the barn and get some things put inside."

Clay thought his head would burst with all the new problems. He'd found some dry charge batteries at the store. It was a country version of a convenience store and gas station. The batteries would store in the barn for now. He needed some way to keep batteries charged besides swapping them out in the truck. He should look for more solar chargers of some kind. That might mean a trip to the city and he wasn't anxious to do that. He never liked the cities with their high crime rates and thought that if very many people survived they would be worse now.

\*\*\*\*\*

## CHAPTER 5

Amy decided she wasn't ready to sit and ride that far for a few days, so it was a week later when they planned to go visiting. Clay had been busy for that week, hauling home a lot of things. He had found a delivery truck at the herb and cheese place up on the hill a mile past the crossroads store. The cheese was all moldy green and past hope, but the herbs and spices were just fine. There was a herd of cattle in the big pasture across the highway, too. The cattle were getting along fine, so he had no immediate plans to do anything with them, besides opening some gates so they could get to the hay barn.

The delivery truck was a refrigerator unit. The driver had gone to the house and died there. The truck box was full of molded and spoiled cheese, but it was in plastic containers so Clay had simply shoved it all out the back and left it there. He left the door open and sloshed it out with buckets of water from the well by the house that had a hand pump. The next day he'd gone back with Amy and some spare batteries and diesel fuel. The engine smoked and rattled for a while before it ran halfway decent, but it ran fairly well.

Amy drove the pickup home following him in the big truck in case he had trouble, but it went okay. They stopped at the crossroads store and got some diesel fuel additives that improved the big truck's engine a lot. The fuel tank was nearly full, so he let it run for half a day to charge up the batteries. He was thinking about how to get started farming some ground, and that truck meant he could haul home

what he needed.

\*\*\*\*\*

Tom Neilson had a like new chainsaw that Clay had brought home, so he put that and its fuel can and tools in the pickup before they left home. He threw in a long tow chain and some tools, in case they found a tree down across the road. It was still too muddy in the fields to be dodging trees that way, 4 wheel drive or not. There were no wreckers around to pull him out if he got stuck.

Except for some tree limbs he moved by hand, they had no trouble in the 5 miles to Roscoe Beam's farm. The baby rode on Amy's lap, and she was getting tired of holding her by the time the trip was over.

"We need to find a car seat for her if we are going to do much of this," Amy said.

"I'll watch for one," he said. He drove slowly up the Beam's long lane.

Roscoe's shotgun peeked out a window of the barn at them until he realized who it was. The older man stepped outside and waved when Clay stopped and shut the truck off.

"We brought you some things," Amy said as he came toward her side of the truck.

"Sorry 'bout the gun," Roscoe said, "Cain't be too careful now. C'mon in the house and set a while."

Clay got out and shook hands with him. "Good to see you're still up and goin'."

"Where'd the truck come from?"

Clay told of his experiences and what he'd found. "We need to start gatherin' up some things before they all go bad."

Roscoe nodded and said, "You think the flu is all gone now?"

"I don't know, but we don't have a lot of choice about it. It's get it now, or do without," Clay said.

Roscoe saw the baby when Amy caught up with the men. "Looks like you got a brand new one there!"

Roscoe's wife Marta met them at the door and spied the baby. "Oooh, who's this you're carryin'?"

Amy smiled and said, "Louisa May. She's 9 days old today."

"Well, come in and rest. You shouldn't be up runnin' around yet. Take that big chair. Can I get you something to drink?"

Amy said, "We brought you some things. Clay has been down to the crossroads store."

Clay came in with a big cardboard box and set in on the floor. "There's coffee, tea, sugar, and some spices and such in there. We got a lot more at home. Just tell us what you need and we'll get it."

They talked until nearly noon and parted after Clay and Roscoe got their pickup going with a new battery and some fuel additive. He left another new battery for the old man's tractor. The men planned

to get together the next day and work out a trip to begin gathering goods, over Marta's objections that they might bring home disease.

The next morning over a cup of coffee, Roscoe said, "We need to get some of those trailers from the rental place in town, if they're still there. We could tow 'em home and let 'em set. They seal up pretty good."

Amy asked, "Are you sure Marta is okay with this?"

"No, she ain't okay with it, but she knows we need a lot of things an' there ain't any help for it. We got to do it, and pretty quick now. It ain't just her. Ever'body's scared to death. We give some things to the Harris's on up the hollow, and they was about afraid to let us in. People is about out of everything, though, and they're startin' to go lookin'. The Collier's has been over to around Scottsburg and got some stuff from some houses on the way. Didn't go into town, though. Didn't see anybody they said. Must not be many folks left at all."

"The Harris's, they brought home a crank powered grain mill that they been usin' to make flour. We need to find more of them. We used it and made enough to do us for a while, but now I got the tractor goin' again I can grind all you want with the feed grinder. Long as we got diesel, that is."

Clay said, "That's another problem. The diesel and gas ain't gonna last forever. It goes bad when it gets old. Even if we can still find some, we'll be stuck with things that won't run."

The older man looked shocked at that and said, "I hadn't thought about that. Oh, damn. We might have to go to farmin' with horses again. How the hell will we cut wood?"

"I dunno," Clay said. "but we better be figuring it out pretty soon."

Amy said, "Let's get what we can now. I don't want to have to dress my little girl in buckskins. We need diapers and clothes and sewing stuff and all kinds of things."

Roscoe said, "We need a place to store a lot of stuff and take care of it. No good gatherin' up stuff and havin' it go bad."

Amy said, "How about the church up here by your place? It's big and it'd hold a lot. They just put a new roof on it, too. It should be good for a long time."

"That sounds good," Roscoe said. "But we need to think about this before we go haulin' all kinds of stuff home. We gotta get crops in pretty soon, and if diesel fuel is gonna go bad, there ain't no need to go crazy haulin' home a lot of stuff that depends on it. We need to think about the long term, too. I want to find some horses, big horses like the Amish use. Maybe we better go see if any of them is livin'."

Clay nodded and said, "Let's do that first. Take some stuff along to give 'em if any of 'em made it, and see if we can work together on this. I know some of them that lived out west of town. I used to do some welding for a few of them and they know my old truck. I should drive it out there so maybe they won't shoot at us."

"Is your old one still going?"

"Yeah. I put a battery in it and I had to find a hand pump to air up a low tire, but it'll go now."

\*\*\*\*\*

## CHAPTER 6

Amos Schwartz shook his head and said, "Me an' Delilah is all that's left. Ever'body else died. They got that fever and went to pukin' up blood and didn't last no time. We was home and workin' outside and hadn't been to town in while, so we didn't know about it 'til we went over to the blacksmith's an' he was layin' dead in the yard with two of his kids. We did the best we could at buryin' 'em, but it was a hard row. I seen two of my best friends die an' they wasn't a blessed thing I could for 'em. They kep' sayin' to get away, don't touch me. I did, but it was hard."

He sat there and cried, unashamed. He finally said, "I did what I could fer the horses and the stock. Mostly I just let 'em out to pastures and saw to it they could get water."

"We didn't know how it went out here. Sounds about like what we saw," Clay said. "I was at work at the lumber yard when the boss died right there on the spot and the woman in the office was raving outa her head with that fever. She fell over on the desk and died inside of half an hour. It happened so FAST! I ran outa there and started drivin' home. I saw people laying dead in the streets and I seen one man fall out the door of the drug store. I went home and stayed there. The radio was sayin' it was some kind of flu, but then the stations all stopped. I reckon the people all died. There's---remains---laying everywhere."

The men sat there silent with tears on their faces as Amos' wife came outside followed by 3 small children. Noone spoke for some time.

Finally, Roscoe said, "We brought you some coffee and sugar and some other things. We got it from that grocery on this side of town. It should be clean, 'cause there was nobody in there and the doors were all locked up. It smells a little, 'cause there was some meat spoilt in there, but this stuff wasn't anywhere close to the mess. We stayed away from that."

Clay said, "We brought you some .22 shells and some shotgun shells. We got trouble with dogs and coyotes, and thought you might need 'em."

"Thanks a lot. Yeah, the dogs are like the old plagues of Egypt. They get into everything and they're MEAN! We're 'fraid for the kids to be outside without us."

Roscoe said, "I got an idea!"

Clay asked, "What?"

"Bout them dogs. Let's go to the feed store and get some of that fly bait they sell. The man there told me once it would kill about anything and do it quick. We can't be up all day and night shootin' dogs. Let's poison 'em."

Clay said, "Have to be careful with poison. Most anything is liable to get into it."

Amos said, "It sounds good to me. I can't get nothin' done fer the dogs. Gotta carry the gun all the time."

"We'll fix you up," Roscoe said.

Clay asked, "Did you say there's a lot of horses that nobody owns now?"

Amos nodded. "They's horses all over and nobody to tend 'em. Good horses, too. I can't do much for 'em and keep my place goin'. Not enough hours in the day."

"The gasoline and diesel fuel is going to go bad in a year or so," Clay told him. "That means we're going to have to use horses to farm with. Our machinery won't go without fuel."

Amos said, "I wished we lived closer together. A man needs some neighbors to help back and forth."

Roscoe and Clay looked at each other, and then Clay spoke. "You can live about anywhere you want to now. There's empty farms all around us that you could move into any time. Good bottom land, too. If it ain't worked this year it'll start goin' back to brush and we'll never get it back."

Roscoe said, "We need to learn from you about how you do things. We're all livin' like Amish now an' there's a lot we don't know. If you'd consider coming to live by us, we'll help you move and get set up. Do the plowin' for you this year, too, while the tractors still work."

Amos looked at his wife who gave a slight nod of agreement. "Let's do it then."

Two days later Amos and his family were settled in the farm just up the road from Clay and Amy.

\*\*\*\*\*

Clay stopped at the hardware store in town that had a Radio Shack section and took a collection of radios and the biggest 220 volt generator they had. He and Roscoe worked for a couple hours getting the generator hooked up at the gas station. It took a couple trips to the electric shop for wire and parts, but they made the hookup and soon had gasoline pumping into Clay's truck.

"Mister, have you got anything to eat?"

Roscoe turned around so suddenly the boy started to run before he said, "Hold on boy. We'll find you somethin'."

Clay got a fried egg and biscuit sandwich out of the truck and handed it to the boy, who looked to be maybe 12 or 13 years old.

Roscoe got his thermos of milk from the cab and gave it to the boy then sat and watched it all disappear.

Between bites the boy said, "Thanks mister. I was really hungry. All of us are. We cain't get into that big grocery over there and the rest is empty now."

Clay asked, "All of you? How many people are you talkin' about?"

"Five of us. Me an' one other boy and three girls. We're all that's left in town, now that the old man died."

That got Roscoe's attention. "When was that?"

" 'Bout a month ago. He had some kinda breathin' trouble and he just choked and passed out. We didn't know what to do. He had those inhaler things that he used, but they was all ran out. Said it was the azzma, or somethin' like that."

"He was takin' care of you? Helpin' you kids?"

"Yeah, he told us a lotta things. Told us how to get good water to drink and helped us get food and learn to cook it on a fire an' all. None of us wanted to go home. Our parents died and it was awful. We did get some clothes and stuff, but the girls won't go back to their house."

"Where are the others? We can get 'em somethin' to eat," Clay said.

"We been living in Mister Williams' basement. It's warmer down there than in the house, and he had a water tank outside that runs into the basement without a pump. The house is out past the paint store on the highway. I come to town to look for food and seen you here."

"We'll get something for 'em to eat," Roscoe said. "You get in the truck and we'll go to the grocery. We busted the back door open this morning."

"All right! We couldn't figure out how to get in. We threw rocks at the front windows, but they wouldn't break. So, we been gettin' stuff from other houses, me an' Ben. It's bad in there. Dead people."

The boy looked haunted. Clay said softly, "I know. I've been in a few of them. Let's go now."

\*\*\*\*\*

When the kids were fed, Roscoe said, "We need another truck. Let's go to the Ford dealer and see if we can get one going."

The new truck started easily and was soon filled with gas. They made a few stops at a clothing store and had the back end piled with groceries when the trucks headed for Roscoe's farm.

Marta Beam heard the story from Roscoe and Clay as they herded the kids into the house. Marta shook her head and said, "We can't let kids have to live like that."

She looked over the kids and said, "Food is almost ready. Lemme get you something to eat and drink, but first things first." She pointed at the bathroom door and said, " You all go get washed up. At least faces and hands. I'll be puttin' something on the table."

"Yes Ma'am," the smallest girl said.

The kids trooped into the bathroom and came out looking cleaner. Marta thought they were too somber looking for kids that age, and wondered what all they had endured. She shuffled chairs and added one from the desk to have enough. From the kitchen, Marta took the soup pot off the stove and put it on a trivet in the center of the dining table, then began to fill bowls.

As she went back into the kitchen for milk and cornbread, she told them, "Don't be bashful. There's plenty to eat and more where that came from."

When stomachs were full, Marta said, "My name is Marta Beam and that's our friend Clay Whitaker.

the ugly old guy is my husband Roscoe. Now tell me your names and how old you are and I'll try to remember them."

The smaller boy said, "I'm Dylan Draper and I'm almost 13, and that's my sister Melanie," he said, pointing. "She's 14. And that's my other sister Emma. She's 10."

The other boy said, "I'm Benjamin Scott. I'm 13."

"Gina Kelley. I'm 12."

"I'm not telling how old I am," Marta said, but Roscoe is 58. He's going to get to help with the laundry here pretty soon. Do you kids have any clean clothes?"

Gina said, "We've got more clothes, but we couldn't wash ours very good."

Clay said, "I'll get 'em outa the truck. We stopped at Goodwill and got some things for 'em, but I'll let the kids sort it out."

Marta said, "Okay, is anybody feeling bad or hurt anyplace?" All the heads shook no, so she went on to the next thing. "Good! We're going to take turns in the bathtub, so you figure out who's first and we'll have you some clean clothes ready."

"We'll have to bed down one of you on the couch, but we have 2 spare bedrooms that will handle boys in one and girls in the other."

Benjamin said, "I'll take the couch. I've been sleeping on a couch."

Clay said, "Some of you could stay with me and my wife if you want to. We've got a couple spare bedrooms. You want to go meet my wife and decide? We have a new baby, but that's all at our house."

"I wanna stay with my sisters," Dylan said. He got an anxious look from Melanie, the oldest, but he held his ground.

Gina Kelley stood close to Benjamin as he said, "We'd like to stay together, me and Gina."

"You can all sleep here tonight and we'll sort that out later. We won't make you do anything you don't want to do. But I think Clay has a good idea. Why don't you all go with him to his house and meet Amy and the baby, then you can come back here. It'll take some time to make sure you have what you need, so we can do all that tomorrow."

The next morning Melanie spoke for the group of kids. "We'd like to stay together, but there's not enough room either place, so Dylan and me and Emma would like to stay here, if it's okay. Benjamin and Gina want to stay with Clay and Amy."

Roscoe and Marta smiled at them all and said, "Then we'll just do that, just like you said. I think it will be just fine. It's not far to Clay's, so you kids can see each other a lot. We'll have to get you kids some schooling somehow, so you'll be together for that, I'm sure."

\*\*\*\*\*

CHAPTER 7



Amos Schwartz, Clay, and Roscoe made a trip to the tiny village of New Philadelphia where they discovered that the only two families had survived there. Jacob Knepp, the harness maker, had 5 children ranging from 8 to 18 years old. His young neighbor Daniel Schmidt and his wife had 3 kids, 2, 4, and 6 year old. Jacob invited Amos and his family to move to their neighborhood, but Amos soon convinced him to come look at the farms where he lived now. Daniel went along and together they decided the rich bottom land was very desirable.

Several trips were required with two large trucks to move the two families over a period of a couple weeks. The men and Jacob's girls Martha and Sarah helped clean the houses and get them ready to move in. His oldest son Isaac was 12 years old and a big help getting a hand well pump installed and some stalls ready in the barns on both their new farm and also the farm Daniel would be taking over. Their wives came and spent the night a few times getting everything in order, cooking outdoor over a fire until the final moving day when their wood cookstoves were moved.

\*\*\*\*\*

"We need to get the biggest farm equipment we can find and plow this whole valley," Roscoe said.

Jim Collier agreed, saying, "If diesel is not going to last, then we have to use it and get the best out of it now. If we can get most of the valley plowed and planted in pasture and hay, we'll have chance at farming with horses later. They are just too slow to be trying to play catch-up. I know where to find what we need up by Seymour. We'll have to road the tractors and equipment down here. They're too big to haul. Highway driving is hard on tractor tires, but we won't be wearing them out farming, it sounds like."

Roscoe said, "It ain't that far. Those things'll run what, maybe 20 miles an hour? They sure ain't no traffic to worry about now, so we can go right down the middle of the highway."

"Let's do it ASAP, then," Clay said. "I told Amos we'd plow his farm and those friends of his from over by New Philadelphia. That's over 300 acres, and we've each got a lot more to do. This bottom land is slow to dry out. Can we get it all done in time to get crops put out?"

Jim grinned and said, "We'll spend more time servicing the tractors than we do working a thousand acres! If we can get 2 or 3 of those big ones going, it'll keep somebody busy hauling fuel and food to the drivers. We can do a thousand acres in a week, easy. What we need to do now is get everything else ready. Get fuel stocked up down here and find enough seed and fertilizer and some trucks to spread it."

Clay had called the meeting at Roscoe's farm with the Collier, Schwartz, Knepp, Schmidt, and Harris families. He told Jim Collier, "You're the one who needs to be bossing the operation this year. You've got the experience at this. Tell us what to do when and we'll do our best to make it happen. Somebody take notes here so we know what we all agreed to and what to do next."

Albert Harris said, "There's that big truck stop over at Seymour. If we get lucky we might find a tanker of fuel up there. Might find some other good stuff too. When I was driving OTR, there was always 30 or 40 trucks there."

"Anybody else that can drive a semi? Not me, I mean, I could learn I guess, but I never drove one," Clay said.

Jim said, "All I've driven is my grain trucks, and not all that much, but I can get by at it. I can't thread a needle with a 52 foot trailer, but I can drive one down here."

Clay said, "That oughta do it. We can drive somebody up there in my truck and then lend a hand to get things working. Now, about seed. Who knows where to find enough seed?"

Amos said, "You wanted the open pollinated seed if you can get it, you said?"

"That's right. We have to save our seed for next year."

"Well, I know where there's plenty of wheat, and soybeans, oats, and corn. It's that yellow dent corn that we grew and saved seed all the time. And there's some spelt, too, for horse feed. We always saved our seed for crops."

Anita Harris said, "We've been saving our garden seeds for years. We don't have enough for everyone, but we can share some. We got a generator back right before the-- Anyway we got one and we use a vacuum sealer to store our seeds to keep the bugs out."

"That works good now," Marta said. "But that all depends on stuff that's going to run out. We can do it that way now, but we have to think about how we can do things without plastic bags and electric machines. I think our Amish friends can help us there."

Daniel Schmidt said, "We save seeds in bottles. We put in some Bay leaves and peppers and have no bugs in them."

Jim Collier and Al Harris were deep in conversation about trucks when Jim's wife Sylvia said, "Why don't we talk about livestock? We're going to need pigs and chickens and cattle. We need somebody to work on plans for who will have which ones and how to feed them, and how we can find them."

"There's animals running wild now," Amy said. "I've seen chickens everywhere, and some pigs in the woods."

Marta said, "That will be a job, rounding up pigs and chickens. They'll be wild as deer now."

"Maybe we can trap 'em somehow," Anita Harris said.

Jacob Knepp said, "Ve can find pigs. All the pigs you vant. Ve vill need a truck to get dem here. It vill take some days to get dem togedder. Dey are in pasture near my farm. Pigs in der woods iss bad. Dey get mean and attack us. If dey get mean, ve need to shoot dem."

Roscoe said, "You're right about that. We need pigs to raise, but we better kill every wild hog we see. They get vicious and they'll ruin crops. My brother in Oklahoma told me about the wild hogs out there."

Clay said, "As soon as somebody is ready for pigs, we'll go get the ones you're talking about, Jacob."

The conversations went on until it nearly sundown when Clay said, "We better call it quits for now. Looks like me and Roscoe are going with Al and Jim to find trucks, fuel, and big tractors tomorrow. Everyone else take an idea you heard here or one of your own and write down what you need to make it happen. Let's get back together in a week and see where we are then."

\*\*\*\*\*

## CHAPTER 8 JUNE, 2015

"I'd say we got about 1,200 acres worked down," Jim told Clay. "There's 80 acres sowed in alfalfa and about 400 acres in hay, mostly Timothy, Brome, and Orchard Grass for the horses, and some Red Clover for cattle. There's a couple hundred acres of those hilly fields that we disced up deep and sowed in Fescue to hold those hillsides. If we can keep that mowed to keep the weeds out of it, we'll have good Fall and Winter pasture for a couple hundred head of cattle there."

"They're planting corn now in those 2 big fields down in the lower bottoms, about 160 acres of it. The rest is for whatever people decide on. Lot of room for wheat this Fall and we found a couple fields of wheat that reseeded itself up by the highway. I'll try combining that and see if we can get something from it to use for feed and flour."

Roscoe asked, "How much of this can we do with horses when the time comes? Anybody talk to the Amish folks about that?"

Jim said, "All 3 families wanted 80 acres broke up to plant this year. They say they can do that easy. But Jacob Knepp said that if he can get more horses over here and ready to work, him and his 2 boys can work a lot more. He brought all the harness and supplies from his harness shop. He said if we get a couple more families and enough horses, we can farm most all of it. Mostly in hay and pasture, but mowing it each year and grain farming about half of it, he says."

Roscoe nodded. "The problem then is getting enough grass and hay ground for this year so we can keep the horses here, right?"

"That's right. I think I can arrange that. There's some kind of poor pasture on the next farm over from me. I've got 80 acres in hay now, so we can winter a lot of horses if we aren't feeding beef or selling hay like I planned."

Roscoe said, "Looks like we've got a chance of making it this year. If we can keep things running for a year or two with the tractors, maybe we can get there."

"We need more cultivators and soon," Jim said. "There's no herbicides to be found, so everything will go to weeds if we can't keep it cultivated. Me and Al Harris are going up to look around Brownstown where the vegetable growers were. They might have some old cultivators, but they went to herbicides lately, too. Most of the old cultivators got sold for junk years ago."

"Nothin' comes easy, does it?"

Jacob Knepp told Clay, "Ve haf cultivators. Ve need to haf more people to drive horses, but ve can find cultivators."

"We'll get a truck and you show us where to go," Clay told him.

A week later there were 2 mid-size tractors and 4 horse teams cultivating corn, soybeans, and large vegetable plots. Jacob's 16 and 18 year old girls, Sarah and Martha, expertly drove teams along with

their brother Isaac. Daniel Schmidt drove tractor and cultivator with Jim Collier while Clay and Al Harris were busy with other chores and doing oil changes and keeping the fuel topped off. They kept at it steadily for the next 6 weeks until the corn was too tall to get through, and the mid-summer heat lessened the need for cultivating.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Get that basket under the pump and I'll wash those beans," Amy said. "You all can go to the shade and cool off."

"I want a drink first," Benjamin said.

Gina echoed, "Me too. It's hot out here." She wiped sweat away with her hand and headed for the pump.

"There's some lemon Kool Ade in the kitchen," Amy said. She glanced at the baby on the porch in her playpen and began to wash the green beans.

Clay came out and said, "Me and Al Harris are going up to the truck stop again to see what's in those other trailers up there. If we find a good one, he'll drive it back. I got my truck tank with treated fuel in it and the fuel pump on it and spre batteries to start 'em with. Anything you want that we might find up that way?"

"Canning jars. Always be lookin' for canning jars and LIDS! I don't know what we'll do when the rubber seals quit working on canning jars. Oh! And some work clothes for the kids. They're growing fast and they need more clothes. Gina has shot up several inches this summer and her clothes are way too tight. She's wearing my shorts now. Look for a women's size 10, and Benjamin is your size, but he's only about a 28 waist. See if you can find some fabric that might suit the Amish folks, too. I'm sure they need it. Oh, and everybody needs shoes. It doesn't matter much now, but come winter it will be important."

"I'll look into that. We should find something in a town that big.

Clay didn't say anything about it then, but he was remembering that he'd done some construction work on a cannery over by Scottsburg. He was wondering if they could work out how to do the tin cans at home. That place was full of them. Of course it ran on natural gas, but he thought they could make it work on propane if they tried. There was that big propane dealer over that way, too, and propane would keep forever, if the tanks didn't leak.

That evening Clay came in with a big grin on his face. The pressure cooker was hissing and making the jiggling noise, the house was full of steam and his Amy was sweating up a storm. She looked at his silly grin and said, "What?"

"Come see."

Parked in the road was a semi truck that said WAL MART emblazoned on one side.

"They have a distributor hub in Seymour. Anything you want and truckloads of it. We got a forklift going and that one is half full of canning jars. The rest is fabrics and clothes. We'll get shoes the next trip."

Amy said, "Well. Ask and ye shall receive."

The next day there were 3 buggies in the yard and Amish women were chuckling over the trailer contents.

"One day the trucks von't have fuel and these miracles you do vill stop," Jacob Knepp said.

Clay said, "That is so true. There are a few things that really worry me about that."

"Vhat is dat?"

"How to grind grain for feed and flour. How to cut firewood. How to do welding without any gas for torches or gasoline for that portable arc welder. How to get in enough hay for the winter to feed all those horses and cattle."

"Some things ve can help. The hay is hard work, but it can be done with horses and put it in stacks. To cut wood by hand iss a lot of vork. Velding can be done in der forge. Ve haf to find one. To grind der flour iss hard. Ve not grind grain for feed. Let der cows und pigs chew."

"How about threshing wheat and oats? Can we do that by hand?"

"Iss too much vork," Jacob said.

"But can we do it if we have to?"

"It can be done. Der cutting is done wit a scythe when the grain is not so dry, or der grain falls off in der field. Straw iss tied in bundles. Stack der bundles in shocks to dry in field. Den bundles are hauled to the barn where it may stay until you are ready to thresh it with a flail. Flail iss stick to beat the straw. Den iss taken outside for wind. Grain you throw up for wind to blow away the chaff. Den grain iss clean to use."

"Der vork is too much. Ve use horses pull a binder to cut grain. Der machine ties bundles und ve haul to a treshing machine wit diesel engine. But iss no better dan a combine when dere is no diesel. Dere are no new binders, only very old ones. If ve cut wheat wit a binder, we can do maybe 10 acres in 2 days, maybe less if ve have no trouble. To cut wheat wit a scythe, one man can cut maybe 2 or 3 acres in a day, and another man must tie it in bundles, maybe 2 men. It iss a hard way to get wheat for bread. This we need to work on."

Clay said, "Jim told me he could cut 50 acres of wheat a day with a big combine and have the grain clean enough to use. That's a big difference. We have a big problem coming up."

Jacob said, "Farms must be not so big wit more people to vork. Iss the only way wit'out the big machines. Ve do not need so much wheat. My family maybe eats 2 loaves of bread a day. Maybe less. A bushel of wheat is 60 pounds so it makes 60 loaves and ve eat for a month. So, 12 bushels of wheat is all ve need for bread for a year. I grow 40 bushels of wheat on an acre, so dat is enough to feed chickens and have some to sell. I do not need to grow 100 acres of wheat. What would I do with 4,000 bushels? Dere is no place to sell it now, and nobody to eat so much."

Clay asked, "What will you grow on your farm?"

Jacob said, "Ve grow five acres of wheat and have some to sell. Ve grow 10 acres of corn and feed to

pigs and cows and horses. Cows and horses need pasture and hay. Ve grow 10 acres of hay. I will have room to grow somet'ing to sell and buy udder things. Maybe ve haff milk cows and sell milk and make butter. Dat would be good. Ve make a good living with 120 acres, but it iss hard work."

\*\*\*\*\*

## CHAPTER 9

Amy was kneading bread dough while Clay told her what Jacob had said.

She asked, "So is everybody going to be farmers now?"

"No," Clay said. "What I'm figuring out is that with tractors and combines one farmer could feed a lot of people, maybe 100 or several hundred. But farming with horses and doing things the hard way a farmer might only be able to feed 10 people. I'm not sure, but it won't be very many. That means we need more farmers for the number of people we have, but not everybody."

"So, what are we going to do for a living?"

"I don't know yet. I'm not a farmer, but we can raise most of what we eat. I'll have to do something besides that to trade for what we don't raise or scrounge from salvaging things. Salvaging won't last forever. Things will start going bad form the weather and nobody taking care of them."

Amy said, "You've done welding and worked on machinery. Maybe you could do that."

Clay shook his head, "Not without electricity. I'll think of something. I need to figure out what's left to salvage and what I can do with it."

\*\*\*\*\*

A fringe of ridges and steep hollows bordered Royce's Creek, all that remained of the old plateau after millenia of erosion since the last ice age. Daniel Schmidt's farmhouse and buildings lay in the mouth of one such hollow sheltered from winter winds. Broad fields spread out in the creek valley beyond along the creek. Corn grew shirt pocket high in the July sun and the creek had slowed to a gentle flow.

This Sunday the valley folks had gathered at the Schmidt farm for a short community worship service followed by dinner in the yard and visiting.

"Ve haff to keep cultivating," Jacob Knepp said. "Weeds keep coming."

Albert Harris said, "It's all that seed that's left in the ground from the days of no-till farming. It will take years to get rid of it all."

"The corn is too tall now to get the cultivators through most of it," Jim Collier said. "The weeds are going to hurt yields this year, and the weeds we don't kill now will go to seed and come back next year."

Daniel said, "We can plow again this Fall and be ready to sow oats early in the Spring. The oats will

choke out the weeds and we need oats for the horses."

Jacob agreed and said, "Soybeans we follow wit' wheat this Fall. Ve plow a pasture field for corn next year. It makes the ground better that way."

Jim said, "We can't grow continuous corn now without the fertilizer to feed it. We'll have to rotate crops like they used to do. We need to find some clover seed and sow it in the wheat fields this winter. Then when the wheat comes off in July, the clover will have a good start. It might not make a hay crop next year, but we can pasture it in the Fall. Clover grows thick enough to choke out a lot of weeds, too. Dad used to do that, but we got away from it to make more money with corn. I guess those days are gone now. There's no place to sell all that corn now anyway."

Jim's wife, Sylvia said, "It's a good thing we had the teenagers that could drive extra farmequipment this year. I don't see how all the work could have been done without them."

Several heads nodded agreement.

"Well, I'm no farmer," Clay Whitaker said, "but with somebody to tell me what needs done I can drive tractors and trucks. That rush is gonna be over when the fuel goes bad, or things go wrong we can't fix. I don't know what I'll be doing then."

Roscoe Beam asked, "Didn't you do steel work or something before?"

Clay answered, "Yeah, I worked for Parker Construction out of New Albany. Did a little of everything, but mostly worked in the shop fixing equipment. Did a lot of welding on the heavy stuff and some wrench work. I helped on the steel erection jobs when I wasn't busy in the shop. But that's all over now with no electricity to run a welder and no construction going on."

Daniel Schmidt asked, "Can you make horseshoes?"

Clay said, "I've never made any. I've done a little forging in the shop at work, the heat-an'-beat sorta thing to get stuff straightened out."

Jacob nodded sagely and said, "Ve need a blacksmith. Much horse machinery is old and ve need to make new. You must get a forge and do this."

Clay looked skeptical as he said, "I'm not so sure about that. That would take a whole shop and a lot of steel."

Jacob shrugged and said, "You find all dese other things, the clothing and more. You could find steel and bolts and make dese things. We need someone to make fore carts and put long tongues in the tractor implements, then we pull them with horses. I have seen this done. I show you what we need. Come see me soon."

Jacob realized he was sounding more like his English neighbors. He had always spoken German in their home, but more dealings with their English neighbors was rubbing off. He decided that was a good thing. English was fine with him. Jacob was less concerned about such details of his religion than the Elders of his community had been. He was concerned about raising his family with good people and he was convinced he had found some. Then he remembered that all the Elders were dead now. It occurred to him that he might be elected as Elder for their new small Amish group. He frowned at that, not wanting the position, but realizing that noone else fit it now.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 10

Bottled water was getting very hard to find. It had been over a year now and there wasn't much of anything left in the city. Eddie Grimes had been lucky and he knew it, or he wouldn't have lived this long. The subdivision had been a haven for him until today. It was a huge tract of houses, maybe half a mile long and it varied from 3 to 5 blocks wide. The people had mostly been young families, and Eddy had figured out that the kids had brought the plague home from schools. Everybody in the place must have all died within a few days. Oddly, the housing projects, as the welfare apartment complex was called, fared better for a short time. Some of the old people had lived for weeks, and that was why Eddie left there. Those old devils would shoot you in a heartbeat.

The gangs were all dead now. Eddie had seen them partying after they made a score somewhere, and he didn't want any part of them. They didn't have sense enough to stay away from plague bodies. They'd walk right up and take stuff off a dead person. Any fool should know that you could catch diseases by touching sick people, and this was worse than anything he'd ever heard about. One day a person was fine, but the next he was deathly sick and might die that day, but for sure within a couple more. Eddie decided that people must have been carrying the disease for a while before they got sick, and spread it around. There was no other way it could have spread so much. It reminded him of that Ebola virus in Africa he had seen on TV. People died coughing up blood. He had never been so scared in his life.

Not being very big, Eddie learned young that he had to out think the bigger kids to survive. They didn't like him all that much, but the neighborhood kids all knew Eddie was smart and could figure things out. He was using everything he could think of just to stay alive now. He had gotten by drinking only bottled water, and eating only packaged foods. He washed everything with bleach water before he touched it. He had run away from the housing project when their neighbor died, puking blood. His sister had never come home from work, so there was nothing holding him there.

He'd waited a week, but they were out of food in the apartment so he couldn't wait any longer. The gas had quit working, so he put what he could carry in his backpack and took off out the back door and down the alley to the empty factory to camp out. He knew the wino's that hung out in there. There was only one of them left and he didn't last long. Eddie didn't have a better place to go, with the plague all around him, so he set up to live on the fourth floor where he could see all around. It was nice up there, if you stayed away from where the pigeons were. He found a corner office that suited him and didn't smell like pigeons. He could lock himself in when he wanted to sleep there and the rats didn't come up this high.

He never cooked in there to keep the rats from smelling food. There was an old truck parked down the alley that had a good back door he could unlatch from the inside or out. He was scared of it at first, afraid somebody could lock him in, but he figured out the locks and knew how to get out the back way. It was an old delivery truck, the stepvan kind. The front doors were decrepit, but they had concrete blocks wedged in to keep them shut so nobody could get in that way, either. Some guy had a lot of tools in it and a padlock on the door, but he'd busted that off and got in. It had a vent in the roof so he could cook in there and nobody could tell where the smell came from. The smell of dead people was strong enough to cover it up, at least for a while. He'd had to sleep in there a few times, when he'd seen people around.

A hobo stove had kept him from freezing last winter in the factory, but wood was hard to find now.



He'd got by with sticks from trees and broken up furniture. He had a hatchet he got from the truck to cut his wood with and found a file in there to sharpen it. It was on a utility belt and he carried it everywhere. You could do a lot of things with a hatchet. This one had a rubber covered steel handle and a claw thing on the back of the head that he'd used to open a lot of doors.

Going out very early in the morning to find food had worked the best. Most of the canned food had frozen and burst last winter. He'd found some in the basement of a house that kept him going, but it was gone now. He'd have to move and he didn't like the idea. He'd watched the city for months from the top floor of the factory. Nobody was moving around now, at least not in the daytime. Either they were all dead, or they were smart enough to stay hidden. He'd had to take the chance, so he'd gone out with his loaded backpack just as the sun came up one morning in late winter. It had only taken him a couple hours to get to the subdivision he had seen from the factory and find a place to hide in a garden shed. He ate some cold canned chicken and part of a can of peas and waited for dark. He could see out some cracks in the cheap wooden shed. Nothing was moving out there but some birds and a couple cats. He worried about dogs. A lot of them had starved, but there were some real bad ones left.

It had taken him two more days to find a house he liked that didn't have any bodies in it. He had scouted some other houses and found bottles of bleach that he used to clean everything. It had been much nicer living in the house, but he had to go farther to scrounge up some food. He wouldn't touch the stuff in houses where there were bodies.

There was a grocery warehouse down the road about a mile, but he had almost run out of food before he dared to go in there. The door lock had been broken, although the door was still shut. He watched it for several days before he took the chance to go inside. There were two bodies in the front of the warehouse, but they were pretty dried up and he thought the food in cans and sealed containers would be all right. There were several pallets of water in gallon jugs. They weren't busted from freezing, so he knew it had stayed warm enough to not damage the canned food. It kept him eating well for the rest of the winter and into early summer.

The problem came after he'd been in his house for several weeks. He had heard something like a motor running a long ways off, but it quit and he couldn't tell where it was. A couple hours later, he was still watching out the bedroom window in the upper part of the split level house. An older man walked out of the house across the street late that evening and headed straight for his house. He had the look of a scavenger like himself. He moved like a ghost, slow and deliberate, watching all around him. Eddie had seen several of them from high in the factory. He'd seen some murders, too. His mind raced thinking what to do. He knew the guy could smell the difference in his house, because he had used the bleach and aired it out, so it didn't smell musty like the others. He'd only have one chance.

The man walked around to the back door, watching everything. Eddie ran down the 6 carpeted stairs of the split level house as quietly as he could and stood beside the back door along the wall of the mudroom, hatchet held high. The man fumbled with the doorknob, then Eddie heard the wood splinter and break. The shade was down so he couldn't see Eddy plastered against the wall behind the door. The old guy waited for the longest time before entering.

The first thing Eddie saw was a gun held low and then the man's head close behind it as he came in crouched. Eddie swung the hatchet down hard at his neck and heard the solid thud. The man dropped to the floor, quivered a bit, and died. The gun clattered to the floor and all was quiet again. Eddie stood there with the bloody hatchet raised until he realized he was shaking and lowered it. He had never killed a man before. He had never even won a fight before.

Surprised that he hadn't been shot, Eddie's heart was pounding when he looked at the dead man. Then

he threw up all over the floor.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 11

Two days later Eddie was riding down the street just before daylight on the old guy's gas scooter. He had the old guy's whole outfit--the scooter with 2 plastic gas jugs on the back, the trailer thing behind, and he was wearing the old guy's backpack and military gear. There was a holster for the Beretta pistol and spare magazines and ammunition for it. A small .22 rifle was in the clips made for it across the handlebars. He was surprised that the scooter pulled the heavy trailer so well. It was bigger than the tiny cheap ones, but very quiet. It would go faster than those little ones, too.

He had dragged the old guy inside the house and shut the door as soon as he was able to function. Eddie had never been a violent person and hated those who were. He thought about it and decided that the important thing now was to get what he could from the dead man and get away from there as fast as he could. He'd taken the military belt and suspenders off the body and cleaned it up with a rag wet with water and bleach. Later, he backtracked the man through the muddy spring-thawed yards and found the scooter in a garage on the next street.

Eddie had had enough of the city. He was going out of town as fast as the scooter would take him. The problem was, he had never spent much time away from the city. He knew the first few small towns, but he had only been on a couple trips to his uncle's place and that was a long time ago. They lived in a small town and had a garden in back of the house. It was the biggest yard he had ever seen back when he was a little kid. He thought he could find it again. He knew his uncle's address.

It was a risk to ride on the road in broad daylight, but he was more afraid to ride at night when he couldn't see much and didn't know the roads. In his 22 years, Eddie had seen a lot, but the open countryside was unfamiliar and worrisome to him. He was shaking again and decided to pull off the road in a deserted looking driveway. It had been a long time since he ate before daylight and he was hungry. He thought if he ate now it would settle his nerves.

There was tall grass along the narrow gravel driveway. He stopped and shut off the scooter to listen, but didn't hear anything. The old house still had a faded foreclosure paper stuck in the front window. He rolled the scooter on down the driveway where it was out of sight of the road between the garage and the house. A weedy field stretched a long way behind the fenced back yard. He could see one farmhouse some distance down the road, but there was no evidence of life there.

After his first hot meal in a couple days, Eddie felt better and spent some time looking around. The house was easy to get into. There was no furniture inside, just some trash on the floors. He found the water heater in the small basement and refilled some water jugs from it. He'd done that before in the subdivision. The backpack was heavy, too, and he had only glanced inside it, being in a hurry to get away from the house with the dead guy in it. He went outside and looked around again, decided he was secure enough for now and began to go through the stuff on the trailer.

It had taken Eddie an hour or so to figure out the scooter. It was a small motorcycle, really. It said "Rebel" on the gas tank and had a Honda emblem. It just wasn't as big as a real Harley motorcycle, so he'd thought of it as a scooter. It was pretty new and had an oversize black muffler on it to match the paint. The trailer was an aluminum box affair with a lot of stuff tied to the rack on top. Eddie was tall so he could handle the bike, but he was thin and not all that strong, so he had to be careful with to not

upset the bike. He wasn't sure he could set it back up again.

He checked the gas tank first and found it was still nearly full. He knew he must have ridden 10 or 15 miles out of town, so that was good. Both of the gas jugs were full, too. That was good, because he didn't know where he could get more gas unless he siphoned it from a car. There was a siphon pump thing tied to the gas jugs, but he'd never used one like that. He learned how to check the oil and tried to get the bike as level as he could for that. It was full and the oil looked pretty clean. The bike, as he was beginning to think of it, looked like it was pretty new, so it shouldn't use much oil, he thought.

The trailer was full of surprises. On top were some stuff sacks with a small nylon tent with plastic poles, a rolled up sleeping bag and a foam pad. There was a dark green plastic tote behind that, held on with bungee cords and duct taped shut. He found clothing in there, and some more of the military pouches. One of those had 2 big boxes of .22 shells in it, and another had boxes of 9MM shells. He took out a box of each and taped it all shut again with a roll he'd found inside.

He set the tent bag and tote aside thinking he didn't like the idea of sleeping on the ground with only a tent around him. The trailer box was mostly full of pouches of dried food and some cooking things. There was a big water jug in there and a water filter. It was plastic and had hoses and a handle that looked like it was for pumping like a tire pump. He put that back in its' plastic bag with the extra filter cartridges. He had never used one of those but he'd seen them in the Bass Pro shop. They were supposed to filter out about anything, germs and all. He didn't know if it would filter out the plague germs or not. He was glad he'd brought his last gallon of bleach. It tasted bad in the water, but he was pretty sure it would kill about anything. It had worked when they'd had a "boil water" order in the city.

The saddlebags held rain gear, a poncho, and a spare pair of goggles. Below all that was a pair of hiking boots. The roll behind the seat had cold weather clothing. There was just enough room to wear the backpack with that roll behind it. Eddie began to realize that the guy he'd killed had set him up pretty good. By the time he'd repacked the bike and trailer, he was getting hungry again. He used the cooking pot and a little stove from the trailer to heat some water and followed the package directions to cook a meal labelled beef stroganoff. The stove used alcohol fuel and there were a couple gallon cans of it in the trailer box. It was the best meal he'd had in a long time.

Eddie decided to sleep here tonight, since it was getting late and he didn't know what was ahead of him. He rolled the bike and trailer into the little garage and closed the door. It made more noise than he liked, but he could see for at least half a mile and there was nothing moving.

He realized there was enough food in that trailer that he wouldn't have to worry about it for a while, but he wanted to get to his uncle's place where he hoped to find a lot more in the town. He worried that he might find people there, too. The sleeping bag was too warm for the summer weather, but it made a good enough bed on the foam pad with his winter coat for a pillow. It was a good warm coat he'd found in a house down the street in the subdivision. He'd gotten all the new clothes he wanted there and got enough water out of the toilet tanks to get cleaned up pretty good. He wanted to wash up again, but there was no water in this house, not even in the water heater.

When he woke the next morning the only sounds he could hear were birds singing outside his window. After he ate and did his morning routine, he was packed up and ready to leave. He knew he needed to try the guns be sure they worked and he could hit something with them, so he had let the bike warm up a minute while he went behind the garage and shot the rifle first at a fence post. It hit where he aimed it, so he tried the pistol, expecting it to be louder and it was. He hit a post with it a short distance away and thought that was good enough. He replaced the shells in the magazine, left one in the chamber, and put it on safety in his holster. Dangerous, he thought, but it might save him a split second when he

needed it.

A minute later he was on his way toward Salem and his uncle's house.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 12

Mulberry Street was easy to find and soon Eddie found the house number 1217. It didn't look nearly as big as he remembered, and the back yard was overgrown. He found the remains of his uncle in the bathroom. His aunt wasn't there. Eddie didn't like the place now. It felt bad to him, with the body inside. He closed the door and went back out to his bike. There didn't seem to be a soul around here at the edge of the small town. It was bigger than he remembered. He could see the courthouse tower and a street of stores and gas stations. There were many houses, all looking deserted. Weeds and grass grew everywhere and leaves littered the streets and gutters.

Eddie put his bike and trailer in the old garage headed out so he could leave in a hurry if necessary. Up the street half a block on a hill top was an old farmhouse with a big barn behind it. He watched it for a while and couldn't see any evidence of recent life there. He was getting good at that, he thought and then worried about getting over confident. He walked to the house and saw the same leaves and old litter as everywhere else, so he chanced going in the back door. It was unlocked so he left the hatchet on his belt, but he had the pistol in his hand when he entered and he made sure to shove the door all the way open in case there was someone behind it. There wasn't. There was evidence that someone had been rummaging around in the house. Cabinet doors were open and no food remained inside. A closet door was open, but there was nobody inside.

The body was in the barn. He walked past it as far as he could to get to the loft ladder. In the barn loft there was an opening up high and he climbed up to it to look out. From that vantage point he could see all over town. Nothing moved in his range of vision. This street seemed to be a major one in the town, but wasn't a highway. He thought he would be safe to stay here for a time, since if there were any scavengers around they had already been here and probably wouldn't come back. He considered sleeping in the barn for safety, but he didn't like to be that close the dead body. Something had chewed on it pretty bad.

Eddie slept in an upstairs bedroom with all the windows open. He didn't hear anything to alarm him all night and woke feeling better. It was time to get some breakfast and then go search for food. From the barn loft, he'd seen a flat roof that could be a grocery across town. The old farmhouse had a hand pump outside. He'd seen them in movies, so he knew how to work it and soon got some water. He treated himself to a bath with water warmed over his little camp stove. Dressed again, he put on the web belt with its' canteen, holster, and other things. It had a small pack hanging from the belt, where he put some dry granola bars from the trailer food. Leaving the rest of his gear in the barn, he began to walk toward the main part of town. There was no sound or movement except the slight wind.

There was a shallow creek that ran through the town just behind the grocery. He crossed that stepping on some rocks and then decided to watch the grocery for a while from the weeds. Nothing moved that he could see except some litter quivering in the breeze. He had decided to look at the grocery when he heard an engine running in the distance. He about choked at that, remembering the last time he'd heard

and engine. He hid as best he could in the weeds and listened. His panic grew when he heard the truck pullin behind the grocery and men got out. He peeked through the weeds and saw kids in the big truck. They were talking and didn't seem to be afraid. Soon the men came back with armloads of groceries.

He watched while they made several trips and loaded the truck. There were already boxes of clothing in the truck bed, and other things. The men never glanced his way before they got back inthe truck and left. Eddie lay there for a long time, his heart pounding in his ears. Gradually he became aware of the stones he was laying on and tried to get comfortable. He was getting hot from the sun on his back when he concluded that the men were gone. Their presence had terrified him, but they didn't look like the scavengers he'd seen in the city. Their clothes were good and they looked well fed. They carried guns, though.

Eddie felt for his own gun for reassurance and knew he had to look in that grocery. He was shaking with fear until he got inside and learned that there was nobody in there but a couple bodies. After selecting a few things he could carry in the small pack on his belt, he called it good enough and left, closing the door like the men had left it. If they came back, he didn't want to leave any sign he'd been there.

That night he thought a lot about the kids he'd seen in the truck. They weren't starving, although they were dirty. They weren't afraid of the men, one a fairly young man and the other old. The truck looked like new, so they had probably stolen it from a car lot, he thought. He wondered why the kids were dirty and the men were clean. That didn't look good to him, but he couldn't figure out why the kids were not afraid. They must not be captives then. The only other thing that made any sense was, the men must be helping the kids.

Eddie got more curious about the men in the truck over the next couple days. The truck had driven out of town to the north. He thought they might come back to town and wondered about how he could follow them and find out where they lived.

It was a week before he saw or heard anything else. He'd heard a big truck coming toward town and got in the barn loft to look for it. He saw it come to the intersection where the stop light was and turn there going out of town to the east. A second big truck followed it. It was hours later that he heard them come back and turn north again. He got up into the loft just in time to see that both trucks had big loads of machinery. Eddie ran to his bike and unhooked the trailer. He took off across town and headed north out the highway the direction he'd seen them go. He planned to stay way behind them and stop to listen where they went.

Instead, he saw the trucks going east again on a county road a couple miles out of town. He followed them slowly on the bike so they wouldn't catch sight of him and turned on the county road. It went over the rolling hills for a mile then turned north. Half a mile further the road dropped down a big hill into a valley. Eddie stopped at the top and pulled off the road in the weeds. He shut the bike off and tried to listen for the trucks. Finally they came out of a wooded area where he could see them far in the distance. There were fields down there with something growing that he thought might be corn. It was the first crops he had seen of any kind. He wasn't about to let those people see him, so he reluctantly went back to town and put the bike away.

The next week he spent getting groceries hauled back to his new house. The men might come back with trucks and clean it out, he reasoned, so he'd better get there first. He did his hauling at night, after learning the streets well. Moonlight was enough to see where he was going. It didn't take many nights to have the house stocked up pretty well.

He didn't know how to make bread and he wanted some bad. It had been ages since he'd had any kind of bread. The grocery had biscuit and pancake mix, so he got some of that and a skillet and some shortening. When he read on the box that he needed milk, he about gave up until he saw powdered milk in boxes and took some along. That evening he had his first pancakes in a long time. The syrup was wonderful, too. He wished he had some butter, but failing that, he cooked them in a lot of shortening and the grease made them better.

Eddie needed a better way to cook and heat water so he went to the hardware store one morning and found the door had been broken open. It wasn't a mess inside, though, so he suspected the men and their trucks had been there when he found some empty shelves.

He found what he wanted, though, a propane camp stove and a big box of the propane bottles for it. He left it there and would go back that night with the bike and trailer to get it all, plus some rope and another can of alcohol for his camp stove. All he took this time was a map he found in a rack by the door. It was map of the county and showed all the small county roads.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 13

Isaac Knepp and his little brother Samuel were hoeing in the garden early one morning before the sun got too hot. The green beans were ready to be picked and that was easier work than hoeing, so they would do that later. Samuel looked up and asked his brother, "What is the noise?"

"What noise?"

"It is a small noise, like the engine on the washing machine."

Isaac stood very still and listened hard. "I don't hear anything," he said. "Wait, yes I do. I think it's on the hill back there."

They both squinted in that direction but didn't see anything. Isaac said, "I'll go tell Ma. Maybe Herr Whitaker is up there. He might come here."

Isaac told his Ma about the noise, but she was busy canning green beans and said, "If it is someone coming here, we will know soon enough."

Eddie lay on top of the hill off the gravel road he'd found that led the direction the trucks had gone. What he saw in the valley below astounded him. There were a couple small boys working in a garden, and a woman in a long dress and bonnet who came out to get something with a bucket. She was picking something. Beyond the house was a field of grass with horses in it, and farther away, rows of corn stretched for miles, it seemed like. He quickly decided that the people were Amish. He'd seen them on TV. Eddie laid there on some soft green vines for a long time and listened. He heard an engine start far away. Then it ran for a long time but didn't get any closer. He finally gave up and left, scratching at his forearms.

That night back at his house he was itching something fierce and the skin was turning red. It took him a while to figure out he had gotten into poison ivy or something like it. He washed with soap he found in the house, but the itching didn't stop. He couldn't sleep that night and had to take off his shirt because his chest was red all over and burned and itched. Finally he got up and walked into town where he

found a drug store. He couldn't read in the dark store so he chanced lighting the lighter he used for his stove. He found anti-itch medication, a cortisone cream in a tube and slathered it all over his chest and arms and his ankles. It began to help a little, so he gathered more of the tubes and went back to his house, finally getting to sleep as the sun was coming up. Three days later the itching had calmed down except for some red welts that he thought were bug bites of some kind.

\*\*\*\*\*

Eddie kept himself busy getting some things collected for cold weather ahead. He had nearly frozen to death in that factory and had to wake up repeatedly to keep a small fire going in his hobo stove. He never wanted to do that again. The old house he had settled in had a wood stove in the living room. He began to wonder how he could get enough firewood to feed the thing for a whole winter. That made him think about someone seeing or smelling the smoke and finding him. He had seen some kerosene heaters in the hardware store, but he didn't know if he could get kerosene for the gas stations or not.

At this time, he was sweating like crazy in the house, afraid to open any windows in case somebody would notice them. He spent a lot of time sitting outside thinking and absentmindedly scratching at the bug bites that just wouldn't go away. They were getting smaller, but they still itched like day one. While it was too hot to be carrying things across town, he sat in what shade he could find and his mind kept going back to those people he'd found north of town. Maybe he could go back and scout some more. There had to be more people around out there because he hadn't seen the ones with the trucks. He got his county map out and looked over the roads again.

Eddie was still poring over the map when he heard an engine start a long way off. It ran for a while faster, then slower, then faster again like it was doing some work in one place. Then, that engine stopped and another one, different sounding, started up. It ran for a while then it began to get closer. He ran into the back door of the house and settled down to watch. A huge truck-like thing with 3 wheels came past with some white stuff in the hopper. It had a fan on the back end like the salt trucks in the city, so it was used to scatter the white stuff, he decided. The wheels and tires looked like an earthmover of some kind, but he'd never seen one like this before. It didn't go very fast for a truck, but still a little dust came off the load. A big dump truck soon followed it down the street with more of the white stuff. The man driving the dump truck looked like one of those he'd seen at the grocery, an older man.

His curiosity may get him in trouble, he thought, but he had to find out where these people lived and if the kids were still with them. Eddie waited a few minutes until he could hear the truck, and whatever the other thing was, get through the town streets and speed up going out the highway. He had to know, so he fired up his bike and followed.

This time, he knew the road where they would probably turn off, and sure enough, they did. He had the map of this area mostly memorized and gave them plenty of time to get ahead of him. This time he went down the big hill on his bike and found himself in the end of the valley he'd seen from above. He pulled off in the entrance to a field and shut the bike off. He could hear the big 3 wheeled thing running and soon he could see it in a field ahead with a huge cloud of white dust behind it. The field was bare dirt and being coated with the white dust as the vehicle ran back and forth on the field. The dust stopped and the driver went out of sight past a hill on the right side of the road.

Eddie left his bike where it was, pretty well hidden from the road and walked in the woods toward the hill ahead. It got steep pretty quickly, so he had to go slower. When he got to the top he stopped to rest and listen to engines running. The trees were thinner on the hill top. Eddie moved along the ridge to where he could see the trucks parked at a farm. The dump truck had emptied the powder in a pile and

one man was using a tractor with a bucket on it to load it in the big yellow 3 wheeled thing. He watched, fascinated. It had been a long time since he'd seen very many people and even longer since he'd seen men working.

Movement caught his eye and he looked toward the farm house where a couple half grown boys were carrying something toward the men. The engines shut off and the men got off their machines, going toward the boys. It was something to drink they carried and the men drank and handed glasses back to the kids who ran back to the house with them. Eddie had never seen kids act like that outside of a movie. The boys seemed to be happy and went back inside the house. Eddie leaned on the medium sized tree he was hiding behind and thought about what he'd seen. The man fired up the big yellow machine and drove it back towards the field while the other man walked out to the barn beyond the house.

That man was the older one. After a few minutes he came out of the barn leading the biggest horses Eddie had ever seen. They had harness on them and he led them to an implement where they stood while he hitched them to it. It had round discs of metal that rolled on an axle and a seat where the man rode. He flipped the lines in his hands and the horses walked toward the field slowly, just like he'd seen in western movies with horses pulling a stagecoach or wagon. Eddie was so intent on what he was seeing that he didn't notice a slight sound behind him.

"Hello," the girl said. Eddie about had a heart attack and grabbed for his pistol, but then he saw the girl was carrying a shotgun. He froze.

"You don't need the gun. We don't bite," she said. "Do you bite?"

"Uh..... no. I don't bite," he struggled to say.

"I saw you from down below and thought you might be hungry. We'll have lunch ready pretty soon and Mom said to invite you to eat."

It was no wonder he'd thought she was a boy, She had on jeans and boots and a man's shirt. Her hair was stuffed up under a ball cap. Up close, Eddie realized she was a cute kid and was wondering what to say when she said, "You're welcome to eat with us. We'd really like some company."

"Ah, uh, okay, I guess," Eddie's voice was a little off from not talking hardly at all.

"We can go straight down the hill. I came up the back way in case you weren't friendly."

"Uh, if I wasn't friendly?"

"If you wasn't, I'd a shot yer butt."

Eddie saw a glint of something feral in her eyes when she said that and he believed her.

"Yeah. Right."

"Well, let's go down and you can meet the rest of us."

"Okay. I didn't mean to.... I mean, I'm not dangerous or anything."

"Didn't think so. Just nervous like everybody else now. I'm Melanie. What's your name?"



"Eddie. Eddie Grimes. Hey, how come you guys didn't shoot me if you saw me?"

"We don't shoot anybody unless they need it. Pop said if you'd been meaning any harm you would a done shot at us, so he told me to sneak up on you just in case we were wrong. He thought you probably needed some help and were afraid to ask. He'll be back as soon as he sees me come out with you. He just kept workin' to make sure we didn't spook you and make you run off."

Eddie had never met such a girl in his life. There was no doubt in his mind she WOULD have shot him if she thought she needed to. Then she invites him to eat. He began to wonder if he was being captured the easy way, but her face said he didn't need to worry about that. She did keep her distance from him, though, and she was never careless with that shotgun, either.

She watched him while he thought for a while, then asked, "Where ya from Eddie?"

"New Albany. I came out here to find my uncle, but he's dead."

"You got a place to stay?"

"I took a house in town."

They had come to the front yard where two big Maple trees stood. An older woman came out of the house and yelled up toward the woods, "YOU CAN COME OUT NOW CLAY!"

Eddie looked behind him and saw a younger man step out of the treeline carrying a nice rifle with a big scope on it. Eddie was profoundly glad he had not given them any reason to shoot him. Then he noticed the other man slide out of the woodshed with a rifle. He felt a little weak. He kept up with the conversation as best he could while the realization dawned as to how badly he had underestimated this bunch of farmers.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 14

It smelled wonderful to Eddie. He had never seen such a meal in his life. Long planks sitting on sawhorses were covered with bowls and platters of meat and steaming vegetables. A huge platter of cornbread was right in front of him with a bowl of butter beside it. Marta poured him a glass of milk out of a big pitcher as everyone found a seat on the wood benches.

"Time to introduce ourselves. I'm Al Harris," one of the older men said to him.

"Uh, I'm Eddie Grimes."

"Where you from Eddie?"

"New Albany. I came to find my uncle in town, but he's dead," Eddie told him, repeating what he'd said to the girl.

"What the city like now," Albert asked, knowing everyone was more hungry for news than food.

"Nothin' there. Ever'body's dead. The gangs all died. Some fighting, but mostly sick I think. There is a few around, I guess, but they'll kill you if they see you. I had to get out of there."

All was silent around the table as Eddie recounted his experiences up to when the man had come in his house. He didn't want to tell about that.

Marta Beam asked him, "How'd you get way out here?"

"Uh, I found a bike. A motorcycle, an' I rode it out here."

Marta knew that wasn't the whole story, but she let it lay. She didn't push him, waiting for him to say more.

Eddie felt the pressure to talk to them, but he asked, "D'you all let anybody come in an' eat?"

Al Harris said, "If they're peaceful. Not many people left. We need all the help we can get."

"I don't know much about farmin'. I always lived in town," Eddie said. "I mean, I'll help you do somethin' if you show me what to do. I oughta do somethin' for eating your food."

Eddie was making it up as he went along, never having been in this situation before.

Marta laughed and said, "You prob'ly feel as lost as a short dog in tall grass our here. But look, it's like this. We work hard to raise our food and it takes long days to do it. We can use some help, and we'll be glad to see to it you have what you need. Just eat your dinner and we'll work something out later, okay?"

Eddie caught himself staring at the plump woman with the gray hair and easy smile. He smiled back, for the first time in years. He'd never felt quite like this before, but he thought he'd found a friend. Sort of like that old black woman in the apartment below his sister's who was nice to everybody. He felt himself blush a little and looked down at his plate. Melanie saw it but she didn't say anything.

Conversation began in soft tones around him while he finished eating. They all wanted to know if he'd seen anyone on the way out of the city and he said no. When the meal was nearly over, Melanie asked him, "Where's your bike?"

Eddie felt a little guilty saying, "I, uh, left it down the road. I wasn't sure what to expect. I just wanted to see what was going on."

Marta said, "Well, now you've seen. Why don't you go get it and bring it up here? While the men are finishing with the lime in the fields you can help us in the garden. It's time to cut some cabbage and make sauerkraut. There's sweet corn ready to pick, too. You any good with a knife?"

"I suppose so. What for?"

"We need to cut the corn off the cobs before we can it today. The girls are good at shucking it, but you can try that, too."

After Eddie retrieved his bike, he found he was pretty good at cutting the corn off after she showed him how. It sure looked and smelled good in the big pan and there was a lot of it by the time evening came

around. Every time he got the pan full, Marta and the girls came out and got it to put it in jars and then in a big kettle to cook. When they opened the kettle and set the jars out they were bubbling inside. Marta told him they would be sterilized by the boiling and when they cooled off, the lids would seal them tight.

The evening meal was mostly leftovers with a couple fresh peach pies, hot out of the oven. He'd never tasted anything like that before. It was SO good! He said so, and Marta gave him a wide smile.

Dylan had been busy with the men all afternoon, so Eddie hadn't talked to him yet. Dylan spoke to him after supper and said, "It's time to feed the pigs. You wanna help?"

"Sure," Eddie said, "What do I need to do?"

"Get that wheel barrow and we'll load up all the corn mess and take it to 'em." The boy pointed at it by the garden shed.

"Okay." Eddie was a bit awkward with the wheelbarrow at first, but he got it in place and helped load the sticky corn cobs and shucks. He pushed it to the barnlot where Dylan directed him to the pig pen. Eddie was enthralled by the animals and a bit shy of them. The smaller boy's confidence made him feel sort of bad. He followed the boy into the barn to get some ground feed in buckets, then to the hand pump to get water. He carried a lot of water buckets before he figured out how to do it without spilling it on his shoes.

Eddie asked Dylan, "What are you going to do tomorrow?"

The boy shrugged and said, "Marta or Roscoe will have somethin' goin' on. Prob'ly more canning. The beets are big enough, I think. Roscoe said somethin' about goin' fishin' again some time, too."

"You have time to go fishing?"

"It ain't for fun. It's hard work. they got this big net and we go down to the lake an' pull it around with a boat. Get a lot of fish, but that means a lot of CLEANIN' fish. C'mon. We gotta gather eggs yet."

Back at the house with a small bucket of eggs, Roscoe said, "Looks like you're gettin' a start at farm work. What d'you think of it so far?"

"It's easy enough work, I guess."

Roscoe smiled and said, "Think you could stand to live like this?"

Eddie smiled a little and said, "I'd sure like to."

"How about you bed down on the couch tonight and we'll see if we can find you a job tomorrow? I know a man who needs some help. You interested?"

"If it's like your place, I sure am."

When Eddie laid down to sleep on the couch, he thought about what he'd seen and done that day. The good smell of the corn, the clean pots and pans, and the shining jars of canned corn set on the pantry table to cool. He'd never been around people who made their own food before. It took all day, but they had a lot of it now. Their pantry had more food than he'd ever seen in a house, and there wasn't much

that had come from a store. He'd been worried about what to do when there was no more food in the stores. He had been fishing before, but he'd never killed an animal to eat. He'd seen some hunting shows but they never showed how they got the meat from the animals.

Eddie slept and dreamed about the man with the gun again, and the bloody mess on the floor. He'd been dreaming about it every night. He woke up and remembered where he was, moonlight from the window showing all was well. He tried to go back to sleep, hoping he hadn't made any noise during his dream.

In their bedroom just down the hall from where Eddie slept, Roscoe stayed awake long into the night listening in case the young fellow on the couch got up. He had stuffed the boy's backpack and pistol belt in beside a table so if it was disturbed he would hear it. Marta was a light sleeper and heard him rustling around and saying something. He quieted down finally. A lot of people had nightmares now. It wasn't unusual, so she went back to sleep.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 15

Ahmal stood in front of the Mullah and said, "We have killed the Great Satan! The US is DEAD! ALL DEAD! Allah be praised! Allah akbar!"

The Mullah stared cold black eyes at the man for moments before speaking. Ahmal was beginning to sweat and be a little nervous by the time the old man responded.

"The Great Satan is dead, indeed. There has been no communication from the US for weeks. Your poisonous experiments succeeded. It was indeed genius to put the virus in the city water supplies. Because it lived in them for weeks before they sickened, there was no warning for the devils, and no chance to stop the attack. There was no possible defense against it. The virus spread even better than we had hoped, by water and by air, and from person to person it went to Europe, and to Asia where the yellow devils also died."

"You have done your work all too well. Now it has spread to the faithful. You and I may be the only ones alive in the city. YOU FOOL! YOU HAVE DESTROYED US!"

Ahmal's mind was slow to work, a product of the fever he had. In a moment he said, "May we all meet in Paradise with Allah!"

The Mullah said, "You have sinned a great sin against the faithful! There will be no Paradise for you! May you burn forever!" The Mullah's voice was weakening even as he spoke the curse.

Ahmal swayed on his feet as his fever increased. In moments he fell to the floor and retched in convulsions as the old Mullah watched, sweat beading his own brow. The Mullah reached for his cup of water, but was too weak and fell from his seat as he too began to convulse.

Goats browsed around the cement building in the desert where the last member of the genetic research team lay on the floor, bleeding from his mouth and nose as he died.

Lacking a living host, the virus died within the dead. The thin protective layer that helped make it so fast to embed in living cells was also its' Achillies' Heel. The virus died in water within days, in air within hours, and in sunlight, even faster. Within a month it would be no more.

The desert oil wells had ceased to flow for lack of power to the pumps. What oil remained would stay deep under the sand. Huge tankers floated with engines running until they ran aground with no one alive to guide them. Airplanes had crashed when pilots died, as did millions of cars, buses, and trucks. The world would take hundreds of years to absorb some of the damage from oil and chemical spills. The oceans would recover, but slowly, and only after some species were extinct. Wild life would increase again in the vast plains, jungles and forests of the world, as forests began to reclaim land they had once owned.

Deep in remote jungles, deserts, and wild lands of the world, indigenous peoples survived as they always had, close to nature and living within its' rules, far from the dead cities. Some pockets of modern humans survived, but only those who could adapt to the new conditions would endure.

\*\*\*\*\*

Clay told Amy, "I need to clean out that spring at the foot of the hill and make a springhouse there. Then we could get a cow and have a place to cool the milk and cream and butter. We're going to go look for a backhoe, me and Benjamin. We can use it to dig a root cellar, too."

"We don't have to do everything this summer," Amy said. "We have enough food and clothing and everything to last us for several years."

Clay said, "Yeah, but the problem is how long the fuel will stay good. We found some of that fuel preservative and treated the tanker we got from Seymour, but even with that stuff it won't keep forever. The sooner we can get the real heavy work done, the better. We have to do it while the heavy equipment still works, or we'll be doing it with picks and shovels."

"Oh. Okay. Can me and the kids help?"

"You're doing fine. If you can keep me and Benjamin fed and in clean clothes, we'll get it done."

\*\*\*\*\*

"We have to find more people," Roscoe told his wife.

Marta said, "That new boy Eddie is working out pretty good with Albert and Anita. She said he's a big help. She said he doesn't know anything about the country, but he learns fast and he works hard."

"We need more help like that, but what I mean is it's like cattle. Our herd is too small. The community will get inbred in a couple generations. We need fresh bloodlines."

Marta thought for just a minute and said, "I see what you mean. We need to keep geneologies, too, so nobody marries too close to their relations. That makes me think. We don't have much in the way of writing materials, or books. We need to educate these kids and we need a way to keep records, too. things like your planting and animal breeding and so many things. We should call a meeting about this."

Roscoe nodded and said, "I'll pass the word around. We need to get some radios or fix up some

telephones some way, too. Those little radios we got in town won't reach very many people. I'll work on it between now and corn harvest time. Now that we got the oats and wheat in the bins, we'll have a breathing space for a while."

Jim Collier and his son Kevin spent some hot days in their tall farm shop building going over the 2 combines they had retrieved from farms near Seymour. They had only had time to grease them and change oil before it was time to cut the oats crop and then the wheat. It wasn't a lot of acreage for these big machines, but they still needed maintenance. The machines were pretty new, but Jim didn't know for sure without a dealer to ask, or the internet for researching. He frowned, knowing the internet was a thing of the past, and dealers wouldn't be ordering any new parts. If something went bad on the machinery, they would just have to look for another one like it and rob parts. That's why he had insisted that they get two combines exactly alike.

Sylvia Collier came out to the shop and said, "Jim, where are you?"

"Back here. I'm comin'."

He crawled out from under the grain head and stood stretching his back. "What's up?"

"Roscoe came by and said he wanted to have a meeting at his place this Sunday for dinner. It's a pitch-in meal. Wants to talk about finding more people because he's worried about inbreeding and needing people with different knowledge. And Marta wants to talk about schooling the kids around here. They want to hear whatever is on anyone else's mind, too. Stuff like what we need to get done before the machinery quits working and all."

"I was just thinkin' about that," Jim said.

Kevin came out of the back end of the combine and listened.

She went on. "He said that Clay Whitaker has found a backhoe and got it at his place, digging a root cellar and a springhouse. Clay's worried about getting that kind of thing done now, too."

Kevin said, "I wish we had a spring we could use like that. We need a root cellar, too. There's gonna be a lot of potatoes to store pretty soon and if we can't keep them good until planting time next year, we won't ever have potatoes again. Me and Andrea will be goin' to that meeting."

"He said to write down anything that comes to mind so you don't forget it."

Jim nodded slowly and said, "He's right. We can't afford to make any mistakes. We only got one chance to get it right, or do without from now on."

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 16

Sweat ran down Benjamin's forehead and into his eyes making it hard to see what he was doing. The concrete truck was noisy enough that he had to make hand signals to Clay when he wanted more concrete in the form. He held both arms up and waved a 'No more' at Clay. The engine slowed down and quieted, but Benjamin walked around to the truck cab so he didn't have to yell.

"The form is full. What do we do with the rest of it?"

Clay said, "Swing the chute around let's run the rest out for a spillway below the springhouse. It'll wash out if we don't have something there."

A few minutes later the truck was empty and washed out. Benjamin was struggling with a shovel to move the heavy wet concrete up on the sides of the ditch that led away from the springhouse. The spring water had been diverted to a temporary ditch until the concrete hardened.

Clay shut the truck engine down and came to help move the concrete. Benjamin took a break and went to the new ditch where he splashed himself with the cold water. He took off his straw western hat and splashed waater on his head, wiped out his eyes and put the hat back on. When he got back to the spillway, Clay had most of the concrete in place with shovel and rake.

"Get that wood float and start smoothing it out," Clay said, "As hot as it is today this will set up fast."

Benjamin nodded and grabbed the long handled float. Clay showed him how to work it, lowering the handle on the forward stroke made it float over the concrete like a ski, then lifting it on the back stroke did the same. That made it operate like a giant trowel, smoothing a 3 foot wide swath at one stroke. It was hard work and they had to hurry. Already the concrete was acting stiff and hard to move.

While Benjamin worked the float, Clay got a bucket of water from the spring and dipped a broom in it to sprinkle water on the surface of the concrete. Amy and Gina showed up with glasses and a pitcher. They retrieved a gallon jug of tea from the old spring pool and poured drinks for the men. While the men rested, Amy showed Gina how to work a metal trowel and finish smoothing the concrete in the spillway. The sprinkled concrete began to look much smoother.

Clay showed Benjamin how to push anchor bolts down into the formed concrete walls where a roof would be built and bolted down to keep debris out of the water inside.

An hour later, the concrete had been washed off their tools and the family sat in the shade admiring their work. The concrete tank they had made was 3 feet wide and 12 feet long. It was 3 feet deep, but Clay had designed it so it would run over the end at 2 feet of water. A much larger wood building would be erected over it. It would be the next best thing to a refrigerator, the water staying at a near constant 55 degrees through the hot summer.

"We're lucky to have it this close to the house," Amy said.

"That's why they put the house where it is," Clay said. "The old folks didn't want to carry water any farther than they had to. And that's why I ran the ditch down toward the barn to that pond so the livestock can drink from it. Cows drink a lot of water, and I don't plan to carry it to 'em. Plenty of work to do without that."

Amy said, "If you guys are rested up and ready to eat, we've got some lunch ready."

Clay said, "Heck yeah! I'm starved!"

Gina and Benjamin lagged behind the adults as they walked. She held his hand on the way to the house and gave him a fond look.

\*\*\*\*\*

One evening after supper Anita said, "We need to paint the windows and the doors. This old house isn't going to last if we don't keep it painted. The vinyl siding is starting to crack in a few places, too."

"Maybe Eddie can do that," Al told his wife. "I need to see about some new fencing down by the creek. Eddie, have you done any painting?"

"No. I worked for a guy once that did gutters, so I ain't afraid to climb a ladder, but I never done any painting."

"This would be a good job to learn on. It's kind of a slow process, being careful not to get it on the glass, but it's not hard work. You can start on the west side in the mornings and go to the east side after lunch so you'll be in the shade all day."

Anita said, "As soon as I get the canning caught up I can do the scraping."

Albert said, "Okay, I'm going to town with Jim in the morning to help him fetch some things and get some fence wire, if there's any left at Tractor Supply. We can stop at the paint store, or the hardware and find some paint and caulking. There's just so much to do. I'm really glad you showed up Eddie. If there's anything you want for yourself, just says so and we'll try to make it happen."

He gave Eddie a look intended to show he was serious about what he said.

Eddie understood it that way and said, "Well, someday I'd like to have a place of my own. Might find me a girl, you know? But I need to learn a lot about how to grow food and all, so I don't want to leave here. I don't know what to do, really."

Anita smiled without saying anything. She'd seen him around the girls that lived with Roscoe and Marta Beam.

Albert thought for a minute and said, "How about we move you a trailer in here? There's some sittin' in town and I drove for a trailer company for a while. I know how to move one. You'd be close by, but still have your own place to live."

"That sounds good to me!"

"There ought to be room across the driveway there." Albert pointed. "We can get Clay to bring that backhoe up here and put in some sewer and drain lines, and with the well pump here in the yard, it wouldn't be any farther for you to carry water than it is for us."

Eddie looked at the spot and agreed. "That would be awesome!"

\*\*\*\*\*

Roscoe waited until the Sunday meal was over and people had spread out in the shade of the big Maple trees. He called for everyone's attention and said, "Some things have been botherin' me and Marta, too, about how we're going to do things from here on. I wanted to talk about that and have you all talk about what's been on your minds. We need to do some planning to make sure we get done what we ought to do. Clay has made himself a springhouse and is almost done with a root cellar. I know we need a root cellar, and probably some others do, too. We need to do that kind of thing before the concrete all spoils from dampness, and the fuel won't run the trucks and equipment any more. We need more people



around here if we can find 'em, or the next generation will have slim pickings for mates and be marrying too close to their family."

Marta said, "I got some note paper in town the other day and some pencils. Help yourself here at the table and start making notes of what is said today, and I will, too. Now we'll shut up and somebody else tell us what you've been thinking about. Start with whatever problems you've got today, or anything you think of that needs done. One thing I thought of was getting some kind of schooling started. Okay, it's your turn."

She sat down and looked from one face to another until Jim Collier said, "We need to re-think how we farm. I've been doin' some of that and talkin' to Jacob and and Daniel and Amos about how the Amish run their farms. We all agreed we need to get lime on this ground, and get whatever fertilizer we can. I only knew about big scale tractor farming all my life, but that just won't work now. We don't need 50,000 bushels of corn. There's no place to sell it and we can't use it up before it would go bad, so there's now need to raise it. We need chickens and turkeys and pigs and cattle. Jacob knows a lot about how that works, especially doing it with horses, so I'll set down and let him talk to us.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 17

Jacob Knepp stood and cleared his throat, clearly not comfortable with speaking to a group.

"I thank you for me and for my family that we are invited here. It is a goodt place, and goodt people. It does not matter to me if you are English. Amish are taught that English are sinful, and we must stay separate from the sinful. That is why our Elders made rules for us to do things the old ways, so we depend on each other and not depend on the English."

"Too many have died. There are not enough to be separate. We must work together. I say this because our Elders have died, and I have been asked by Daniel and Amos to be Elder for our group. So, I say this. We have been working together and helping as our religion teaches us to help each other. It has been a goodt thing, doing this, and I see no sin in helping good people. We are doing this now, but I thought it should be said here."

"Our way is to have everyone do as much as they can, but not all can do everything. We should all raise all the food we can and everyone keep seeds. If Daniel's seeds are not good, then he can get some from Roscoe, or Jim, or me."

"Farms should not be so big to need tractors, or too many people. Maybe one raises more pigs and another raises just two pigs, but has cattle to trade. We know about horses and I make harness. But I need someone to make leather and a blacksmith to make the iron parts. So, we need more people who can do these things."

"It is too hard to travel for what we need each day. So, we have a cow, or goats for milk. We have chickens for eggs and meat. Each one has what he needs, but what he does not have, we trade. We are doing this now and it is goodt."

Some things we do not have. We have no doctor. We need someone to teach the kinder, uh children. I cannot think of everything today. So, I ask you to each tell what you know to help us all."

"I let someone else talk now."

Jacob had seen people paying attention, but he was still uncomfortable and felt like he had been rambling in his talk. He had noticed Marta writing things down and was surprised when she stood again to talk. In his culture, women always gave deference to the men speaking, but he did not object, having respected what she said earlier.

Marta said, "I am making a list. Jacob made excellent points that we need a blacksmith, a tanner, a doctor, a teacher, and above all, we need to cooperate. There will be certain things we can all do. Maybe not everyone here knows what each of us can do. I would like for each of us to tell the rest what skills and knowledge they have so we know who to talk to when they are needed."

"I will start with myself. Some of you know that Roscoe and I had a son and a daughter. They are adults and live several states away. There is no good reason to think they survived, since they were both doctors and were working to help with the emergency the last we heard from them."

Her voice quavered and she stood silent for a moment as tears glistened in her eyes. Marta looked down, swallowed hard and continued.

"We home schooled our children before that was a popular thing to do. I still have the materials we used to teach them, so I can teach children through 12 grades. We are close to the middle of this valley community, as my husband pointed out, so we could teach children here at our place. There is room in our house to do it, and we would love to have the children come here if they can."

She sat down on the porch again and said, "Someone else talk now."

Albert Harris stood and said, "I was a truck driver most of my life, but I don't have any special skills. My wife Anita, though, got to studying herbs back when we got interested in the Mother Earth News magazine and what they taught. Maybe our Amish friends know more that could help her so we could have some kind of medicines when the old stuff is gone."

Heads nodded among the Amish women along with some others, men and women alike.

Albert sat down abruptly.

Jim Collier, his nearest neighbor, said, "You're selling yourself short Al. Everybody that has seen your place can see that your a pretty fair carpenter and you always took care of your own truck. You made that solar stuff, too, so tell us about that."

Albert stood back up hesitantly and said, "Yeah, we made a solar food dryer and a solar water heater. We have a little reflector that Sylvia uses to make tea in the sun and I made one solar collector to help heat in the house. Anybody that wants to look at that stuff is welcome to come see it so they can make their own."

He sat down again and was surprised when several people said they wanted to look at his things. Albert said, "Anita got us started that direction because she was always a fan of the Mother Earth News magazine. Still has all the old issues, too. They have a lot of projects in them that might come in handy now, so anybody wants to look at 'em is welcome."

Jim Collier said, "I'm just a farmer, but I can do some carpenter work, and you all know I have a

bandsaw mill if we need to run that. It's got a 24 horse diesel engine on it and it's big enough to saw 16 foot stuff. I'll need to find more blades for it soon, though. We've got a good farrowing house for hogs, but it was heated with gas, so if we can get wood heat in it somehow we can raise a lot of pigs this winter. It does have gravity water from our pond, but I'll have to fix up the automatic waterers if I can find parts."

"This is our son Kevin. I'll let him tell about himself."

Kevin stood up and said, "Not much to know about me. I joined the Army right out of high school and went to the sandbox for a tour. I got out before they started sending guys back for 2 and 3 tours. I was an Armorer in Supply doing weapons maintenance. When I was discharged I started an apprenticeship as a machinist at the Jap auto parts factory in Seymour, but I couldn't take their management's attitude and came back to farm with Dad. My girl Andrea felt the same way, so she came with me."

He turned to Andrea and asked, "You want to tell about yourself?"

She nodded once and stood up. "Kevin never lets me forget that I'm a year older than him, but I don't think 30 is over the hill yet." That got a few chuckles before she went on. "I was taking classes after work studying chemistry back...before. I worked in the tool crib at the factory where I met Kevin. My folks...."

Andrea stopped and collected herself before she could go on. "I lived on a farm near Seymour. We raised grain and hogs, so I know how a farm works. My, uh, parents didn't make it, so, uh.... Anyway. I came down here with Kevin one day after work and we were afraid to go back..."

She refused to think any more about that day and all the dying people. Her tears flowed freely, like several others in the group. It was quiet enough that people could hear the scratching of Marta's pencil as she made notes. Her tears fell on her note paper. Marta gathered herself and stood again.

"We have all lost many of our dearest and best family and friends. But somehow, we are all here today. Life is going on. We can make it through this, if we do it together. Each soul is precious, and even more so now. We MUST do all we can now. Everyone's abilities are needed. So let's go on the best we can and find out what those abilities are."

Daniel Schmidt stood up and said, "My English is not so good. I am a farmer, and I raise some seeds to sell and trade with our people. I can train horses to work and ride. I can shoe horses, if we can find shoes for dem. I need to find more shoes and nails. I tink dere are some at the hardware store. We will need dem, so maybe make a trip dere soon."

Clay looked at Daniel and said, "We can get you there to find what you need. Maybe more than one hardware store."

Martha and Sarah Knepp were sitting together near their mother and siblings listening to the meeting, but Martha wasn't keeping up with it all because her attention kept straying back to Eddie's good looking young face. He hadn't said anything yet, but was paying close attention to the speakers and hadn't noticed her. Sarah noticed her looks, and gave her a sly smile. They both looked down to hide their grins, but their mother saw them and guessed correctly that there must be a young man causing them. They all kept silent, though, as the others talked.

Amos Schwartz told that he'd worked for the blacksmith in his community when he repaired buggy wheels and running gear. He said he'd done a little blacksmithing work there and thought they should

collect the contents of that man's shop. He choked up a little when he said, "He was a friend of mine, and he would want someone to take care of his tools."

Roscoe had been listening carefully and thinking. He asked Amos, "You probably know everyone's property in your old community, don't you?"

Amos said, "Yeah, we all worked together, so we all been on each other's places a lot."

"I think you could help us find things we needed from there, if you feel like doing that," he suggested.

Amos lifted his chin up and said, "Yeah. I can do that. No need to let things go to rot and ruin. Better save everything we can, since ever'body's sayin' they ain't any more stuff bein' made now. Seems like the right thing to me."

He looked at Jacob for confirmation and got it with a solemn nod.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 18

..

Eddie hadn't said anything during the meeting and Roscoe noticed that, thinking that the boy probably felt out of place with a bunch of farmers. That needed to be fixed, Roscoe decided and asked him, "Eddie, how well do you know New Albany?"

"Uh, well, pretty good, I guess."

"Where's the most likely place to find trucks around there, semi trucks and trailers?"

"Oh. Well, there's that truck driver school up by the interstate, right off the Hamburg exit. And there's the Peterbilt dealer on down Hamburg Pike and a truck parts place there, too. Find all you want there."

Roscoe said, "Thanks! I bet you could tell me where to find a lot of stuff around there, huh?"

"Oh, prob'ly so. Depends what you want."

"What we need," Roscoe mused, "is some more truck drivers. Have you ever drove a big truck, Eddie?"

"No, I'm not a truck driver. I just worked for a contractor and drove his old stuff around a little."

"But you have driven a big truck?"

"Yeah, a little bit. I just worked for him one summer and got laid off. He had a bunch of dump trucks and some lowboys to haul the dozers an' stuff. But they ain't in New Albany. He lived out at Greenville. I didn't come out that way, so I don't know if he's still around, or not."

Albert spoke up, "Oh! Is that Cunningham excavating?"

"Yeah, Danny Cunningham. Hard guy to work for. He was on everybody like stink on s.... Like white on rice."

Eddie had noticed the Amish girl looking at him and almost embarrassed himself saying the wrong thing. He thought he'd better watch his mouth around these religious people. He was glad when Albert got her attention.

Albert said, "Cunningham had all kinds of excavating equipment. We need to look into that. Always top notch stuff, too." He asked Eddie, "Did you ever run any of his equipment?"

"Nah, I was just a flunkie. Well, I moved things around, but I never did no work with it, except the small dozer. He had me on that one day when a guy didn't show up. It wasn't nothin' important, just shoving dirt around and packin' it down. Mostly I was takin' care of stuff, greasin' and fillin' tanks, checkin' oil and like that. I helped load up stuff when we moved it an' all."

Albert grinned at Roscoe and said, "Looks like we got a heavy equipment operator!"

The meeting broke up into pairs and small groups, socializing as evening came. Marta encouraged everyone to eat again before they went home to make use of the leftovers. Soon, though, the Amish took their leave and loaded all the kids in the buggies to go and others began to go to their various vehicles. Eddie caught a backward glance from the Amish girl as she climbed in the back of their buggy. He was pretty sure that Amish girls were not supposed to have anything to do with anybody outside their bunch. It made him wonder if maybe their rules were changing, or if it was just her being curious.

That evening when they went to bed, Sarah quietly asked Martha, "So, you were looking at the English boy a lot, like you wanted to see more of him?"

Martha didn't answer, but blushed heavily, so Sarah grinned and said, "Yah, I thought so. He is a pretty boy, but father would not allow that you know."

Martha bit her lip and nodded agreement, but she was wondering just what her father would permit. Things were very different now, with so few people around. Maybe some things would change. She fervently hoped things changed for her.

In the downstairs bedroom, Rebeckah told her husband, "Now that you are the Elder, what will you do about our children and the English children? They will see a lot of each other and I see them like each other already."

Jacob let out a sigh, and said softly, "I will pray about this. I think we must live in the world God has given us."

Rebeckah said, "Well said, Jacob. Gute nacht."

"Gute nacht, love."

Clay and Amy had driven home slowly in the truck with Benjamin and Gina riding in the back end sitting on a straw bale. Amy noticed they were sitting very close together and had arms around each other. Clay didn't let on that he noticed, but he drove carefully so they weren't jostled around too much. It wouldn't do for anyone to fall out of the truck. He was worried that someone might get hurt and not be able to get the help they needed. Amy was thinking something very different about the kids. The

baby in her arms had her mind on the subject of babies, and she thought these kids were far too young to be so close.

Jim Collier was thinking of the possibilities of a trip to New Albany with a big truck. He would love to have some spare parts for his farm equipment and there was a dealer close to that truck driving school that Eddie had mentioned. He seemed to recall he'd been down that way to get some bearings once, too.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 19

Roscoe expertly sliced off weeds in the sweet corn row with his hoe as he spoke to his foster son.

"Where did you live, Dylan?"

The boy stared at the woods across the garden before he answered Roscoe. He had never said a word about his home or the rest of his family since the kids came here. Dylan liked this old man and said, "We lived on Sawmill Road back where the road goes down the hill."

Dylan looked away from Roscoe then back again. He said, "It was in the country, but it wasn't a farm like this. We had some chickens and a pig once. Melanie and me took care of 'em 'cause Dad was gone a lot drivin' his truck. Mom had a little garden like this. Emma helped her pull weeds and stuff. Dad came home sick and called us at school an' said don't come home 'cause we'd catch it too. He said to stay with Benjamin until he and Mom got better and he'd call us. He never called and then ever'body got sick and died and..."

Emma walked between the garden rows to where they were and said, "Marta said supper's ready."

Roscoe turned toward her and said, "You go tell her we'll be there shortly, okay?"

"Okay." She turned and trotted toward the house.

Roscoe looked back at the boy who had tears running down his cheeks. He had dropped his hoe and was trying to wipe them away. Roscoe laid his hoe down in the row and told Dylan, "It's better to let it out."

"Boys ain't supposed to cry," Dylan said. "Melanie an' Emma cried a lot and I had to keep gettin' us somethin' to eat and there wasn't nobody else to do it..."

"Boys and men need to cry sometimes, like everybody else," Roscoe said. He reached for the boy and put an arm around him. "Grief is a heavy thing to carry around. It needs to be let out so we can lay it down and go on. So, you just let it out right here if you want to and this'd be a good place to lay it down."

Dylan cried softly while Roscoe held him in a hug and cried with him. Later, he held the boy's hand and walked to the hand pump behind the house where they washed their hands and faces in the cold well water. The cold water helped take away some of the redness from their faces before they went inside to eat.

\*\*\*\*\*

The big Maple trees shaded Eddie's trailer completely from the August sun, but it was still hot inside, so he sat outside in a lawn chair drinking cold well water and eating his lunch. He had finished painting the house trim a month ago, and was almost finished with the big barn. There were a couple outbuildings yet to do, but Eddie was pleased with the way things looked so much nicer.

He had never lived in a place he owned before. They had always rented an apartment in the city. This was so different. He wasn't part of the family, although Albert and Anita said he was. He felt like the trailer was HIS, though. He had done a lot of the work getting it moved here and set up, and he'd dug the drainage ditch and sewer line, and when he poured water in the toilet he could flush it. He kept the place clean inside and cut the weeds around it that the cows didn't eat. Cows made pretty good neighbors, he thought. Sure, they would crap wherever they felt like it, but they didn't bother anybody. They were gentle and came when he called them for feeding in the evening. That was better than the neighbors he'd grown up with.

Eddie finished eating and picked up his big western straw hat. He never thought he would wear a hat like that, but it helped keep the sun off his head so he didn't get so hot. He fetched the paintbrush from the can of water, shook it out and went back to painting the barn. The wood was old so it took a lot of paint. He was glad they didn't have to pay for the paint. He'd used three 5 gallon buckets of it on the barn and thought it would take one more to finish.

Albert and Anita said he could have the ground on his side of the driveway, and there was a lot of it. The pasture was huge, 40 acres Albert said. When they were talking about it, Anita had pointed out that nobody had claimed the land on past it, either. It had belonged to some big farmer who lived several miles away, but nobody had heard from him so they assumed he was dead. There was an old house and barn on it, but they hadn't been used for a long time. Eddie had looked at it, but he didn't know what he would do with that much land. He wanted to learn more from Albert before he said anything about that land. It had always seemed so simple when he'd seen farms on TV, but there was a lot he hadn't figured out yet. The more he saw, the more he realized how much he had to learn.

He had 10 cows out there getting fat. They came from a deserted farm Clay knew about up on the highway, and Clay said they need a new home, so they'd brought 28 of them down here. Albert had most of them on his side of the farm where he'd taken over the neighbor's empty farm. That neighbor and his wife had never come home. Albert had mowed the pasture and baled some hay from part of the field. It looked really nice now with all those black cows out there. The hay smelled good in the barn, too. He thought about how the city had stunk. After living in the top of the factory for a winter, he had gotten used to fresher air up there. Down on the ground, the city had still smelled bad. He decided he was never going back there to live, even if things got back to normal somehow.

While he painted, Eddie thought about how different this life was. He had never thought he would become a farmer. He didn't have a boss and he didn't have any money, but he had everything he'd always wanted--a place of his own. Well, almost everything. It sure would be nice to have that pretty Amish girl here with him, but he knew that would never happen. It was nice to dream about it, though. Eddie had always been a loner, but he had loved his sister and his few friends. He'd been pretty lonesome for a long time. Funny, he thought. He was alone out here most of the time, but he didn't feel lonesome at all.

\*\*\*\*\*

Anthony Van Derver was lonely, more lonely than he had ever been. It had been a year and a half since he had fled the clinic where he'd worked and ran away like a scalded dog. He had the overlook place

stocked to the max, having taken after his father who had built the place. At first he had wondered if his Dad was just paranoid after a lifetime of lawyering, but by the time he'd finished medical school, he had seen enough reasons to have a retreat. They were different reasons than his Dad had given, but the result was the same.

He felt the guilt every waking moment for not having stayed at the clinic to help fight the plague, until he'd been at the overlook cabin for almost a month and heard the shortwave transmission. He heard someone in Florida late one night, clearly on a "skipped" signal, because the relay towers were all down by that time. The man said something about weaponized Ebola Virus from the Mideast. The signal faded and then came back and he heard it again, "...from one of the Arab countries the CDC official told me. He was dying and swore it was Ebola, but that it would die out. That was why the government had their officials in the bunkers, but they had quit transmitting..." "...all dead, or they would be trying to reach us..." That was the last shortwave transmission he had been able to pick up. It had been over a year since then.

Anthony still felt twinges of guilt, but then he reminded himself that there was no chance of surviving the virus if you caught it. He kept telling himself he had done the right thing. He could not have stopped the impossible, and only if he lived could he help anyone who survived it. Some days he almost believed that. The trouble was he had only seen one living person since then.

That person had been riding a motorcycle, going west on the highway, away from the city. He wouldn't have seen or heard the motorcycle, but he had heard some shots and looked out the front of the A-frame cabin toward the sound. Atop the 300 foot bluff, he had plainly heard the shots below. It had been little pops first, probably a .22, then some louder ones, maybe a larger pistol. It didn't have the crack of a high powered rifle. Then the motorcycle drove away with a small trailer behind it.

Maybe there were survivors after all. Anthony was tending his large garden behind the cabin when he heard the trucks below.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 20

It was early in the morning. Anthony liked to work in the garden just after sunrise to avoid the heat later. He rushed into the house and to the front where he could see two pickup trucks driving slowly toward the city. He went to the telescope and picked out at 3 people in each truck, before they disappeared around a turn, then reappeared too far away for inspection. He went to the side veranda and pointed the parabolic microphone their direction. Above all the wind noise he could hear the trucks still driving. He decided they were no immediate threat to him, so he went back to his gardening, his determination increased by his growing distaste for freeze dried meals.

He had never liked hunting, which had frustrated his Dad, but he wanted to save life, not end it. That got put in the back of his mind after a year of eating freeze dried meats and he opened the gun safe to get the scoped and silenced .22 rifle. The first morning a rabbit got put in the skillet and a week later a couple squirrels. He was thinking about shooting a deer this Fall, when the weather got cold enough to keep the meat for a while.

"A reluctant survivalist, that's what I am," Anthony thought as he picked sweet corn. "Now. What do I



do about those people in the trucks? If anything. They could be killers, or worse. Or they could be good people. How do I figure that out?"

He had watched the trucks out of sight, then finally got the idea when he noticed the long whip antennas on the trucks. He turned on his CB scanner to listen. He finally found their distant traffic on channel 11. It came and went, but he had the channel now. If they came back, he would hear them.

\*\*\*\*\*

"There's the truck driving school," Eddie told Clay. "Turn in by the guardrail there."

It took over 2 hours to find keys, charge batteries, refresh fill fuel tanks, and get a pair of semi's ready for the road. They took 40 foot trailers for easier handling, leaving the longer ones and headed out in a convoy toward the truck parts business down the road. Clay opened the small side door to the warehouse with a heavy pry bar and then found the way to the loading dock doors they opened from the inside to avoid damamging them. They got a propane powered forklift running and loaded four 55 gallon barrels of diesel engine grade motor oil while Al searched for the right filters for the trucks they had taken. Jim Collier found cases of cetane booster and fuel preservative and loaded those while his son Kevin stood guard with a pump shotgun, mostly watching for stray dogs. They hadn't seen any sign of life so far on the trip.

They were in and out in less than an hour and on the road again, slowly driving down the secondary road toward the bearing wholesaler. That took a little longer, loading up every sort of bearing they could imagine using. They were careful to shut the warehouse door securely, like they had at the truck parts building to preserve what was inside. The next stop was Rural King.

"Take 'em around to the back," Al called on the radio. "Will do, good buddy," Eddie answered from the other semi and got a chuckle from him. Al let Eddie back to the loading docks first, and then easily slid in beside him with his rig and set the brakes. Trailer doors were opened and dock plates were slid into place.

"You all know what you want, so let's see if they got a forklift that will run," Clay told the group. Again, they entered by the small door in back and found noone inside. The warehouse was dark inside, so they opened all 3 dock doors to get some light. The store was much better lighted from the plate glass front windows, but it was still dim. Some flashlights were found and spare batteries and the search and loading began with large flatbed carts. There was no forklift, but there were a couple good pallet jacks that enabled them to load the trailers fairly efficiently.

"I'm going to the canning section first, or my wife will have my head on a platter," Clay said.

Roscoe said, "I have my orders to bring jeans and work boots to fit everyone, so I better get after that."

Eddie said, "I think they have those straw hats the Amish wear in here, don't they? I'll go with you to the clothes and stuff."

Clay found the flashlights and batteries and got several 6 volt lanterns going to light up the store. One cart after another rolled to the warehouse where the goods were stacked and tied as best they could be on spare pallets and loaded. It was hot in the store with no air conditioning, so the men made frequent trips outside to cool off. Bottled water was passed around and very stale snack foods.

Roscoe munched on a stale candy bar and said, "Amazing how this stuff never seems to go bad, ain't

it?"

"I guess it's all those chemicals they used to put in things," Clay said. "Or, maybe it wasn't really food, just plastic and sugar."

"Speaking of chemicals," Jim said, "I think they had Round Up weed killer in here. I gotta look for that."

"We better go clean out the vet supplies, too," Al Harris said. "I can do that."

"I'll give you a hand," Eddie said. He grabbed some empty boxes and a flatbed cart.

Kevin Collier said, "I'm going to Sporting goods. I want some traps for coyotes and some other things."

When he returned later, he said, "Be careful how you stack these boxes. It's mostly ammunition."

Clay said, "Let's put that in my pickup to be extra careful with it."

Jim Collier was back outside cooling off when Roscoe told him, "We need to save some room to hit that big drug store over by the grocery. Marta said to be sure and get all the medications we could find, so I better come home with some. We got those 3 kids to raise and kids are always getting something."

Jim yelled at the rest of the group and said, "Better wind this up. We're burnin' daylight and we gotta stop at the drug store."

On the way out of town, the trucks were loaded full, although most of it wasn't really heavy. The drug store had been intact and provided enough boxes to finish filling the last trailer before they got everything they wanted from it. Roscoe had tried hard to get a good selection of things, but it was a hurried job and he was sure he'd forgotten some items. He hoped he could come back later and do this again before long.

Jim insisted on stopping at the Case-International dealership to get parts for his equipment. It was more difficult than he thought, with no computers to look up the items and locations. He settled for some filters and mower sections and other common items in the interest of saving time, since it would be sundown in a couple hours. He gave it up and took off leading the convoy in his pickup out the highway toward home. On the CB, he called to each driver in turn and was assured everyone was on the road and following in sight of the next truck. They weaved around a few wrecked and stalled cars, giving them only a glance to see if there was human remains in them, but not really wanting to see it.

"Breaker, Doc to convoy on highway 60. Breaker, Doc to convoy on highway 60. Anyone there?"

Everyone in the trucks was dead silent, not knowing whether to answer or not. Kevin shucked his shotgun and everyone else checked their weapons. They looked all around them and didn't see anything moving. Jim Collier answered, "This is convoy, who are we talkin' to?"

"This is Doc Holiday up the road from you. I'd like to talk if you have time. Haven't talked to anyone for over a year."

"Doc this is Jim. What's on your mind?" Jim slowed his truck from 40 MPH down to 25 MPH, causing the group to slow behind him.

"Jim, I'm just looking for living people to talk to. Only saw one person go by in all this time."

"Anybody with you?"

"Just me. I'm up near Borden, and I'm up high so I can get your signal. Are there more people out there?"

"There's quite a few of us, but we could use more people. How can we get to meet so everybody feels safe here?"

"I haven't figured that out. You have any ideas?"

"Not really," Jim said. "Is there a place we can meet where there's lots of room around?"

"Okay. You know where the golf driving range is? The one with the bar?"

"Yep, I can find it. Not too far away," Jim said.

"I can be there in about 10 minutes. I'll be on an ATV, a green one."

"Okay. See you there."

Jim pulled into the driving range parking lot alone and told the others to stop some distance away. He stood alone in the parking lot beside his truck with no one else in sight. Kevin was under the porch of the bar building with his shotgun and Roscoe was across the road laying behind the tall grass with his .30-30 lever action pointed out at the parking lot.

Soon they heard the small engine on an ATV coming down the highway. There was a rifle strapped on the rider's back, but nothing in his hands as he rode slowly into the parking lot and stopped some distance from Jim's truck. With the engine shut off, the men could easily hear each other 50 feet apart.

The rider said, "You aren't going to shoot me, are you?"

"Not plannin' on it, but better lay that rifle down slow, so my friends know you're friendly."

He did that and turned back around slowly. Jim spoke then, "To tell you the truth, it's good to see another person."

The rider said, "That's the truth if I ever heard it. My name's Anthony Van Derver. I'm a doctor and the only one I know of that's still alive."

"My name's Jim Collier and we're a bunch of farmers just out lookin' for what it takes to stay alive. Are you really by yourself?"

Anthony nodded soberly. "I have been since my nurse died at the clinic up the road. I'm staying in my Dad's old place, The Overlook cabin on the ridgetop."

Jim said, "Oh, that A-frame way up on the hill?"

"That's right. Dad built it a long time ago and I inherited it."

"How'd you stay alive all this time?"

"Dad was a survivalist. He had the place full of stuff so he could live up there for years. That didn't help his heart attack, though. He passed away while I was an intern at Jewish hospital. I moved here when I started at the clinic."

Jim was fascinated, but finally remembered his people and said louder, "It's okay, you guys can come out now."

Roscoe and Kevin slowly made their way to the other pair in the parking lot. They met and shook hands with Anthony while Jim got on the CB and called the other trucks to come up to the lot and meet this man. They spent an hour talking and getting acquainted before Anthony agreed to come visit their community.

"My Jeep won't start and I'm no mechanic, so I don't have a way to get there and back," Anthony said.

"How about you ride with us and we'll bring you back when ever you want to come? I know that's asking you to trust us a lot, but we'd be damned fools to do any harm to real doctor these days."

"I guess that's true. I don't have any better ideas. I should go get some things, though. I want my black bag and some clothing at least. Probably should take my pack, too. Dad said don't go anywhere without it."

Jim asked, "Can I drive my pickup up there?"

"Sure. The driveway is a little washed out, but not bad and it's not steep at all. It goes around the back of the hill."

Kevin elected to ride with his Dad in case of trouble, but there was none. The doctor's things didn't take much room, which was a good thing, the truck being loaded full.

"How far is it to your farms?"

"About 10 miles past Salem. Take us most of an hour at the speeds we been going."

Anthony chattered all the way there. He was so glad to have real people to talk to he was almost hysterical.

Jim said, "We can take you to our house if you want. it's the furthest up the valley, but we'll see most everybody on the way there. We're going to stop at Roscoe's first and put one of the big trucks there, so you'll get to meet his wife and the kids. I think Clay's wife was gonna stay there today, too."

"You have kids? Real live kids?"

Jim laughed, "We don't, just Kevin here, but Roscoe's got 3 they took in to raise, and Clay's wife has a baby and the Amish all have a houseful.

Anthony said, "I can't wait to see kids again. I thought they all died. I really did." He wept as they hit some bumpy patches that got his attention back on the road.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 21

"Dad was a lawyer. An ambulance chaser. He made a lot of money, but he raised the cost of malpractice insurance a lot all by himself. I couldn't do that. I heard all the tales about people with injuries and felt like I had to DO something about it," Anthony said.

Marta said, "I'm glad you did. We had two children that had just completed their internships when the plague hit. They were both working in Atlanta. We didn't hear from them after the first wave of sickness hit the city."

"I'm sorry. I had no idea."

"That's okay. We all lost family. What we have now are parts of families put together into new ones. This is Melanie, Dylan, and Emma Draper. They came to us from our town. This is Amy Whitaker, Clay's wife, and their baby Louisa May. That handsome devil in the corner is Benjamin Scott and the pretty girl is Gina Kelley. They are part of Clay's family now. You'll meet the Amish families when we have our Sunday meeting."

"What day is it? I've lost track," Anthony said.

"It's Tuesday, at least we think it is, and that's what we are calling it, August the 14th," Marta told him. "We've got a meal ready, so, are you hungry?"

"What I smell is heavenly! I'll try not to embarrass myself eating real food. I've been living on freeze-dried food."

"Oh, Yuck!" The kids had experience with freeze dried food. Melanie gave him a sly smile and said, "If we feed you good will you stay around here?"

"You couldn't chase me off now," he told her with a smile.

Melanie went into the kitchen to help her sister carry food to the table. Emma said, "You got a goofy grin! You like him, doncha?"

"Sure I like him. He's a nice man."

"No, I mean you REALLY like him!"

"Hush! He'll hear you!"

Emma chuckled and followed her sister to the dining room with a big bowl of mashed potatoes. Melanie did like the looks of his shock of blond hair and the bright blue eyes. She spent all the time she could looking at him during supper.

\*\*\*\*\*

Jim and Kevin Collier had driven the other semi and Jim's truck to his farm where they told Sylvia and Andrea to get a room ready for a visitor.

"YOU FOUND A DOCTOR??!!!"

"He found us, really," Jim said and told the story. "So now he needs a place to at least spend the night. Marta is feeding him, and he looked to have an appetite."

Sylvia said, "Oh, I hope we can get him to stay here! We need a doctor here so bad!"

"He was getting a pretty warm reception at Roscoe's. And the way he talked our ears off on the way home, I don't think you could chase him away. He's been by himself all this time and he seems to like being around people."

Andrea said, "We'll have to find him a place of his own. There's not many houses left down here in the valley."

Sylvia said, "He needs a place to work, too. And it should be easy for everyone to get to. Maybe down by the church somewhere. There's that house just past the turn where the Jacksons lived. But it's a mess of course, since they died in there. Maybe we could clean it up if we all worked at it."

"Hey! It doesn't have to be solved tonight! We've got a spare room, so I thought he could stay here for a while if it suits you all."

The women agreed they would love to have him, so they got busy cleaning the spare room and airing it out. The day had been hot and the evening breeze was welcome. Jim excused himself after having something to eat and drove back down to Roscoe's to fetch Anthony. Clay and his family had already gone home, but it still took a while to get him away from the Beam family. Jim drove slowly up the valley just as the sun was setting. They waved at Albert and Eddie who were sitting in the yard with Anita, well aware of who Jim was taking home.

Anthony introduced himself to Andrea and Sylvia, who offered him coffee. He declined and said, "I'd just like to sit here on the porch for a while, if it's all right. I think I am a little overdone tonight."

Jim smiled and said, "I've got just the thing for you. Sit still and relax." he went inside and came back with 2 glasses and a bottle of Crown Royal whiskey.

"Have some and rest a while."

"I'll do that. Thank you."

The women went inside and soon the soft glow of a kerosene lamp lit the front window. Crickets chirped and lightning bugs flew slowly around the yard. In the distance a whippoorwill called. Anthony relaxed. He and Jim talked a little about the farm and what was there. When darkness fell, the two men went inside and the women showed Anthony to the bathroom where he was amazed to find a flush toilet that worked, and warmed water from the kitchen range to wash up.

He fell asleep that night as soon as he laid his head down.

In the days that followed, people worked to clean and sterilize the house by the church. It was as clean as hard work and lots of scrubbing could make it when Anthony saw it the first time. He decided that

since it was fairly large with 4 bedrooms, there was room for him to live and have a small clinic. Storage space might be a problem, since he wanted to bring all his medical goods from the clinic near his old home and the stored things at the Overlook cabin.

Jim solved that in a hurry. "We'll just go get another semi trailer. We need to go back to the pharmacies and Rural King, so we'll just bring a trailer for your things."

"I have a lot of books, too. We'll need some bookcases. I suppose we could just bring the bookcases they are in now, since I'm not going back there. A lot of medications need to be stored where it is dark and cool, so I think the basement will do for that if it's dry."

Jim said, "Yes, this is a good dry basement. They had somebody put some kind of sealant on it outside before they finished the inside. If you need more storage, we can come up with something."

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 22

It took several days to move the entire solar system from the Overlook cabin to Anthony's new place, but he had a reasonable amount of constant electricity. The batteries were the Edison Nickel-Iron type that lasted for at least 100 years, another of his father's ideas. They moved the Lister diesel generator next, and had it set in the small storage shed behind the house. That would take care of unusual loads, and Anthony had ideas that would need it. He wanted an X-ray machine and some other equipment. It would be well into the winter before the clinic was completed to his satisfaction, and it involved robbing test equipment from 3 different hospitals. Harvest time had intervened and slowed progress somewhat, but it got done.

The only thing that worried him was future supplies of certain drugs and laboratory reagents that had a shelf life. There would come a time when some things simply could not be done any more. He worried at the problem and talked at some length with Kevin's wife Andrea about the possibilities of doing the chemistry to keep some things available in the purity that was required.

\*\*\*\*\*

Jacob had butchered a cow as soon as the weather turned cooler, and had found a book at the library on tanning leather. He had made a vat for wood ashes and collected lye drippings from below it to remove hair from the cow hide. He had no idea where to find chemicals for some of the processes, so he stuck with the old way of boiling oak bark to remove the tannic acid. The hide was now soaking in that bath of brown liquor contained in a plastic vat obtained from a deserted metal plating plant.

There had been a lot of wood cutting done, so the bark was available. Some of the firewood he cut went to the doctor's house, to pay for any medical needs his family might have. Others had also contributed firewood, canned food, fresh meat, eggs, milk, butter, and all manner of fresh foodstuffs each week. The doctor refused any other pay, although he asked for some contributions to be given for his new nurse, Melanie Draper. He had provided her with medical books to study, and she got plenty of on the job training helping him treat the small injuries, fevers, rashes, and the birth of one baby by an Amish woman.

Anita Harris had been charged with researching all she could learn about herbal substitutes for drugs that were no longer available, especially the penicillins. She made a few trips to the library when others

went to town and came back with every herb and biology book they had. She became convinced that they needed a still to make alcohol and herb extracts. That was quickly supplied by Eddie, who had known some drug cooks in his early life that used a pressure cooker for the boiler of their stills.

Ruth Schmidt had collected quantities of some local herbs she knew, ginseng, yellowroot, bloodroot, blue and black cohosh,, and a few others. Rebeckah Knepp had shared her considerable herb lore with Anita who dutifully recorded it all. Their collective medical knowledge had grown and was all given to Doctor Van Derver. He felt like they could handle most things that might happen, but he knew some things were missing and may always be in the future.

Clay was finding the same thing trying to repair the horse draw machinery. Some things simply were not to be found and would have to be made. He and Amos Schwartz spent some cold days moving tools and equipment from the blacksmith shop in Amos' old neighborhood to the nearly new pole building on Amos' place. Amos was industriously learning the fine points of how to make wooden buggy wheels, bore the wood hubs, and install bearings and the steel tires on them.

\*\*\*\*\*

Another trip was planned and taken to Greenville where they found the construction firm that Eddie knew about. When they found the remains of 4 people in the house and noone else around, they decided they could take what they wanted. A heavy dump truck towed a lowboy trailer with the medium size dozer, a D5 Cat on it. The semi and it's lowboy were already loaded with a knuckle boom excavator, but it took some time to air up tires with a tiny 12 volt compressor and tend to the fuel of both vehicles. They found a couple spare batteries for the heavy equipment and a store of maintenance items to take along. Clay decided he could drive the single axle fuel truck, so they could get the whole haul in one trip.

Both trucks were delivered to Eddie's place, since he had been elected to operate the machines and he wanted some practice with them. Albert had convinced him that he needed a stock pond in his pasture fields for late summer when the creek sometimes dried up. Eddie had seen some of this work done, so he resolved to learn how to do it well. He thought, how bad can I mess up digging a hole in the ground? He found out when he made his first tries at it, then began to learn how it was done with a few tips from Roscoe who had been around that kind of work. He made a trip to the feed and seed store for grass seed and found some very old straw bales in a barn along the way to use for seeding the pond banks. By the time the Fall rains began Eddie had two new ponds. They held water and new grass began to grow on the pond banks.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 23

On the trip to Greenville, Roscoe had noticed some farm equipment sitting at the old auction grounds just west of the town. He made a mental note of it and resolved to go back another time for a closer look. Amos Schwartz had been making noises about finding some more coal for his blacksmith forge, and Roscoe remembered there was a small coal dealer in Palmyra, a little town on the way to Greenville. He had just a couple weeks before it would be time to begin the corn harvesting, so he sighed to himself and decided that maybe Amos should go with him on a trip. He'd ask him about it.



When Roscoe went in the house to discuss the trip with Marta, she had her home school materials all spread out in the living room on the floor and was organizing it into piles.

"What've you got going here? Is school ready to start?"

She looked up and said, "I need to be ready for it. We're going to need some school supplies, if Clay didn't get any in that load last Spring from Wal Mart's warehouse."

Roscoe thought about it and said, "I think there might be some on that load. I'll ask him about it if you don't get to it first."

His wife said, "I know corn harvest is coming up, but as soon as that is finished and people have enough firewood cut, we need to start school. There are 9 of the Amish kids plus our 3 and Clay's two. That is 14 kids and Eddie Grimes said he'd like to study this winter. He wants the last couple years of high school because he dropped out to work after his mother died."

'Yes, all the kids need to learn, that's for sure. Something that has been bothering me is that we need to teach trades, too. We need several electrical things, like telephones and solar powered lights, and anything else we can come up with for as long as we can make it work. So somebody has to learn about that from those of us that have done a little of it. Amos Schwartz wants to teach an apprentice blacksmith and buggy maker. I bet there are several trades that we'll need when the old stuff quits working and wears out. We need to think on that."

"I've been thinking that we have a lot of young girls that need to know more than just how to keep house. I can drive a tractor and do a lot of things on a farm, and I don't see why the girls can't learn to hunt and fish and do whatever it takes. There's just not enough people to go around for all that needs doing."

"Isn't that the truth! We have to find more people if they're out there somewhere, but that will take some travel and it could be dangerous. We got off real lucky meeting Doc Van Derver. That could have been a disaster if he'd been a bad sort. I need to go to Palmyra to get blacksmith coal, and I want to see what might be left at the auction place in Greenville, too. I thought maybe we should do some scouting around on that trip and see if there are signs of people anywhere close, too."

Marta frowned and said, "You better go in a group, like you've been doing, in case somebody isn't friendly."

He nodded and said, "Yeah, I planned on that."

\*\*\*\*\*

"Didn't you say you saw somebody at Chris Hamilton's place, back when you went to Millport to the store?"

"I clean forgot about them! Somebody shoulda been in touch with 'em a long time ago," Clay said.

Amy said, "Maybe we ought to go see about them." She and Gina were cleaning up breakfast dishes.

"I wonder... I think it would be a good idea to be careful about places we haven't been to yet. Never know how people might act, bein' so scared and all. Maybe I'll do a little scouting around before we just go drivin' in there. Jake's gettin' lazy anyhow. Time for us to go look around some."

Gina said, "I saw some smoke over across the river when me an' Ben went up the hill to look for Ginseng. It was right over that old bridge."

Benjamin said, "It was bigger than chimney smoke, like they were burning a big pile of trash or something."

Clay said, "It's too dry out to be burning trash of a brush pile. Could set a big field on fire if you wasn't careful. I better go have a look. You want to go Ben?"

"Sure thing!"

"Okay, get a couple bottles of water and I'll get my canteens and my pack. You better carry a rifle, too. Never know what we might run into."

"Okay! I'll be ready in a minute!" The boy trotted upstairs and new .22 rifle they had brought him from the trip to Rural King and his backpack. He was back in 2 minutes and looking for some water bottles. Clay kissed Amy goodbye and grabbed his pack and .223 bolt action rifle from the rack. Amy made sandwiches of the leftover sausage and wrapped it in paper for their packs. They filled bottles and canteens at the well pump and were on their way with Jake leading the way.

The morning was still cool, but there was almost no dew on the grass. The garden could use some rain, Clay thought. The corn was looking wilted, too.

The gravel road to the old iron bridge was almost overgrown, mostly with weeds and tall grass, but it still made walking slower. There was a pile of driftwood against the bridge pillars, showing mud colored now that the river level was low. The old wood plank floor was getting rotten in places, so they stepped carefully as they walked across, trying to make as little noise as possible.

"We don't want to make any noise out here until we see for sure what's going on. Might be anybody living out here now. So, you stay behind me and to one side so I can see where you're at. And stay close to a ditch, or some grass, or something where you can drop out of sight if we see somebody, okay?"

"Yeah. I got it," Benjamin said.

Their walk was uneventful except for a disturbing a few birds and one fat ground hog that scurried across the road ahead of them. The river bottom was not exactly level ground, but deceptively gradual slopes. They couldn't see the Hamilton house until they topped a slight rise where the grass and weeds were tall. Clay put his hand up motioning for Ben to stop in the shade of some bushes as he looked ahead.

Down the grade and to their left was the house with knee high grass surrounding it. Far in the distance Clay could see a few black cows, just the backs of them above the grass, moving one slow step at a time as they grazed. There was no sign of life at the house at all. An older model pickup truck was visible above the weeds, sitting enough of an angle to suggest some flat tires. Clay stood behind his bush for several minutes watching, then signalled for Ben to follow him.

Clay stayed in a slight crouch behind the row of bushes until he was almost even with the driveway. There was some grass trampled down at the end of the driveway that got his attention. He motioned Ben to stop and looked closer at the house, now 50 yards away to his left. He got a faint whiff of smoke

and then saw a thin, almost invisible column of smoke rising from behind the house. He sat down along the roadside and waited, the tall grass keeping him hidden.

A few minutes passed and the slight sound of a door being opened and closed reached him. Clay looked sharply at Ben with a finger to his lips to be quiet. Clay made his decision and said loud enough reach anyone in the house or yard, "Chris, are you home? It's Clay Whitaker."

There was no sound for several minutes, so he tried again, louder this time.

"CHRIS HAMILTON? THIS IS CLAY WHITAKER. ARE YOU OKAY?"

From off to one on side of the house, he heard a voice say, "Lemme see if you're who you say. Stand up. You ain't sick are ya?"

"No, I ain't sick, and I ain't by myself, either, so don't do no shootin' when I stand up or somebody'll shoot back, okay?"

"Damn, you sound like Clay. C'mon, stand up."

"Okay. I'm out by the road at the driveway, okay?"

Clay stood, half expecting to be shot for his trouble, but after a few seconds, he heard, "It IS you! C'mon up here!"

A tall thin figure with a rifle stepped out from behind the corner of the house as Clay stood up, his rifle at his side. Clay almost didn't recognize him. Like himself, he had a long beard and long hair, and he had lost a lot of weight. "That you Chris?"

"Yep, that's me. You okay, for sure?"

"I'm just fine. Say, I've got a boy with me, so don't get spooked when he stands up, all right?"

"Yeah, if you say he's okay."

"BEN, come on up here and leave the rifle pointed down, okay?"

The two men looked each other over and soon were sitting on the ground talking about the the past years of death and horror. Chris said, "I ain't seen another livin' soul since goin' on 2 years. How'd you stay so healthy lookin'?"

"We got gardens and farmin' goin' on. Several of us up the creek a few miles past my place. Got a regular community goin'."

"I heard a buncha trucks go by out on the highway, different times, but I had no way to know who it was. 'Fraid to go see, in case it was somebody had the sickness, or hell knows what."

Clay asked, "You ain't been out and looked around any?"

"I went to check on the Ballard's, but they was dead. I was 'fraid to go in the house for the longest time, but I got outa somethin' to eat and had to do somethin', so I went in their cellar door and got some canned goods. They didn't need 'em. I was about outa rifle shells and had no way to make a fire. Run

outa matches. I found the next few houses on down the road was empty. Nobody dead in there, so I went in and found some lighters an' some matches an' some tin cans that wasn't busted open. Mostly been livin' on fish and greens and whatnot since that run out."

"Was there a fire up here somewhere? Ben said he seen some smoke a few days back."

"Yeah, I caught the grass on fire. Finally got it stomped out when it got to the field back there."

"How about you come home with me and we feed you a good supper? Amy is a pretty good cook."

"You sure nobody's sick down that way?"

"Nope. Anyway, we got a doctor livin' down the road from us now."

"Are you kiddin' me? A doctor? Where'd he come from?"

"He was down by Borden when we went to New Albany shoppin' a while back. Nobody else alive down that way, so he come to join us."

"Hell, I though most ever'budy was dead. Can't imagine a doctor lived through all that."

"Yep, and 3 Amish families and Roscoe Beam, Jim Collier and his wife, Al Harris, a bunch of us now. Whole bunch of kids, too. We got to pick corn pretty soon, if you want to join us. There's plenty to do and lots ot eat."

"I'm havin' a hard time believin' this," Chris said, shaking his head.

Ben spoke up saying, "You can believe it all right. Just about everybody in town died, but these people found us and 5 of us kids live out here now."

"Lemme get somethin' cooked here. I got half a fish left an' I'm hungry." Chris got up to go to his campfire behind the house.

"How about some sausage and biscuits?" Clay opened his pack and took out his sandwiches.

Chris looked a little bugeyed as he accepted the sandwiches. He didn't say a word until he'd eaten them both.

Clay said, "I'm sorry, Chris. I shoulda come to see about you sooner. I seen smoke over here last Spring and figured you was all right. I guess I was pretty paranoid back then, too."

Ben handed Chris a bottle of water which he drank greedily, then sat back down on the ground.

"So this is for real. There really is people around and all."

"Take a walk with us and see for yourself."

"I'm pretty dirty to be seein' anybody. I washed some at the river, but I run outa soap."

"You'll do just fine. If that food has settled, we need to get towards home. Come on with us."

"Lemme get a few things first."

---

That evening Chris was asleep on the cool back porch on Clay's sleeping bag and pad. He had clean new clothing, a bath, and a good meal in him. After they ate, he had begun to nod off and was asleep as soon as he laid down.

Amy softly asked Clay, "He didn't say anything about his wife or what he's been doing."

Clay said, "He ain't any different than the rest of us. He don't want to think about it, let alone tell the story an re-live it."

Amy was silent for a while, thinking about losing her parents and her brother's family. She sighed and said, "You're right. Nobody wants to talk about it. I guess we just go on from wherever we are now."

\*\*\*\*\*

List of Characters, age and occupations in 2015:

---

Clay Whitaker, 28 construction work, lumber yard work, small farmer

Amy Disston/Whitaker, 24 housewife

Dau. Louisa May, b.March 2015

Foster children:

Benjamin Scott, 13

Gina Kelley, 12

Roscoe Beam, 58 Farmer,

Marta Beam, 58 Farm wife, homeschool teacher

dec'd. son and daughter

Foster children:

Melanie Draper, 14 apprentice nurse

Dylan Draper, 12

Emma Draper, 10

James Collier, 52 Agribiz farmer, grain and hogs

Sylvia Collier, 51 Farm wife

son Kevin, 29 military armorer in Afghanistan, 2006, apprentice machinist, farm kid

live-in girlfriend Andrea Hoenfeld, 30 Chemistry student, worked factory tool crib, housewife

Albert Harris, 54 Truck driver, small farmer

Anita Harris, 52 homesteader, herbal knowledge

Foster son:

Eddie Grimes, 22 City survivor, construction worker, learning heavy equipment

The Amish Group:

Amos Schwartz, 26 Farmer, blacksmith/buggy shop/wheelwright

Deliliah, 25 Farm wife, pregnant

Adam, 6  
Lilith, 4

Jacob Knepp, 45 Harness maker, farmer, horseman  
Rebeckah Knepp, 44 Farm wife, herbal lore

Children:

Martha, 18  
Sarah, 16  
Isaac, 12  
Mark, 10  
Samuel, 8

Daniel Schmidt, 26

Ruth Graber/Schmidt, 26 Farm Wife, herbal lore

Children:

Joseph, 6  
Miriam, 4  
Melvin, 2

Dr. Anthony Van Derver, 36 M.D., father was lawyer/survivalist.

Chris Hamilton, 28 Construction worker, farm kid, some electrical/plumbing experience. Widower, no children.

Population of the community is now 35. 19 are adults.

Chapter 24

"You can't go by yourself, I mean not just one truck," Marta said. "If you have any kind of trouble, it's not like you can call a wrecker on your cell phone. It's more like the days of the wagon trains going out west. You have to have enough help with you to deal with anything that comes along."

Roscoe said, "I know that, but Jim is starting to combine corn and Albert is helping him and Kevin. Eddie is going to ride with me and Amos, but Clay is busy building a root cellar and that doesn't leave any men to drive."

"Hey, you old chauvinist! I can drive. I can shoot, too, if necessary, and I can help you as much as anybody to get things loaded or whatever needs done."

"We only have one truck."

"Well, let's go to the dealer and get us another one. The sooner the better, too, because it will take a while to get it gassed up and get the battery charged and all that. And why don't you go to the rental place and get a gas powered air compressor so you don't have to wait all day on that little 12 volt thing?"

Roscoe didn't want to expose his wife to needless risks, but he knew he was beaten and gave up the contest.

"Okay then, let's go do those things and be ready to make a trip tomorrow," he said. "I need to find some tie straps and chains and stuff to tie things down, too."

"I'll tell the kids and we should stop at the Doc's and tell him where we're going so he can send somebody after us if we have trouble and don't get home tonight. That way Melanie knows what's going on, too."

Roscoe just nodded his assent and went out to get the truck.

The next morning just after daylight, Marta went after Eddie who would literally ride shotgun with her. Roscoe went the other way down the valley to get Amos and was surprised when he came out with his shotgun over one arm and a shovel in the other hand.

"I thought the Amish were all peaceable sorts," Roscoe said with a grin.

Amos said, "Yes, that's right, but there's a bunch of wild dogs and such things that ain't heard about that. I know we got most of 'em around here, but no tellin' what might be where we're goin'."

"Sensible thing to do," Roscoe told him as they started down the road.

They drove past the coal yard to assure themselves there was still coal there, but drove on planning to get that load on the way home.

The auction grounds had begun to grow some weeds through the fine gravelled lot, not having been sprayed to stop them for a couple years. They had to use Roscoe's bolt cutters to cut the chain off the gate, but soon they were inside and looking over the offerings. Apparently, there had been an auction scheduled before the plague hit this area, because the lot was comparatively full of machinery and other odds and ends.

What had caught Roscoe's eye driving past was a new Bobcat sitting in the front row next to the road. Business had been slow for equipment dealers before the plague hit, so several dealers brought things to auction, with a hefty reserve bid, of course. This was a diesel unit, and a big one. It was sitting on a heavy duty tandem axle trailer that still had the tires inflated. It was outfitted for logging, with steel tracks mounted over the tires, and lift forks on the front. A bucket was sitting on the forks, chained down.

They checked it over while they had jumper cables attached to charge the battery and did their normal fuel refresher with additives and fresh fuel. After an hour of tinkering, it was running nicely. They let it idle to further charge the battery while they walked around the rest of the lot.

Amos said, "We could use that wheel hay rake with horses, if we can get fore carts built."

"I can tow that behind my truck," Marta said. "Let's hook it up."

Roscoe towed the Bobcat and trailer behind his heavy duty farm truck, a one-ton Ford diesel dually model. They found a few other things, notably a big stainless steel restaurant sink that Marta would not pass up. With that in the bed of Roscoe's truck, they left for the coal yard to fill Marta's truck. It was a slow trip towing the unwieldy hay rake at 20 MPH or less, but that suited Roscoe just fine with the heavy trailer he was pulling.

Everyone was tired by the time the coal was unloaded and the hay rake dropped off at Amos's shop, and the Bobcat at Roscoe's place. Marta was tinkled pink with her new sink. She informed her husband that now he needed to build her a roof over it for a summer kitchen, and find her a nice wood cookstove

to live out there, too. He knew that meant pouring a concrete floor and that was hard work. Maybe he could get some help with that, he thought. Eddie said he was going to need concrete soon.

\*\*\*\*\*

Eddie was getting better with the big knuckle boom excavator, or track hoe as it was called. It was a matter of learning the levers and what they did, then his innate abilities took over to make the bucket do his bidding. He had dug out a big root cellar for himself, and had the drain ditch done and the drain pipe laid in it. He had to wait for harvest to be finished before he could get enough help to pour the concrete, so he built a crude roof over it with lumber framing and a big tarp so any rains wouldn't mess things up.

Chris Hamilton had been helping him do the layout and taught him a lot of ditch work and how it should slope for drainage. He and Chris had hit it off at the meeting a couple Sundays ago and decided they would live together in Eddie's trailer for now. Chris found himself thinking of Eddie as a younger brother he could teach and mentor about many things. The relative isolation was more comfortable for Chris than being around so many people like that first meeting he'd attended. Eddie was an apt student and paid attention, so he was learning fast.

"We just as well get some lumber and plywood and get the forms ready," Chris told him. "It won't take but a day to pour the walls, and then as soon as we peel the forms off, we can go get some gravel from the creek for the floor. Don't want a concrete floor in a root cellar, 'cause it makes it too dry for things and they shrivel up."

Eddie listened and considered that. "Well," he said, "we could get the gravel now while the creek is down and sort out the bigger stuff somehow. I can dip it out with the track hoe and load the dump truck to haul it up here."

Chris said, "Yeah, that'll work. We need a rock screen to pour it through, or we'll be forever getting the stuff sorted out. We might find something at the rock quarry. Set it up down by the creek and sort it there, then put the big stuff back in the creek."

"Okay, let's go to town tomorrow and see what we can find."

Chris took the fried venison steaks out of the skillet and proceeded to make gravy in it, adding a little more bacon grease before he stirred in the flour and a bit of water. He thought it was nice to have people to share out a deer in warm weather so they didn't have to wait for winter to butcher one, lest it spoil before it could be used. It sure was a nice change from all that fish he'd had to eat.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 25

"What are you gonna do when you run out of those sutures and needles?" Melanie was as conscious as everyone else about how life would be in the future.

Anthony frowned as he put two more stitches in the boy's leg. Mark Knepp had cut his leg with a very sharp hoe.

"I'll have to go back to the old ways. Use thread and soak it in alcohol to sterilize it, and use the smallest



needles I can find. Remind me to find some upholstery thread and get a lot of it."

Jacob Knepp asked, "Will the boy be okay now?"

Anthony looked up and said, "Yes, he'll be fine. I'll give him some antibiotics to take for a few days to be safe, but it was a clean cut and we scrubbed it out good. He didn't lose enough blood to matter, but be sure he has all he wants to drink today.

Jacob asked his son, "Does it hurt now?"

Mark shook his head no, and said, "I can't feel it at all. The medicine made it stop hurting."

Anthony told Jacob, "The time will come when I run out of the anesthetics, and then it will be a painful process. We're doing some research now on something to take the place of local and general anesthetics, but we don't have answers yet. Clove oil will help as a local and it will keep for a long time if we can find enough of it."

"But because he can't feel it right now, it is important to be very careful with the stitches. Keep the dry bandage on it tonight, don't bang it into anything, and don't let it get dirty. Don't wash around the injured area because you can wash germs into the cut. It will seal up well within a couple days and then you can wash it gently. Come back if the cut gets red, or swollen, or if the stitches get damaged. For the next 2 days, he should stay in the house and not do any running."

Anthony ruffled Mark's hair and asked, "Will you do that for me Mark?"

"Yes, I'll stay in."

Jacob asked, "When do the stitches come out?"

"These are the modern kind and will dissolve on their own and be absorbed inside. The outside part will fall away in a week to 10 days, so they don't have to be removed."

\*\*\*\*\*

"Why don't you just go to town and get lumber? The lumber yard is full of it," Amy said as she cleaned up lunch dishes.

"Because it's pine and fir and it'd rot in a couple years. That root cellar door and the spring house needs something that will last, like white oak. That's why I want Jim to saw it."

"But Jim and all those guys are combining corn now. They'll be busy for quite a while, won't they?"

"They ought to get done before long. The combine makes it go fast."

Amy frowned and then brightened up. "I know! There was a sawmill down in Wheeler Hollow. Why not go look over there? It's not that far past the Millport store."

Clay smiled and said, "That's why I love you. Good looks, great cooking, and brains to go with it all! You want to go with me?"

"No, I've got too much to do here. Gina and I are going to pick what's left in the garden and make

pickles out of it all. You take Benjamin and see what's there. He might not have have much lumber anyway."

Clay said, "It's worth going to look. I'll go find Benjamin."

"He's just getting the eggs. He'll be back in a minute."

\*\*\*\*\*

"It's got to be here somewhere close, but I can't tell exactly where I am with things all grown up like they are along the road. It don't look the same," Clay said.

"There's a driveway," Benjamin said. "Is that it?"

"I don't think so. Wait. It might be. Let's look."

He turned into the overgrown driveway, having a hard time seeing where the little bit of gravel was still showing.

"Yep, this is the Darling's place, all right. i don't see any signs of people, though."

"Uh, there's somebody, uh what's left of him," Benjamin said. He gulped and looked a little sick.

"Oh boy. I guess there's nobody alive here. I had some hopes I'd find old Henry. I always liked him."

"Maybe that's him I saw back there by that old truck."

"Hard to tell now," Clay said. "Let's try not to worry over him much."

Clay was upset, too. All they had seen was some torn up clothing and a few bones. It looked like the dogs or coyotes had been at the remains. He drove on in low gear up to the sawmill building and shut the truck off. It was quiet in the driveway, shaded by big trees all around. The house was visible in the distance, some 80 yards away, but there was no sign of recent occupation. Clay spied a tall lumber stack and got out of the truck.

He told Benjamin, "Watch out for snakes. Henry said there was copperheads around here. Don't be grabbing anything without looking it over real good. They like to sleep in those lumber stacks, where the cross sticks leave a gap between boards. Henry said his Dad got bit once that way."

Benjamin's eyes got a little bigger. He looked all around him and saw a scrap stick he picked up for a weapon. As they got near the lumber pile, he was watching closely.

Clay said, "This couldn't be any better for us if we'd had it cut to order. Help me get that old tin roofing off the top."

They laid the metal aside, then Clay backed the truck up to the pile. It was a cool day in early October, but they were both sweating pretty well by the time the truck had a load on it, enough to make the springs sag noticeably.

"We'd better put the tin back over the stack. I want to come back and get the rest before long and I don't want it to get wet."

"Put those wood chunks on top again?"

"Yeah. That'll keep the wind from blowing the tin off. Now let's load those separator sticks, too. Keeping it stacked with those sticks between layers let's the air get to all sides of it so it dries evenly and doesn't warp. We can stack it in the barn the same way we found it and it will keep forever inside that way."

"I thought you said that oak wouldn't rot?"

"All wood will rot eventually. Oak just lasts a lot longer. If you can keep it dry, it'll be good for a hundred years or more. I've heard that if oak is under water all the time, it will last even longer. That's why they used it for posts and pilings for river docks and such things. It only goes bad is it is wet part of the time and has enough air for the bacteria, or whatever it is that makes it rot."

"I didn't know a sawmill was this big," Benjamin said.

"He had a pretty big operation, but it takes some room for all the machinery. It's a shame we couldn't keep this going."

"Why couldn't we? What's wrong with it?"

"I guess we could make it run for a while, but it runs on diesel fuel, and that won't last forever. And we don't have enough people around to do all these things. We have to concentrate on things we can keep going when the fuel and engines won't work anymore. We'd better get going. Amy is gonna wonder what happened to us."

The truck drove a lot differently with a heavy load on it, and the potholes in the road didn't make the trip any easier. Clay was tired from the stress of driving the rough roads when they got home.

As the truck drove along the river road leaving the sawmill, two men watched it from the hillside above. They decided to follow that direction to see where it went. When Clay slowed down before crossing the highway out of old habit, they heard the truck gear down then cross the highway. The sound indicated it had gone across the highway, rather than turning either direction to the side. Assured of that, they set out walking.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 26

Cave River Valley had become more well known after the State of Indiana bought the area. Cave explorers had always frequented the area, but they had been few in number. State budget cuts had delayed developing the area for visitors, which suited Jason and Wayne Flynn just fine. They had bought 40 acres in the adjacent valley for a bugout location 7 years before in 2008 and had worried about their remote property becoming too well known to the public. The brothers breathed a sigh of relief when they learned there was no money for "improving" the cave area.

They had continued developing the old barn with a basement that had once housed a small farmer's

herd of hogs. They had pressure washed the barn from top to bottom and hired an unemployed mason to repair the concrete block basement and pour a new floor in it. The upper story had been completely redone to home standards. A dull brown painted metal roof and metal siding made it look like just another old barn from the narrow county road that few travelled. The old lady who had sold them the 40 acres of creek bottom and hillside forest had passed away, and the heir was renting the old farmhouse out to a young couple with 3 little kids.

There was a hand dug well on the hillside slightly above the barn, now covered with a concrete top and a tight shed made of weathered oak farm lumber. Inside was a new electric water pump and a hand pump to serve the renovated barn. The twin brothers thought exactly alike and stocked the basement as a fallout shelter with long term storage foods and other carefully selected items to prepare for their family's future, come what may. Their successful family construction company had footed the bill for most of the project, listed on the company records as a storage facility, making it a company expense item.

A loft provided 2 bedrooms for their children, Jason's two boys and Wayne's boy and girl. Two bedrooms on the barn's main floor provided for the adults, with a large open space of kitchen, dining and lounge, all in a 24 X 48 area. It was comfortably heated with a wood stove in the basement that used convection to circulate to the upper floors. Heavily shaded by mature forest, it stayed cool in summer with only natural ventilation aided by extensive insulation.

After the near failure of the international monetary system in 2008, Jason and Wayne had become increasingly worried about an economic collapse that they expected would lead to a major war. They bought the place and stocked it as fast as they could with their considerable resources. If they missed anything in the process, it was not for lack of trying. In the interest of keeping a low profile in a disaster, they had stocked a large pole shed with firewood so they wouldn't have to run a chainsaw for at least 2 years. Their small Kubota diesel tractor would take care of small farming chores to raise food in the rich bottom land along the creek. It was stored in another small building with its' implements and had a 500 gallon tank of preserved fuel buried in the hillside above it, out of sight with a gravity flow arrangement to the outlet in the tractor shed.

The brothers had combed the internet for ideas and made their plans known to noone outside the family. They and their wives were solidly committed to the project and had spent vacations there for three years before they finally decided it was time to make a move. The disease had hit Louisville, Kentucky with a vengeance early in the epidemic, due to the international airport that brought it in. Travellers were infected on their flights into the city and spread the disease rapidly. Soon the hospital complex was overwhelmed and the city was in a panic within a week.

Janice had told Wayne she was ready to leave the city when she saw a man die at the entrance to the supermarket, and hurried home with their kids. Jason's wife Lori agreed. The men did not bother to notify any employees, but hastened to hitch their trailers to the pair of company trucks they drove and vacated their homes. They were two days ahead of the quarantine orders and martial law declaration in the city. The young couple renting the farmhouse never returned there.

As utilities died and radio and television stations dropped off the air, the two couples knew they had made the right decision. A year came and went, with a more or less successful garden and corn and hay crop. They gathered cattle, hogs, and horses, free for the taking in the area, their owners long dead. A large barn on the next farm down the creek was appropriated to house their stock and they made plans to enlarge their farming the next year. Their home schooling had gone on with no interruption, but they kids were feeling the strain of the isolated life like the adults. They hadn't seen a living human being besides their families in over a year. Many long discussions ended in frustration for lack of news of the

rest of the world. All they knew for certain was that there had been no signs of life within a 5 mile radius of their property that they had explored. it was time to go further afield.

Fifteen months after they arrived, the two men had set out to learn if anyone else survived the plague. Afraid of what they might find, and the nature of who they might meet, they planned to do their exploring on foot in the interest of stealth. Fitted out with military surplus gear, the brothers left one morning early and promised to be back within a week. They set out along county roads headed east toward the next major highway.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 27

"You two are pretty sweaty and stinky," Amy said.

Gina grinned and said, "Yeah! You better go to the pump and get that washed off!

Benjamin said, "Okay, we'll wash up. You girls are gonna help us unload the lumber, though. Right Dad?"

Clay smiled and said, "That seems fair to me, since we did the loading and hauling."

Gina said, "Yeah, but WE did the cooking, so if you wanna eat, you get clean first."

\*\*\*\*\*

"This saw is DULL! I have to find that file and sharpen it," Clay said.

Most of the truckload of lumber was stacked away in the barn, except for what they had sorted out for the root cellar door. Clay headed for the garage and his toolbox. Benjamin rested on a sawhorse, enjoying the shade. Even with Amy and Gina helping, it had taken a while to get the lumber neatly stacked inside. He was tired.

A flicker of movement caught his eye, but since he had learned to not spook the forest animals, Benjamin didn't move anything but his eyes. He didn't look directly at the spot, knowing that looking a bit off to the side was better for some reason. There it was again. Because he was used to looking for parts of animals, he thought about what he'd seen and decided it was a boot, with part of a leg sticking out under some bushes on the hill.

Nobody was supposed to be up there and he knew it. Benjamin walked slowly to the garage and inside where Clay was making some noise filing the saw.

"Dad! I saw a man on the hillside looking down at us. He had Army boots on, but that's all I could see."

Clay stopped filing abruptly, thought for a second and then began filing again. He said quietly, "Where's your rifle?"

"In the kitchen by the door."

"Okay. You show me from the window where you saw him. Don't get too close to the window, or he'll be able to see you."

"Right there by that big bush. I think you said it was a dogwood. The one that had the pretty white flowers."

"Okay. You go to the house and take your time so he doesn't think we saw him. Tell Amy to get her shotgun and show her where he's at. Just watch for now and stay outa sight till we know who it is. Where's Jake?"

"He was in the house the last I saw of him."

"That's a good place for him right now. If I yell or you think I'm in trouble, send him outside."

When the boy was safely in the house, Clay gave thanks that he always had his rifle in arm's reach and silently went out the small side garage door. He was grateful they hadn't cut the weeds between the garage and the woodshed, too. They gave him cover to slip inside the woodshed unseen where the larger cracks in the siding made it easy to look over the hillside. It took him a few minutes to spot the two men. They were both standing beside fairly large trees, their multi-cam clothing not working very well for camouflage. He went to the back of the wood shed and yelled to ward the garage, so the sound would echo and make it hard to tell exactly where it came from.

"STEP OUT IN PLAIN SIGHT, BOTH OF YOU!"

Some hurried motions hid both men entirely. Clay waited a few seconds and said, "ONE!"

A few more seconds, then "TWO!"

Then he racked the bolt on his rifle and yelled, "TIME'S UP!"

From the woods came a disembodied voice, "DON'T SHOOT!"

"WHY NOT?"

"WE DON'T MEAN ANY HARM."

"SHOULDA COME TO THE DOOR THEN! BEN! YOU READY?"

"YEAH!"

"OKAY! WE'RE COMING OUT."

"BE SURE WE CAN SEE YOUR HANDS ARE EMPTY!"

Two figures stepped slowly out of the trees with their hands raised and walked slowly toward the yard. When he could see they had their hands up, Clay stepped out of the woodshed. Ben stepped out the back door, rifle aimed at them, and a shotgun barrel stuck out of the kitchen window.

"That'll do, right there," Clay said. "Now give us a good reason not to shoot ya where ya stand!"

"We didn't want to hurt anybody. We were just afraid to come to the house until we watched for a while."

Clay had a feeling that these men weren't a real problem, but he didn't want them to know that yet.

"C'mon up here closer. Move slow so we don't get nervous."

When they got within 20 feet of him, he said, "Better have a seat on the ground there. Now, who are you and what're you doin' out here?"

Clay heard a low growl behind him and said, "JAKE! Guard!"

Clay saw that the men looked like mirror images of each other. They had to be identical twins. They looked pretty nervous about the dog.

"I'm Jason Flynn and that's Wayne my brother. We were just out looking to see if anybody else was still alive. We haven't seen anybody in a long time. Don't shoot us mister. We got wives and kids."

"Then it's time you acted like you're adults and come to the front door! I don't wanna kill anybody, but you came close!"

Wayne said, "We're sorry, we really are. We didn't think you'd see us and get scared. We just wanted to watch and see that things looked peaceful. Can we do anything to make it up to you?"

Clay huffed out a sigh. "Well, you could get rid of those Johnny Rambo clothes next time and leave all the soldier stuff at home. Where'd you come from?"

"We got a place over by Cave River Valley," Jason said. Wayne said, "We've been living there for over a year and there isn't anyone alive out that way. All the neighbors either didn't come home or died at home from that disease. There isn't anyone sick here, is there?"

"No. Nobody's sick. See for yourself."

Ben and Amy had walked out toward the men with rifle and shotgun at the low ready, watching them closely. Gina stuck her head out the back door with her .22 rifle pointed in their general direction. Clay didn't say anything for a minute, trying to calm down.

Finally he asked, "How'd you guys stay alive all this time out there?"

"We were preppers," Wayne said. "We had a retreat set up and we bugged out of Louisville when it got bad over there."

"We've been growing a garden and some corn and hay. We found cattle and hogs over there and a couple horses we're feeding."

"Let's go sit on the porch and you can tell us all about it," Clay said. "You're probably thirsty, so let's get a drink first." Clay turned and led the way to the well and began to pump a fresh bucket of water. Amy, Gina, and Ben kept hold of their weapons and followed the men.

The men told their story and somehow they began to feel like they were rank beginners compared to this younger man. Clay and Amy asked questions and found out about their families and general

situation.

Clay said, "Well, you're like most of us. Nobody expected anything like this to happen so we didn't plan far enough ahead."

Jason sounded a little defensive when he said, "We planned ahead. We got the place all set up with water and heat and everything so we could live pretty well."

"Yeah, for a while. We found that out. We can get around just fine after we got trucks going and tractors to farm with. And there's stuff laying around in every town for the taking, so we don't need anything now. But what I mean is, what about 10 years from now, when all that's gone or ruined by weather, or just gets old and quits workin'? We been thinkin' about that and trying to plan ahead. find other ways to do stuff. Tell me now, how long is that dry food you got gonna last, an' what're you gonna do when you run out of it?"

Jason and Wayne looked at each other and didn't say anything.

Clay went on. "We got some big tractors running and farmed this whole valley this year, but in a few years things'll break and the fuel will go bad and then we have to do it some other way. There are 3 Amish families that moved down here and are helping teach us how to farm with horses."

He let that soak in for a minute while the brothers' expressions changed to something less confident. After a while Wayne said, "I'd like to see how that works."

Amy said, "Okay. Today's Saturday. At least we think it is, best we can tell. Tomorrow we have our regular Sunday meeting and you can come if you want to. Meet the other people around here and get a look at how we do things now."

She looked at Clay to make sure he agreed with her. He nodded and said, "Yeah, I guess they need to meet everybody. But they sleep outside until we know 'em better. And somebody'll be watchin' ya all night, too. You bring sleepin' gear?"

"Yeah, we got packs out there where we left the guns."

"Well, go get 'em and we'll see what we can do about makin' some supper. For now, I'd appreciate it if you let me have the guns to keep 'em safe inside for ya. You'll get 'em back tomorrow, all right?"

Both men nodded and walked off to the treeline to get their things. When they were out of earshot, Clay mumbled something about "damn fool city kids" and got himself another drink of water, but he kept his rifle in his hand and watched the men constantly until they were back and handed him their guns. Jake watched them intently with a quick look at Clay to check for new orders.

"Is that dog gonna bite us?"

"Not unless you give him reason to. He's particular fond of his family, so don't piss him off and don't try to pet him."

Jake sat beside Clay and looked the men right in the eye which they found very disconcerting. They had never seen a dog that they couldn't stare down before. He had the look that said exactly what was on his mind.



Supper was fresh, hot, and well cooked, a pleasant change from the stale MRE's the brothers had been eating for three days. When sundown came, they unrolled their bedding on the back porch and when the dog went inside with Clay, they laid down to sleep. They heard Jake walking around inside long after the people in there had gotten quiet. Finally, they drifted off to sleep. Ben watched them until they were snoring softly, then he went to bed, touching Amy on the shoulder to take her turn.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 28

Amy drove slowly on the rough road. It was impossible to dodge all the potholes. Gina held Louisa while the baby gurgled her pleasure at being jostled around. The men all sat in the truck bed, cross legged on their packs. Wayne held the dutch oven that contained cooked cabbage and sausages and Jason steadied a box with 2 fresh apple pies, stacked with a layer of cardboard between them. Jake had been left at home to guard the place, much to the relief of the Flynn brothers.

Clay thought that was funny. By morning, Jake had decided that the two were not a threat and had been ignoring them, but the men never took their eyes off him. Clay thought that was okay. These wannabe Rambo types had needed an attitude adjustment.

Jason and Wayne were marvelling at the long fields of corn stubble and pastures with fat cattle and horses in them. Yards looked like they had been mowed-grazed, really. Houses were neat and they saw Amos' open buggy being loaded with food and kids. Two huge tractors sat at the end of one long field with wide disks nearby. The fields had been tilled and maybe planted with something. It almost looked like nothing had happened here to change the world. As they got closer to Roscoe Beam's farm, two other pickup trucks converged on the same farm. Two buggies were parked in the shade of some big trees and the horses were peacefully standing in the barn lot by a creek, their harness hanging over a wood fence.

Going up the driveway, they could see a crowd of people gathered under two huge maple trees in front of the house. Long tables made of planks on sawhorses were covered with pots, dishes, and platters of food, overlaid with a sheet of clear plastic. Children were everywhere. One rather large blond headed man was sitting on the porch steps talking to a small boy.

All eyes turned their way as they got close enough for the crowd to notice there were extra people in Clay's truck. Clay spoke quietly to the brothers, "These are nice folks and friends of ours. We're going to introduce you and from there you're on your own. We won't mention how we met unless you insist on it, okay?"

The two nodded and didn't answer. They were busy taking in the scene. The demeanor and dress of the crowd made them wish they had worn anything but military uniforms. A couple big dogs came to greet the truck they recognized and were robbing around Ben and Gina as they got out of the truck. They smelled the food and gave the brothers a start when they came close and looked up at them hungrily. Amy fussed at them and sent them off to the house so the men could take the food to the tables provided for it.

Quick introductions were made and immediately Roscoe stood up and said, "Welcome to our new friends here, Jason and Wayne Flynn. We'll get to visit with them later. Now, Jacob, would you lead us in prayer?"

A short, but intense worship service followed of prayers and songs leaving a sense of peace and quiet in the air. Jacob asked Roscoe to give thanks for the meal. He thanked everyone for their contributions of food and asked a blessing on it and all the assembled friends. At the crowd's 'Amen', people flowed toward the tables and began to uncover and dish out food. Lines formed and plates were loaded, then people found seats on benches, the edge of the porch, and one big stump to begin eating.

Wayne talked loud enough for several to hear when he answered questions about where they lived and their families. Jason took the cue and also answered loud enough that he wouldn't have to tell the same things more than once. As that died down, the brothers began to ask their own questions to learn about the community. Everyone but Eddie Grimes were locals and knew where Cave River Valley was. They told that their homestead was the next valley to the Northeast and various heads nodded understanding.

Albert Harris introduced himself and asked, "Anybody else around over that way?"

"Not that we've seen. It's deserted."

Al said, "I was hoping somebody had settled in Cave River Valley and was gonna get that grist mill rebuilt. And, we're always hoping to find more people, too."

Jason said, "That's why we came out exploring, hoping to find somebody living besides us. Gets pretty lonesome without seeing anybody."

Marta said, "How well we all know that. How many of you are there?"

The men found themselves loaded with questions about trading and searching for what they might need in joint expeditions to unexplored areas. They learned that this county and the two to the south had been covered, but only one survivor found, their own doctor. Overjoyed at the news of a doctor, the men had to meet him and hear about the small clinic he had assembled with scavenged equipment.

Jim Collier wondered aloud, "Where are we going to meet when the weather gets cold?"

Jacob suggested, "Our barn is big enough for a gathering if it is not too cold. Our people have always met at one house or another that way. We eat in the house when it is cold out."

"That sounds good. We could pass that around. Take turns at it."

Jacob nodded, saying, "That is what we did. No need to build a church building. The church is in our hearts."

Jim smiled at that and got one in return.

\*\*\*\*\*

News and gossip flowed the rest of the afternoon. The Flynn brothers agreed to bring their families over to visit soon. Marta offered her club cab truck to take the men home, and meet their families. The Flynn's assured them their trucks would run to bring them for a visit. They had simply been afraid to venture out in them for fear of being attacked, or simply drawing unwanted attention to their hidden location. Those fears had been largely laid to rest by this trip, although a sense of wariness remained in everyone.

"We should have been out working on finding people sooner," Jason told his brother.

"We could have gotten dead, too, if that plague was still around."

"Yeah, but look what these people have got going on. That guy was right. We didn't plan far enough ahead. Now we have to play catch-up."

"Okay, we've got a lot to do. But we've got a good start. We just need to figure out how to live without things ever getting back to normal. We've got some notes somewhere on biodiesel, don't we?"

"I think so," Jason said. "I hope we can find what it takes to do that. It will make things go a lot longer without having to go back to horses and oxen."

Wayne said, "If we can get some of these men to go with us, we should go look around the towns north of us. Might find more people, and if not, we can use what we can find there."

Jason said, "Our wives will have a fit. They're still scared to go anywhere, afraid the kids will get sick."

Wayne said, "I bet meeting these people will help change their minds."

"Well, the sooner the better, then right?"

"Right. Let's see if they can drive us home today."

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 29

"MOM! There's a truck coming down the road! Quick! Get everyone out of sight!" Brandon was running hard through the trees for the barn as he yelled at them.

"Logan! Hannah! Get in the barn! NOW!" Janice yelled at her kids as she ran flat out from the garden.

Brandon and David ran to the barn's basement door and sid inside, closing it quietly. They dived for the gun safe and grabbed an AR-15 apiece and a bag of loaded magazines. They were at the firing slits in the front wall in a matter of seconds. Their mother Lori was close behind them and got her scoped rifle and magazines. Upstairs, Janice, Logan, and Hannah did likewise.

The truck stopped on the road just short of their driveway and 2 men in combat fatigues slowly got out of the back of the truck and walked up the driveway, stopping at the bridge to wave their "safe" signal. They waited for a couple minutes until they heard Lori say, "NAME!"

"JASON FREDERICK!"

"COME ON IN!"

If he had not given the correct middle name, he would have hit the dirt and it was time to start shooting.

The women and kids began to relax when their men got close enough to read expressions and see their smiles. The men stopped and looked back at the truck, waving it to come up the driveway. Janice and

Lori were still tense until they saw an older woman driving the truck, and an older man beside her. Still the kids did not come outside until their mothers told them to, and they were carrying their rifles.

Marta and Roscoe introduced themselves and met the families. After a few minutes of relieved hugs and reassurances, Jason and Wayne told their story. They told the good news that the world was now apparently free from the threat of the plague. At least none of their new friends had any problem over the past 6 months. The bad news was the lack of people in a 3 county area that the valley people had explored. The 3 couples sat in the shade and talked for a couple hours. The teenagers were sent for drinks and snacks, then had dozens of questions of their own.

Roscoe had brought 2 extra batteries to assure that the Flynn's trucks could get started, not having run in a few weeks. But they started without help and were left to run for a time while everyone discussed where certain things were to be found in the town, and cautionary words about remains of people still unburied. The Flynn's had flashlights and rechargeable batteries powered by their solar system, so they were ready to go shopping for some needs of their own.

Harvesting was mostly finished for the year, so a meeting was set for the following Saturday, to see the valley community and do some planning together.

\*\*\*\*\*

"What they told us was there had been 5 kids who survived in the town and 3 moved in with Roscoe and Marta, and the other 2 moved in with Clay and Amy Whitaker," Wayne said.

Jason continued, "They have a bunch of Amish families in the community and they are teaching them how to live their way. They don't think there is enough people left in the country to get business started again. We are going to have to learn to live like pioneers, because there won't be any more modern things made."

Janice said, "But it sounds like there are things just laying around everywhere, so there is no danger of running out. We can just go get more like we always did."

Wayne said, "That's what we thought, too, until these people pointed out that things go bad. They spoil, and rot and mildew and the weather destroys things. Machinery rusts out and roofs go bad and everything inside will be ruined. We might get along for 10 or 20 years or more, but if we don't get ready now to live differently, our kids will be out of luck."

Jason said, "The world as we knew it is gone, probably forever. There aren't enough people to make a high tech society operate. Even if we can find the expertise to make things go, there aren't enough hands to make it happen. We have to aim at something we can achieve with the people we have."

Lori looked very sober and asked, "What does that mean? Are we going to living in log cabins with dirt floors?"

"No," Wayne said. "We've talked about it a little and it looks like we can live about like rural people did before electricity came around. Something like the early 1900's. It means doing a lot of things by hand, and using animal power for farming. One guy asked if we could restore the old grist mill in Cave River Valley. He's thinking about how to make flour 20 years from now. It's important to deal with things like that, and the sooner we do it, the more we can use what we have now to make it happen."

"We could use what we have until it runs out and then we can go back to the old ways," Janice said.

Wayne said, "If we do that, we'll be building a grist mill with axes and hand saws and it will take years to do it. If we do it soon, we can use heavy equipment and power tools while the fuels and generators still work. You could wait to dig up a garden until the tractors won't work, but the you'd have to learn all at once how to use a horse to plow it, or you'd be digging it with a shovel."

Lori said, "I think I understand. If factories aren't running, then we can't get new pots and pans, or table ware, or plastic combs, or anything like that. We'll have to find some substitute for those things."

Brandon asked, "Do you mean we'll be making coffee cups out of clay or something?"

Jason said, "That's right. But the smart thing now is to use what we have, collect as much as we will need for a long time, then we'll not run out before we can figure out new ways. Or maybe it will be OLD ways to get those things."

Wayne said, "The hell of it is, the old ways all take a lot more work, so it takes more people. And people is what we don't have now."

His son Logan was a bright 13 year old boy. As realization dawned on him, he said, "Do you mean that our guns won't work and I'll have to make a bow and arrow or something?"

"That's the idea, although I think we can find enough guns and ammunition to last through your lifetime. But your kids will need to have other ways to hunt."

Hannah said, "Oh, man, that sucks! I remember that place we went that had the pioneer stuff. The women all ran around barefoot and had to wash clothes in a big pot of boiling water. They rubbed clothes on that board thing to scrub the dirt out had they had to cook over a fireplace. it was like, quaint to see that, but I don't want to LIVE that way!"

Wayne said, "Well, you seen any Maytag repair men around lately? We all need to think about this and when we go see these people next Saturday, then what they are doing will make more sense."

Jason said, "Yeah, and if you think hard about it, maybe you can ask intelligent questions."

\*\*\*\*\*

The next morning, Janice was depressed. At breakfast she said, "I thought this was just like camping out, you know? That the world would get back together and we could go home and live again. But I don't even want to go see what our home looks like now, from what you guys said about things decaying and growing up in weeds and all."

Lori said, "Honey, this is home now. Probably the best home we'll ever have from now on."

Jason told her, "Look at the bright side, babe. We're alive, our kids are doing good, we've got plenty to eat and we don't have to gripe about traffic problems or the holiday shopping crowds."

"No car payments, either," Wayne quipped.

"And no worrying about being in style, either, I guess," Janice said. "As long as we're not naked, we're doing good, huh? I guess I can make clothes, if we can find fabric. CRAP! What do we do about shoes?"

Wayne said, "Love, we can go to the stores and loot them to our heart's content right now, if you can stand the smell, that is. There might be some spoiled food in the Wal Marts."

Hannah said, "UGGHH! You could have gone all day without saying that Dad!

Janice said, "Hey. If we drag home a whole gob of stuff, where will we keep it? There isn't room to store a lifetime of stuff here."

Jason said, "What the valley people have done is go get some semi trucks running and haul stuff home in the trailers and just leave the stuff in the trailers. That will work for a long time."

Lori was putting it all together in her mind and said, "So we need trucks and we need to go on a shopping binge."

"We need to get a bunch of farm stuff, too, Wayne said. "And a truckload of gasoline and diesel fuel."

"This is gonna be a lot of work," David said. The 14 year old was sagging in his chair thinking about it.

Jason looked at his son and said, "Cheer up David. It could be a lot worse. You could be facing a winter of doing nothing but playing computer games and letting your brain rot."

"Thanks Dad. I'll remember that."

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 30

"Okay. That does it," Clay said. "That door should be good for a long time."

"It's heavy enough, that's for sure," Benjamin said.

Clay stepped back from the open door and said, "We'd better start moving the potatoes from the barn. We'll have a frost before too long now. You want to get the truck?"

"Yeah, I'll get it!" Benjamin enjoyed driving the truck around the farm. He had grown a lot this summer and could easily reach the pedals, although he was still skinny.

Gina and Amy came out at the sound of the truck to help. They loaded 8 plastic laundry baskets full of potatoes into the truck bed, then Ben drove it the 80 yards or so to the root cellar behind the house. The cellar was dug into a steep bank that allowed the entrance to be almost level coming out. A roof covered the concrete walkway and walls lining the entrance. It was a narrow passage, so with two people carrying one basket it went easier.

Amy said, "You've already got the beets in there!"

"Ben did that while I was hanging the door. All that's left is to get the apples in, but they need to be packed in oak leaves to keep 'em from spoiling. Can you and the kids get that done? I need to go over

to see Daniel about some wheat seed for the garden. I should have had that planted a couple weeks ago."

Amy said, "We can do that. Gina, go get that big tarp in the barn and we'll pile leaves on that to drag them back. And we'll need a couple pitchforks, too."

Clay told her, "If you can get enough leaves of any kind to cover the carrots, they can stay in the garden until we get real cold weather. They'll keep better in the ground Jacob said. We can dig them later and put 'em in the cellar."

Gina was headed for the barn with Benjamin as Clay drove out.

\*\*\*\*\*

Eddie and Chris Hamilton carried the last of the concrete forms out of his root cellar and stacked the lumber and plywood on the new flatbed truck they had brought home. They had two more cellars to pour before cold weather, so they were in a hurry to get those poured before cold weather caught up with them.

The older farms in the valley where the Amish had settled had cellars, either outdoors or cellars dug under the farmhouses. But Jim Collier and Doc Van Derver's homes were newer and didn't have cellars. Both had basements, but they were too warm and dry to store root crops. Besides, Eddie thought there was no room in the Doc's basement for anything but the medical stuff he had in there.

The 2 men had been busy. Both of those new cellars were dug and had the drains in. Chris had showed Eddie how to form the walls and ceiling so they could pour the whole thing at one time. He said it would be stronger and wouldn't leak any water inside, and it was less work to do it that way. Eddie's form lumber could be used again, because Chris had him paint the wood with used motor oil before they poured the concrete so it didn't stick to the wood.

They drove the truck with their tools and lumber to Jim's place and started to work. Some of the form lumber was damaged so Chris unloaded the little Honda generator and fired it up so they could use power tools. Cutting pieces and screwing them together went fairly fast, now that they had a plan worked out.

"Looks like we'll get finished here today," Eddie said. "Maybe we can do the Doc's place tomorrow and be ready to pour by Wednesday."

"That'd be good. Indian Summer doesn't last forever. We're bound to get some crappy weather before long," Chris said.

\*\*\*\*\*

Daniel Schmidt was taking the first turn picking up kids for school. It wasn't far to get Clay's kids, but it was the opposite direction from the Beam farm, so he picked them up first. His farm wagon had the sideboards on it and a row of straw bales down the center to sit on. His 6 year old son Joseph was sitting beside him on the drivers seat taking comfort from being with his Dad on his first day of school.

The loop began with Benjamin and Gina, then on to Jacob's place to get Martha, Sarah, Isaac, Mark, and Samuel. Daniel continued up the valley stopping at Amos' farm to get Adam and on to Roscoe's farm where class would be held. Melanie, Dylan, and Emma lived there, so that was the whole group,

except for Eddie Grimes who would drive down himself.

The next week, someone else would provide transportation to spread the work around. They had agreed to start at 8:00 AM, and finish the school day at 3:30 PM, with a half hour lunch break. Everyone carried a lunch with them, even Marta's kids to keep anyone from feeling left out at meal time. Marta and Roscoe would provide drinks as part of the service for the small fee they charged in trade. They had agreed the teaching fee would be paid in goods produced at home, not salvaged goods, unless someone made other arrangements.

Marta spent the first day getting the kids organized into grade levels and doing minor written assignments. There would be no homework until they got much farther into the year. The scarcity of books made it impossible to give reading assignments in the normal fashion, so they had to take turns reading what books were available while they were at school.

The two 6 year olds knew all the neighborhood kids well, so that made their first day a little less frightening for them. They settled into the school routine pretty well. Marta gave them a couple breaks in the morning and one in the afternoon, so interruptions for going to the outhouse were limited. She was thankful for having two copies of the class material. That reduced the amount of sharing necessary. The day went smoothly overall with no disturbances in the class at all.

As the kids were getting ready to leave, Marta said, "I want to thank you all for being very good kids today. You made it easy to teach. If we can continue this way, we should finish the year's work well ahead of time. Thank you all! I think I hear a wagon coming, so better get your things and be ready for him. Daniel has a cow to milk tonight, so we must not keep him waiting."

Daniel was driving faster than she had ever seen him go, his big team coming at a trot. Marta wondered what his hurry was as he stopped the sweating horses at the tie rail by the fence and hurried to the house.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 31

"Misses Beam! We have fount people! They come from Mitchell and the State Park. Mister Flynn's fount dem. They are talk to Mister Whitaker an' den they come to my farm. They are four come to see us, but they are many more he said. They camp at the State Park and the sickness come, so dey stay there."

"Slow down Daniel," Marta said. "I am really glad to hear this news, but you can take your time telling it."

"Yah. Yah, I speak better when not so excited. I want to tell it to everybody. We think for so long there is nobody else. Now there are more than us."

"Did you learn anything about these people?"

"Yah, some little bit I learn. I tink they are from cities. They know nothing about growing things. They lived from things they find only and have a very hard time. They almost starve I tink. They afraid to go in places to find food. They find food, but not soon enough. Mister Flynn, he bring them here and we talk. The Flynn's, dey find them food and drive them here."



"Do you want the children to go home now?"

"Soon, but I wait for Clay and the Flynn's to come here first. They don't believe so many of us doing good. I think they don't know too much. Many things are beyond their finding."

Roscoe had walked up from the barn and heard most of what Daniel said. He looked at Marta and said, "I wonder what we can do with them all?"

Marta said, "What about the campground at the lake? If they know enough to camp, they can fit in the cabins there, and we can get them started, at least get them through the winter if they are close to us."

Roscoe said, "Yeah, that could work. Boy, it's gonna take a lot of firewood to heat those cabins. And we'll have to go find some food for them somewhere. Maybe make a trip to big Wal Mart and maybe Costco. There's probably some stuff still there that is in good shape yet."

He turned to Daniel and asked, "I wonder why they didn't just drive around and find what they needed?"

Daniel shook his head and said, "I don't know. They say they have no gas to drive."

Marta and Roscoe looked at each other. She said what they were thinking. "These people didn't have anyone who could get gas from other cars? Or from a gas station? What's the matter with them?"

Roscoe asked Daniel, "Did they say anything about themselves at all?"

"They say they were all together. They work together at some insurance place. They don't say much."

Marta said, "HOO BOY! We got us an insurance convention! Sounds like they are helpless as a hog on ice, too. Maybe they'll be good for day labor. After we get 'em in shape, that is. What a mess."

Roscoe said, "Sounds like it's gonna be a charity thing for a while, till they learn to pull their weight."

\*\*\*\*\*

The Flynn brthers drove up each in their own truck with a couple passengers in each. The passengers got out, dressed in leisure shirts and trousers, somewhat worse for the wear. They had beards and long hair, cut somewhat sloppily at collar length. One older fellow began talking.

"Hello. I'm Arthur Compton. I was the Division Manager of our company office and sort of the leader now. These kind gentlemen were good enough to drive us here where they said we may be able to find some assistance. We'll gladly pay for it, of course. We need to find transportation back to Louisville to our homes, if at all possible. Our vehicles are all out of fuel and won't run."

Roscoe had trouble believing what he heard. He was at a loss for words. Marta was quicker on the uptake and told the man, "Come sit up here on the porch and we'll talk about this. Would you like some coffee?"

"You have coffee?! We would certainly like some!"

I'll be out with it in a few minutes. You may want to get acquainted with the my husband and our

neighbor Daniel here. He came to pick up the children after school today."

She turned and went inside to give them time to absorb that much, leaving Roscoe to take up the slack while she was gone.

Roscoe introduced everyone and began by saying, "The world has changed a lot, you know that don't you?"

"Well, yes, of course. Many people have died and left this area empty. That's why we must to get back to Louisville where we can find what we need."

"Louisville, for all practical purposes, no longer exists. At least not in the way you seem to think."

"Well of course it EXISTS! An epidemic surely caused some disruption, but the CITY still exists!"

"I take it you haven't been there lately?"

Jason Flynn said, "I tried to tell him, Mister Beam, I really did..."

Arthur Compton was still blustering when Marta came out with a tray of cups and went back for the coffee. Just then Chris and Eddie's construction truck drove in the lane and stopped by the barnlot fence. Eddie came to the porch, but was mystified seeing the new faces and said nothing. He listened to part of what Compton had to say and finally spoke up.

"What d'you wanna go to Louisville for? Ain't nothin' there but empty buildings."

"What are you talking about young man?"

"Just what I said. I ain't real sure about Louisville, but I know for a fact that New Albany's empty of people. I kilt the last one just before I left. He was comin' at me with a gun, but I got him first. I don't expect that Louisville is any different. I seen a lotta smoke over that way last year."

Jason said, "LISTEN TO THE MAN FOR GOD'S SAKE! I been tryin' to tell you since we found you that everybody over there is DEAD man! ALL DEAD! There's no reason to go there unless you need to take something and come back."

Arthur looked from one face to another. When he got to Roscoe and his wife, just putting down the coffee pot, they both nodded affirmatively at him.

The man behind Arthur spoke for the first time and said, "He's having a hard time with this. I believe you. I've been talking to him for weeks now, but it won't seem to go in his head."

He turned to Arthur and said, "It's time for you to sit down and let the rest of us talk."

"I'll do no such thing! I'm the leader of this group and you'll do well to remember that, Simmons!"

"Arthur! SIT DOWN AND SHUT THE HELL UP!"

"YOU don't talk to me like that!"

"You're right. There is no point in talking to you any more."

At that point Simmons turned back away from Compton a quarter turn, then came back with a punch to the midriff that knocked all the air out of the bigger man. Compton fell heavily on his backside and then his back, gasping for air. Simmons turned back to the people in front of him.

"I should have done that months ago. Now, where were we?"

The other two men with the Flynns stepped forward and one said, "He's off his rocker. He's been like that since this started and we've had a lot of trouble because of it. We need help and we'll do whatever you need for us to. We can't make it through another winter without help and we know it."

The other man said, "We tried to leave him back at the camp but he pushed his way in. We should have stopped him before we came here."

Marta said, "Sit down gentlemen and have a cup of coffee. We'll tend to Mister Compton."

She turned to Eddie and Chris and said, "Would you find a suitable length of rope and tie this idiot to a tree far enough away that we don't have to listen to him?"

Chris smiled at Eddie as he headed for the truck. In less than a minute, Compton was rolled over on his back, still trying to comfort his belly, and had his hands tied firmly. The two young men hoisted him to his feet and led him away behind the house. Compton began to protest, but that soon died down, probably because he had something stuffed in his mouth. Chris and Eddie returned with satisfied grins and sat down to listen to the men's tale.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 32

Roscoe said, "Daniel, you may want to take the children home before long so the parents don't get worried about them."

Daniel said, "Ah, Jacob and Clay know about this, so we can wait a bit. It looks like these people need some help. We need to learn what to do for them."

Marta said, "Okay, I'd like to offer an idea. We don't have a lot of time before the weather will be getting cold. There is a campground a mile down the valley that has modern cabins. How many are in your group?"

Mr. Simmons spoke first. "There were 52 of us at the start, but 6 of us passed away during the first winter. We have 46 people now. There are 11 families, more than half of us with children. Some of us aren't in very good health."

"My name is Jim Crawford. I'd like to know more about these cabins you spoke of. How many of them are there, and are they suitable for winter?"

Roscoe said, "Oh there are plenty of them, I think over 20 cabins, but most are small for a family. There are 4 big ones, I think. They were heated with wood stoves, but the kitchens have gas stoves. We can make that work for now, I think. There won't be any water in the houses. You'll have to carry it

from the lake and boil it for drinking. There are outhouses scattered nearby and they are very well made. I think we can make you all fairly comfortable there."

"I'm Walter Rankin. I am frankly amazed at how well this community is doing. It's almost like nothing went wrong here. Are you growing all your food? I am concerned about having enough food for a group as large as ours."

Marta waved a dismissive hand and said, "Don't worry. We'll keep you fed. But you'll be working to grow your own next summer. Does that sound all right to you?"

Simmons said, "Lady, we will do what we have to for our families. Yes, that sounds wonderful! But how can we get moved down here?"

"Don't worry about that. We'll get you moved. It will help if some of you can drive a truck the size of that one," Roscoe said, pointing to Eddie's truck.

"How did you get gas for trucks?"

"We set up a generator at a gas station to pump it, and then we found some fuel trucks, too," Eddie said. "We'll run out some day, but not for a long time. Say, changing the subject, but we stopped here to see if anybody was free tomorrow to help pour concrete at Jim's and at the Doc's place. Maybe these guys could be around long enough to lend a hand."

Marta said, "Let's get 'em fed first, and then we'll work out some help for you." She looked at Roscoe and said, "What are we going to do with the idiot back there?"

Clay and Amy arrived then in their truck and found a place to park along the lane. They got to the house just in time to see Chris and Eddie leading Arthur Compton back to the front yard, still bound and gagged. The kids were shying away from him and the adults were looking daggers at him. When he got close enough to Roscoe he asked, "What'd he do?"

Roscoe let out a deep sigh and said, "He's not got it in his head yet that the world died. He insisted on going back to Louisville so they could get back to their old life. He's just not right in the head, and he got too pushy about it, so Simmons there socked him one."

Clay shook his head and said, "So we got a bunch of pilgrims and a crazy one to boot."

"Yep, that's about it."

"Well, we can't let 'em starve to death I guess. What're we gonna do with 'em?"

"Marta come up with the idea to take 'em to the campground cabins at the lake. It seemed like about the only answer, since there's 40-odd of 'em."

Clay said, "That's gonna be a job, gettin' 'em all down here and fed for the winter. From what I heard 'em tell, they ain't got much of nothin'. We'll have to make some trips and fetch things."

They wandered over to where Amy was listening to Marta organizing help for Eddie and Chris like a drill sergeant. Jim Crawford and Walter Rankin had positioned themselves on either side of Compton at the big outdoor table where they had removed the gag and untied his hands. He was drinking coffee, looking somewhat dazed. He was staring fixedly at Amy holding her baby and had tears running down

his face.

The others had no time to waste in him, but were talking about how they could arrange to move the group.

Wayne Flynn said, "We went to the stores in Mitchell and found enough food to keep them going for a while. They'll be wondering about these guys, but we told 'em it would take a day or so to get things figured out. They don't expect us back for a couple days."

"Mr. Simmons? What's your first name? I didn't hear it, Marta asked.

"William. Call me Bill."

"Bill, then. I am thinking that if your group was camping, there won't be a lot of personal belongings to move, is that right?"

"No, in fact we have almost nothing now. Our clothing is--bad. We tried to wash clothes in the lake there, but it didn't work very well. We need a lot of things, everything, really."

"Okay, we can get you clothing and all that sort of thing. About the moving, I think a school bus would be sensible, wouldn't it?"

"That sounds like... Yes, that's a fine idea! If we had one."

Marta looked over at Chris and Eddie, who were talking to Daniel. "Hey, you guys! If these men can lend you a hand tomorrow, could you all go to the school and see about getting us a bus to move them down here?"

Chris said, "Yeah, we can do that. It won't take long to do the concrete pour once we get the mix truck loaded. We just need a couple extra guys to rake it in the forms. We could prob'ly get done by dinner time. Then, when we take the mix truck back, we'll see about a bus for you."

\*\*\*\*\*

"I think I should go," Anthony said. "If these people have been malnourished for over a year, there are sure to be some health problems. If there are any serious conditions, we need to address it immediately, like communicable diseases."

Marta said, "You're our only doctor. We have to take care of you. I hate to see you taking risks going places like that."

"They wouldn't have survived this long without a good water supply and good sanitation, so they must be in a healthy place. I don't see any big risk to myself there. I'll take proper precautions, of course."

"They said they got their drinking water from the spring that fed the old mill there."

"That is probably what kept them alive. I think the disease spread through the water supply, along with person to person. That is the only thing that explains how some remote areas like this didn't get it. Spreading through the air isn't so efficient, because oxygen, especially ozone, and UV from the sun will kill many disease agents quickly."

"So they got by with dumb luck," Marta said.

"You could say that, I suppose. They were smart enough to avoid people and places who had it."

\*\*\*\*\*

Wayne and Jason Flynn offered to help with the move. They had discussed it with their wives and came to the conclusion that it was in everyone's best interest to save every living person. So they would take their trucks and enclosed trailers, now emptied, to move personal goods and anything they could collect along the way. Food in particular would be sought and taken to stock the cabins at the park.

Eddie drove the school bus with Doctor Van Derver and his helper Melanie. Chris Hamilton drove their construction truck loaded with tools, spare batteries, a portable compressor, and fuel cans so they could work on getting some of the group's vehicles going. The more of them they could drive to their new residence, the better.

The convoy of vehicles arrived at the State Park early in the morning, with Jason and Wayne leading the way to avoid panicking the campers, since they were known to them. After an hour of explaining what was going on, the group was ready to get on the bus and leave the area for good. Doctor Van Derver explained that he needed to check everyone for health problems and deal with those first. As he and Melanie set up an impromptu area in an open shelter house, the people took their turns getting a check up while the rest began to load personal goods in the Flynn's trailers.

Chris and Eddie got 7 of the group's vehicles running with only minor problems. One was Anthony Compton's large self-contained RV that only had a dead battery. His wife assured them she could drive it and he would ride with her. He looked a little spacy, Eddie thought, but whatever. The man was her problem, not his.

The other 6 vehicles were pulling camper trailers of various descriptions that could be pressed into service for housing, if needed. The remaining 4 vehicles had more serious issues, one of them a leaking radiator so they would be left behind for now. Jason and Wayne found that there were few belongings for them to haul, so they volunteered to go shop for food and other needs and left ahead of the big group. Food and drinks were on the school bus so there was no need to make lunch for the group. By mid-afternoon, Eddie led the way out of the park in the bus with the doctor, Melanie, and about half of the group. Camper trucks and trailers followed them, with Chris bringing up the rear in case of a breakdown anywhere.

The roads still had some uncleared debris on them, but they made good time for the conditions and arrived at the valley park campground well before sundown. Cabins were tentatively claimed and belongings stowed as Jason and Wayne drove in with their loads of food and some bedding they had found at a department store near Bedford. It was full dark before everyone had a meal and found a bed after a stressful and exhausting day. Arthur Compton and his wife elected to stay in their own RV that night. He was unusually quiet, as noticed by several people.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 33

Albert Harris drove new newly acquired tractor to the county park in the valley with a Bush Hog on it

and went to work mowing the now dying weeds and small brush that had grown up around the lake. He found a couple snakes near the water, but after being run over by the mower they were no longer a threat. The day went by peacefully for him as he mowed a large area around the lake, boat dock, and shelter houses.

The more he thought about it, the more sense it made to him to fence the perimeter of the park and get a herd of cattle to keep it grazed down. They wouldn't be able to mow like this forever. He knew there was a truckload of barbed wire at the farm stores. They could string it from tree to tree and not have to set any posts until they got to the driveways. Albert laughed at the thought of these men who had always had office jobs trying to unroll barbed wire through the thickets. Then he sobered at the thought that they would have to learn to do things like that. He wondered who would have time to teach them? They would have to get up to speed pretty fast.

He finished up near the road past the shelter house and shut the tractor off there. Several women were gathered around the picnic tables and huge fireplace there. The winter shutters were still down around half of the open building, making it half enclosed. Someone had figured out how to get some of them open and gathered deadfall wood for the fireplace. He walked up to say hello, having only spoken to a man named Raymond Alexander and his wife Denise on his way into the park. He rightly supposed they had told the rest of the crowd what he was going to do and caution them to stay away from the Bush Hog. It could throw things pretty hard.

With the tractor noise gone, Albert took out his ear plugs and could hear the conversation before he got to the building. It sounded pretty upbeat.

"Hi there! Thank you for doing the mowing! That makes it so much easier to go get water. I'm Wendy Simmons, Bill's wife."

She offered a hand and he shook it politely. "I'm Al Harris, a neighbor about a mile or so up the valley. Looks like you ladies have a meal under way."

"Oh yes, and thank you for the food and everything. Everyone has been so nice here. Bill said you folks have been raising practically everything you eat. We have to learn how to do that. And we have to find a way to cut firewood for heating this winter. We only have a little camp saw and it is so dull it won't cut anything."

Al said, "I'm free for the rest of the day, so when you get the men fed I'll be back with a truck and we'll go get you some chainsaws and what it takes to make them go. Get together a shopping list and we'll hit the stores in town for whatever you need."

"We need everything. Our clothes are worn out and so dirty it's impossible to get them clean."

"Why don't you get a party of people together to follow us in town, and we'll show you where to look for things? We need to make this happen fast, because cold weather is coming and there's a lot to do before then. Wal Mart had just opened a big Superstore here in Salem just before the plague hit. We haven't been in there but once, just to get the doors opened and get the spoiled food out of there. You can have your choice of the whole store."

Wendy said thoughtfully, "We need to take several trucks. Everyone needs things, and it will take a lot of room."

Al said, "Yes, that would be good. Since all these trucks of yours have trailer hitches, we'll stop at the

U-Haul place and get you some trailers to load up. That way you can just pile things in it and sort it out when you get home. We'll run out of daylight before you are finished shopping, I'm sure, so we need to get moving. You can go back tomorrow, but get it over with pretty fast, because we need to go other places to get you all outfitted."

"What other places?" another woman asked. "Oh, my name is Shannon Hobart and this is Jeffrey. Those 3 heathens over there belong to us and we need clothes and shoes for everyone."

Al said, "What I had in mind was for some of the men to go to the farm store here in town and get themselves some heavy work clothes and coats and boots there. Some of the older boys should go there, too. We have a lot of work to do so everyone needs heavy duty clothing. Be sure you get some jeans and heavy shirts for you ladies, too. Well, I have to go. I'll be back hopefully by the time you all are ready for the trip. If you have firearms, take some along. there are still some stray dogs around and they can be vicious. I'll bring some, too."

Al left on the tractor at its' top speed of 21 MPH. Behind him Debra Hawkins said, "He wanted us to take guns to town?"

Her husband Jerry said, "He said there are mean dogs around. I wish I had a gun now."

"Me too," Jeff Hobart said. "I'll be looking to find me one, too. That Wal Mart should have some."

Don Blake said, "You won't have to wait on them to do the paperwork now."

Jerry Hawkins said, "Maybe there are a few good things about this godawful mess."

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 34

"That looks really good guys! A pro job if I ever saw one," Jim Collier said, admiring his new root cellar.

"We aim to please! And we aim to eat a lot of ham and bacon off that hog you're giving us for this, too," Chris said. "But don't kill him yet! It ain't cold enough out."

The root cellar had 3 feet of dirt mounded over the top that had been raked fine and winter wheat and grass seed sown on it. A layer of straw was carefully scattered over the seed then held in place with some old fence wire Jim had contributed.

That wheat will come up fast and keep it from washing away when it rains," Jim said. "Then the grass will take hold next Spring and it'll be fixed right."

"That's the way the State Highway used to do it on new grades," Chris said. Now all you need is a door and some shelves."

Jim said, "I've got the door already started, and the lumber laid out for the shelving. I need to go get some good hinges and a latch for the door next time I get to town."

"We beat you to it," Eddie said. "We got some for the Doc's place so we picked up some for you, too."



They're good ones. Stainless hinges and bolts to put 'em on with.

Jim smiled and thanked the men. As they left, he said, "First hard cold spell, come see me about that hog."

They waved goodbye and drove off.

\*\*\*\*\*

The next day was cloudy and cooler, with a wind from the northwest that promised colder temperatures. The camper group was making a second trip with all 7 of their vehicles to shop for clothing and other things. They saw Jacob Knepp and his boys hauling big shocks of corn to the barn on a sled pulled by 2 big Belgian horses. Shocks in neat rows 200 yards long stood in the field behind them. Another team with a second sled was hauling manure out into that field where they began to scatter it with pitchforks.

"That looks like hard work," Paul Anderson told his wife.

"Better pay attention to how they do it," Cynthia told him. "Roscoe Beam said we would have to work with the Amish next year to learn how to put out our own crops and harvest them."

"I hope we can get it done. The food in stores will run out some day and all we'll have is what we grow."

Today the group went to Wal Mart again and outfitted the men with more clothing while the women shopped in housewares for pots and pans, big kettles, and truckloads of canning jars and equipment on the advice of Roscoe's wife Marta. She had gone with them as an advisor, since only Betty Crawford, who was 56 years old had ever done any canning. It had been many years before, so she only remembered a little about it.

It took the day to collect everyone's clothing and try to keep it organized enough that they could sort it out at home. They resorted to tying each person's clothing in a bundle or two with their own belts and shoelaces or whatever else they could find, then writing their names on paper tags. Everyone left the store wearing a new outfit and began to throw their old clothing in the trash dumpster behind the store.

Marta put a stop to that by asking one young woman, "Where do you expect to find a scrub rag 10 years from now? You'd better hang onto every piece of cloth you can get your hands on, because the only NEW cloth that will be made then will be what YOU make the hard way."

Cynthia Anderson just stared at the older woman for a minute. Finally she said, "You mean that, don't you?"

"Sure do. Think about it. You ever see an antique spinning wheel, or a loom? Well, that's how you do it. First you shear a sheep, or grow some flax, and then you clean the fiber and comb it, and then you spin it into thread. When you have enough thread, you begin weaving it one thread at a time into cloth. It's a slow process, but one you'll have to learn before you are as old as I am. I think we'd better figure out some ways to store a lot of clothing and cloth, don't you? And don't wear out what you have by washing it every other day so it's threadbare in just a few months. Learn to keep your clothes clean, because laundry ain't easy now. Which is what we have to work out next for you people."

Cynthia pulled the old clothing out of the dumpster and went inside looking for containers to store it.

\*\*\*\*\*

Gregory Stone said, "I don't know anything about guns. I guess I need one, but I don't know what to get."

He and Walter Rankin were looking at the sporting goods display. Walter said, "You need 4. A .22 caliber rifle that will be what you use the most, and a 12 gauge shotgun that is for defending against predators, whether they have 2 legs or 4 legs. And you need a high powered rifle for some things, especially meat hunting deer and the wild pigs they say are around here. The shotgun will work on large game, but the rifle will do it at longer ranges. Last, you need a pistol that you carry everywhere. It is your last ditch self defense gun."

Gregory said, "I don't think there's enough guns in the store for everyone to have all those."

"That's right, when you count all the young adults we have, but there's a Bass Pro shop in Clarksville, so we need to make a trip up there. We might find a small gun shop or two along the way someplace. We should clean them all out and do our best to preserve those guns and ammunition, because they're not making any more of either one."

Gregory said, "Well, there's enough here for several of us, so let's get all that's here and we can get more later."

Walter agreed and went to fetch some carts. Since this began he had been mentally kicking himself for not having his own guns with him. All he'd put in the camper was his personal carry pistol, a .380, and a box of ammunition for it. It was just one more thing that made him feel down. The worst was not knowing what had become of their son and daughter who had been away at college in Tennessee. He was dealing with that, but his wife was always despondent and he couldn't seem to bring her out of it. It wasn't like they were the only ones with that unspeakable grief. Jim and Betty Crawford and Bill and Wendy Simmons were also wondering what had become of their grown children. Some days they could convince themselves that their kids probably survived and were just trying to figure out how to get home, but Walter knew it was the slimmest of chances.

Children had lost parents, too. Melissa Mills had died in childbirth from a massive hemorrhage leaving her husband Jason with their 16 year old son to raise. Brian Jennings had died of a heart attack leaving Danielle with 2 daughters 15 and 18 years old. Jason and Danielle had found some solace in supporting each other, their families having been long time friends. They were generally acknowledged to be a couple now with their 3 teenagers. It seemed to be working for them, he thought.

Walter got his mind back on the task at hand and told Greg, "Find some plastic bags to wrap that ammunition. Maybe get some tape and tape the bags shut airtight to keep moisture out of it. If we can keep it bone dry, it should be good for years."

It was a long walk to the back door with filled carts, which left Walter time to think about his wife's depressed state again. He wished there was something he could do to bring her out of it. Wendy Simmons had snapped back pretty well when Bill suggested them taking care of 6 year old Alyssa Milhollen and 7 year old Owen Foster. Those kids' parents had drowned when they were trying to fish on the lake and capsized the rental row boat. None of the 4 could swim and had no life jackets. Walter shook his head at the foolish risks people had taken like that. Real hunger makes people pretty daring, he thought. Walter shook his head to clear it of the morbid thoughts and made another trip with his flat bed cart. He was feeling much older than his 42 years.

Guns and ammunition practically filled one of the smaller U-Haul trailers. A stop at the hardware store on the way home finished filling it with more ammunition and a few .22 rifles and shotguns. Walter picked up some heavy duty padlocks at the hardware store and gave a key to Bill Simmons. They agreed that the guns should stay locked up in there until there had been some serious education given to the novices and small children in the group. They parked the trailer in the campground and added a camouflage tarp over the trailer and tied it down to be certain the contents stayed dry until they could do better for storage.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 35

"Where's Arthur?"

Michelle Compton said, "To tell you the truth, I don't really care as long as he isn't trying to talk me into going home to Louisville. He's driving me as nuts as he is."

"Dinner's about ready, so better go look for him," Denise said.

She continued to stir the frying potatoes, and couldn't wait until the meal was ready. The men were working on getting some tanks of LP gas so they could cook in the cabins, but Michelle was glad for the company while she cooked today. It kept her from thinking too much. She put the fried potatoes in one of the big new bowls they'd found at the store and set the skillet on a heavy wood table to cool. She frowned and said, "I'll go look for him."

He was getting close to 60 years old and took afternoon naps, so she expected to find him sleeping in the RV. She went into the bedroom but he wasn't there. Frustrated, she walked the length of the huge RV calling him. No answer. Back outside, she looked around the whole camp ground, thinking she'd spot him somewhere. He was a right pain in the butt these days. He had never been any help around the house, which was why she had insisted he hire a cleaning lady to come in one day a week. He had the money, so she had decided that if she was going to be a trophy wife, she would make her life comfortable.

Arthur wasn't really good looking, but he had always been well groomed and well dressed, so when he hit on her at work, she decided to take him up on it. His first wife had died of some nasty disease and he was trying to cope with getting older himself, so he had made some awkward moves toward her. She thought about it and decided she could do worse. Her first marriage had ended in disaster, so she was determined to do better this time. Money was important, she had learned, and she planned to have enough of it in the future.

Now she was wondering if some other things were not more important than money and security. He was nowhere in sight. Then she noticed the note under the windshield wiper of the RV. It said, "Going in to the office today to check on things. Art."

Then she noticed the little Honda Civic they towed behind the RV was gone, too. Michelle stood there for a minute then went inside the RV to think. She wouldn't miss the crazy old fart. He'd been getting worse every day since Bill Simmons hit him and shut him up that day. She'd had to make sure he was

properly dressed and got something to eat. He had ignored her completely for a couple weeks before that, except to remind her that she needed to put on some makeup. She had run out of makeup months ago, and he knew that.

Okay, she thought. He's as crazy as it gets. Why not let him go to Louisville? Maybe he wouldn't come back. There was nothing there for her now, and he was no help at all in this new world they were in. Fine. She made her decision and crumpled the note and put it in her pocket. It would go into the fireplace. She didn't have a clue what would happen to him, but she was pretty sure he wouldn't be coming back. She guessed she'd have to act like she was worried about him. She could do that for a while. There were other men around, like that gorgeous blond doctor that had given them the once-over that first day. She was only a little older than him, she thought, and she had gotten some makeup and some good new bras at the store, so she could look a lot younger than her 41 years. She went outside and tried to look disturbed about Arthur's absence.

\*\*\*\*\*

Arthur drove the little car automatically, paying little attention to anything except his own plans for the day. When he got to the office, he would start the paperwork to fire that mouthy Bill Simmons. He'd had enough of a couple others, too. They might have to train new agents, but he would have the last word on who they hired. He didn't notice the car ahead was not moving until it was too late. He steered desperately to get around it and skidded sideways a car length before he hit the bridge abutment. The air bag did not help. He died instantly.

\*\*\*\*\*

"When did you see him last?" Bill Simmons asked.

"Just before we went to town today. He was getting dressed in some of his new clothes and seemed to be happy. I know he hated looking bad," Michelle said.

"When did he get that car going?"

"Yesterday. He was pleased as he could be. All he did was put some gas in it and use jumper cables from the solar batteries."

Bill was puzzled. He thought surely someone must have seen him leave. Then he remembered that everyone had gone to town except Jim and Betty Crawford. They were tired out from yesterday and wanted to spend the day putting things away and arranging their cabin. They were eating at a table near the fireplace.

Michelle stood by herself wringing her hands and looking distraught. She pretended to sob and held her nose and blew a little, managing to squeeze out a couple tears. It was a good trick she had used many times in the past. She got a new hankie from her jeans pocket and blew her nose. Walter Rankin's wife, Tina Marie came over and held her arm solicitously. "We'll find him. Don't you worry now."

"How can we possibly know where he went? There's no police to call. He could be anywhere," Michelle wailed in her best imitation of a quavering voice.

Bill came back and said, "Jim said they didn't hear anything, but they live way up at the turnaround, so they might not have heard the car. I don't know what to tell you. About all we can do is wait for him to come back."

For the next couple weeks, Michelle made sure she was seen looking expectantly down the county road. Then she began to look dejected. The rest of the women didn't like her all that much, but they had all lost somebody and sympathized with her. When the first snow of the season came, Michelle inwardly rejoiced, certain she was rid of the old goat. She did her best to look even more sad, especially when the doctor came to give everyone another check up. He offered to give her some antidepressant medication. She refused, saying she had heard they had bad side effects, but she thanked him for offering and thought she got a reaction from him. She had made sure to wear a low necked shirt that day when she heard he would come to the park.

Anthony had reacted to her, and then he felt guilty about it knowing she had recently lost her husband. She didn't even know what had become of him and that was really sad. She was an attractive woman, though. He was determined to be professional with all his patients, so he put her out of his mind. Mostly.

Michelle mentally took stock of her situation. She had the nice RV, which was worth a lot. It was better to live in than the cabins and she had gas to cook and heat with now. She had the good generator he'd had installed for when she needed to do laundry and the solar panels kept the batteries charged otherwise. She didn't look her age if she was dressed well, and she made sure she could. But she would need a man to provide for her in this world of privation. She thought she could get one and she would choose carefully this time. That doctor looked like the best candidate so far, but she would watch to see who else was around. She was a good office manager and she thought she could convince Doctor Anthony that he needed one.

The trouble was, the doctor showed no interest in women, except that teenage slut he had in his office. She went everywhere with him and he was always talking to her. That could be a problem.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 36

"We have to do something about the school situation," Marta said.

Roscoe asked, "Has the new bunch said anything about school yet?"

"No, but they will sometime. I'm trying to figure out what to do with all those kids. There must be 2 dozen down there. We can't have school for 3 dozen kids in our home. We need a bigger building and then we have to figure out how to get the kids to and from school. This is going to be headache."

Roscoe had been thinking the same thing. He said, "Why take the kids anywhere? With that many already in one place, it'd be easier to take the rest of the kids to the park. There's the restaurant building, and it has a kitchen. If we take the dining tables out, we can go get desks from the school in town."

Marta went to him and kissed him. She said, "I knew you must be worth more than just good looks!"

If we're gonna do it, we better be making it happen before we get a big snow. Nobody to clean the roads off now. We could be stuck down here like we was last year for half the winter."

Marta sighed and said, "Don't I know it. After being able to get out and go places I've been dreading

that. Of course, there will be butchering to do and wood to cut, and all that, but it still makes for a long winter. OH! We have to get books too! I'll have to go with you to the schools in town and see what I can find. I think they store all the books at that building on Shelby Street. I need to find enough for everybody. We really need another teacher, too. I think there's over 30 kids total, and with all of them being different ages, it's too much for one teacher to cover."

"Well, just keep up with what you're doing now, and we'll get the rest started as soon as we can," Roscoe said. "I think Clay can go with me to Seymour again and look for more paper and pencils and all that stuff at the Wal Mart warehouse."

"Get somebody from the bunch at the park to go! We can't be wiping noses and cleaning their butts forever!"

"Yeah, but Jim and Chris and Eddie have had them working hard cutting firewood. I hate to interrupt that, but some of them would probably like a break from it. That makes me think. We'll need to heat that restaurant building, too. The parents should probably kick in some firewood for that."

"Take some of the women. They can work too, you know."

"Yes, dear," he said meekly.

"OOOH! I hate it when you do that!"

Roscoe grinned and chuckled. "Well, you were getting pretty wound up..."

\*\*\*\*\*

"They need a couple guys to go along for security. I heard they got some guns in town, but that bunch is likely to shoot each other if we turned them loose in that Wal Mart warehouse with guns," Jim Collier said.

Roscoe agreed, saying, "Yeah. Could Kevin go with 'em? He's the best at that. Maybe he could train some of those guys a little."

"Let me talk to him. He was going to work on getting a wood stove in the farrowing house. We've got sows ready to have pigs pretty soon."

"Maybe he can get some help with that from some of the new bunch."

Jim considered it. "That farm store in Seymour should have wood stoves. That might work out."

"Okay. You talk to him and I'll go see if Chris or Eddie can go with 'em, too. I need to get some more wood cut for late winter. I've got a few ricks of dry stuff, but if it's a hard winter I'll need more."

Chris and Eddie thought it would be a fine idea to go with the group. They wanted to get some things, too. They wanted one of those prefab yard sheds for storage and they had a plan to haul one home. They would drive their construction truck and try to find a rollback truck to haul a shed. Kevin agreed to go and hunt for a wood stove, taking Jim's heavy pickup. He allowed that if he could find a utility trailer to pull home, the trip would pay well for his time. They talked it over and agreed to be at the county park early the next morning.

Roscoe left to tell the park people to be ready. Marta had already given him his mission for the next day. As soon as they got the morning chores finished, the two of them would drive the school bus to town and load it with books and desks. Today would be spent removing seats from the school bus and putting them in the restaurant building for extra seating. Meanwhile, somebody would be assigned to remove the restaurant tables and chairs.

He drove into the county park entrance and noticed the small two story gatehouse was occupied. A young couple waved at him as he drove past toward the restaurant and group of maintenance buildings. Some older man was carrying firewood into the old caretaker's home on the rise beyond the maintenance buildings. A teenaged boy came out and got an armful, too. There was smoke coming out of the chimney, so it was definitely occupied now. He parked in the lot by the restaurant and went inside.

There were only three tables left in the restaurant. He guessed that the rest had been put into service in the cabins because they only had a small breakfast bar for eating. The restaurant had large windows overlooking the lake of about 100 acres. He could see two men out in one of the park's rowboats pulling up a trotline. While he watched they landed a big catfish in the boat, probably 10 pounds or more. He nodded silently to himself. At least they were doing something to support themselves.

Roscoe walked over to the caretaker's house and knocked on the door. Raymond Alexander and Denise came to the door.

"Come in! We have a pot of coffee on the stove. Do you want some?"

"Sounds good to me. It's a little chilly out there," he said.

Denise went to the wood stove where the pot was being kept warm. Two teenaged boys and a younger girl came downstairs and Denise introduced them.

"This is Jack; he's 16, and that's James. He just turned 13. And this is Jessica, our youngest. She's 11. Jordan is our oldest, but he moved into the gatehouse with Destiny Jennings. It looks like they are a couple now."

She was trying to put on a confident face telling this, but some worry showed through. Raymond didn't say anything, but the set of his jaw said a lot.

Roscoe said, "Pleased to meet you all. My wife has been teaching the children that were here before you all joined us. She's planning to get a school going in the restaurant building so there will be room for all that want to attend. She homeschooled our kids and has a degree in education, but she never did see eye to eye with the school system."

"That's a wonderful idea! We have to educate our kids," Denise said. "We've tried to teach a few things, but we spent most of the past year just trying to get enough to eat."

Raymond asked, "When does this begin?"

Roscoe said, "As soon as we can get school desks and books and all moved in there. We need a wood stove to heat the building, so we're planning a trip to Seymour tomorrow for that and to get more school supplies from the Wal Mart warehouse there. We need some of your people to go and get the collecting and loading done."

Denise was interested. "What is in the warehouse?"

"Everything you can imagine that might be in a Wal Mart. You need to take all the trucks and plan on a day of it. Think hard about what you need and get a group together to go. If you need gas or diesel, go up to see Chris and Eddie. They have a fuel truck at their place. They are going tomorrow along with Kevin Collier to provide security. Everyone else here is really busy, so you're pretty much on your own for this trip."

"I'll call a meeting and get everyone working on this," Raymond said. He turned to his wife and said, "You had better go see Jordan and tell him to plan on going. If he's going to live with that girl, he'd better get started thinking about how to provide for her."

Roscoe said, "I brought some tools to take most of the seats out of that school bus so we can use it to haul books and desks tomorrow. I could use a hand with that, if somebody is available."

Jack said, "I can help with that! What are you going to do with the seats?"

"I planned to put 'em in the restaurant, or maybe we should call it the school now. They can be used for extra seating. It's going to be an awkward job getting them out of the bus."

"I'll help, too. I can do that," James said.

Roscoe noticed that the 13 year old got a look of approval from his mother.

Raymond said, "I'd better go talk to everyone," as Roscoe and the boys started out to the door. They heard chainsaws going on the hill above the cabins as they walked to the other building.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 37

"All you teenagers sit at the tables over there. I want the littles over here in these small desks. The rest of you find a desk in the middle that fits you. Try to sit with kids about your own age, okay?" Marta said. "First thing will be roll call. My name is Mrs. Beam and I want you to tell me your name and age. My age is none of your business," she said with a smile.

A couple chuckles came from the back.

"We'll start at the table in the front. Yes, I already know a lot of you, but this will tell everyone who you are. Miss, what's your name and age?"

Marta pointed a finger at each child in turn and wrote the names in her record book.

"Martha Knepp. I'm 18."

"Good. Next?"

"Sarah Knepp, 16."

"Jack Alexander, 16."



"Diana Hawkins, 17."

"Angel Hawkins, 15."

"Destiny Jennings, 18."

"Mackenzie Jennings, 15."

"Austin Mills, 16."

"John Anderson, 16."

"David Anderson, 14."

"Megan Anderson, 11."

"Shane Stone, 14."

"Keith Stone, 12."

"Isaac Knepp, 12."

"Carter Hobart, 12."

"Derek Hobart, 10."

"James Alexander, 13."

"Jessica Alexander, 11."

"Benjamin Scott, 14."

"Gina Kelley, 13."

"Melanie Draper, 15."

"Dylan Draper, 13."

"Emma Draper, 11."

"Caitlin Hawkins, 11."

"Jessica Alexander, 11."

A truck engine came up close and stopped outside. Everyone looked up and soon Eddie came in the door. Marta beckoned with a finger toward the older kids where he found a seat. She asked him his name and age.

"Eddie Grimes. I'm 23."

"Eddie knows the value of education. That's why he is joining us to complete his last year of high school. Next?" She pointed at a boy in the middle of the room where they had left off.

"Mark Knepp, 10."

"Samuel Knepp, 8."

"Julia Blake, 9."

"Lindsay Stone, 9."

"Natalie Hobart, 8. I'm almost 9."

"Allison Blake. I'm 7."

"Owen Foster. I'm 7."

"Alyssa Milhollen. I'm 6."

"Joseph Schmidt. I'm 6."

"Adam Schwartz. I'm 6."

Marta smiled at the kids and said, "I think that's everybody. Let's see, we have.... We have 36 students. That's a pretty big class! Now we have to find out what grades you were in the last time you went to school. I'd like for you to write your name on the piece of paper I gave you and that grade level so I can tell what books to give you. If you remember what subjects you had in school, write down all of them you can remember. That way, we will know what you need to study now, okay? I'll go help the smaller kids write down what they remember."

While she was sitting with the small children, the door opened quietly and a young woman walked in. She waited at the back of the room until Marta came to her. "What can I do for you?"

"Maybe I can do something for you. I'm Cynthia Anderson. The 3 Andersons are mine. I've been home schooling them and thought I might be able to help you, since there's a pretty big crowd of kids here."

"Manna from heaven, that's what you are! I can sure use the help. Come on over with the little kids and we'll get their names and grades. I was trying to get grade levels for everyone so we can hand out text books. The bus outside is loaded with books we got at the city school."

"Oh great! I was wondering about teaching materials."

It was near lunch time when books were passed out and the older kids were ready for assignments. The two women decided to both give attention to the younger ones for the afternoon while the older ones had a writing assignment to do. The kids were getting their lunches from the table at the back of the classroom when they heard an unearthly scream outside followed by a yell and three shots in rapid succession.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 38

"Stay seated children! All of you! Eddie, you and I will go investigate."

Marta picked up her rifle from the top of the lockers along the side wall. Eddie had his pistol in hand and was running out the door ahead of her. People were converging from all directions on the trash barrels by the park road where Jerry Hawkins stood dripping blood from his shredded shirt sleeve, his pistol in his other hand.

"What was that?"

"It's a Bobcat, that's what it is."

"Get Jerry some help. He's bleeding," someone said.

"Get a tourniquet on that arm!"

"I got it!" Jeffrey Hobart took off his shirt and tied one arm of it around Jerry's forearm at the elbow. He cut most of the shirt away with his belt knife leaving a longer strip to tie, then grabbed a stick from the ground and said, "Somebody hold this! Right there over the knot!"

A woman held the stick while Jeffrey tied another knot over it, then twisted the stick to tighten the tourniquet. "Hold that as tight as you can stand it," Jeffrey told Jerry, who was beginning to sag a little.

Jeffrey said, "Somebody get us to the Doc's place! He needs stitches."

An engine started somewhere and soon a truck came skidding to a stop on the road.

Jerry asked, "Would somebody put my gun back in the holster? I gotta hold this thing."

Walter Rankin picked up the pistol, made sure it was on safe and stuck it in Jerry's holster. As soon as that was done, Jerry was shoved into Don Blake's truck and off they went, heading for Doctor Van Derver's place.

"Man! He can sure shoot! That cat has 3 holes in him."

"Look at those claws!"

"I want to be able to shoot like that."

"What happened?"

"Jerry was gonna burn some trash and I guess the cat was in the barrel. Probably looking for food."

Marta felt the let down after the adrenaline rush and walked slowly back to the school room with Eddie.

"Thanks for the backup Eddie. I don't think I'm ready to fight a Bobcat by myself."

"Me neither, Miz Beam. I just couldn't sit by without doin' somethin', though."

Cynthia had kept the kids as calm as she could, but they were mobbed by questions as soon as they got inside. Marta called for quiet and told them, "The excitement is over for now. Jerry Hawkins apparently reached into the trash barrel to light in on fire, and there was a Bobcat in the barrel. Jerry shot and killed the cat, but he got his arm cut up so he is going to the doctor to get stitches in it. Jerry should be fine in a few days."

"Now, I don't think anybody ate lunch yet, did they?"

The kids gave lots of negative head shakes.

"Okay. Let's all sit down, try to calm down, and get some food in us, all right?"

\*\*\*\*\*

Doctor Van Derver followed the men back to the park after treating Jerry Hawkins in his Jeep. There were still a few people outside, one skinning out the Bobcat, and others doing various jobs. They gathered around him and asked about Jerry.

"He will have to be very careful of that arm for a week at least. There was a vein torn that took some very careful surgery to repair. I am thankful for the help by the two men who brought him to my office. without their help, I would have been hard pressed to do the surgery. I'm looking for someone who can be in my office full time to assist in such things."

Walter Rankin, who was skinning the Bobcat said, "Why don't you go up to my cabin, number 4, and tell my wife what you just said. She'll have some ideas."

After some false starts with people who wanted the job but turned white when they saw Jerry's arm, Michelle Compton came to the front of the group and volunteered.

"All I know is some simple first aid, but I'm not afraid of the sight of blood, and I can do your office work, too. I can drive my RV down there to live in and start today."

It was better than he had hoped for, even lacking any medical training. With Melanie in school now, she wouldn't be free except on weekends. Michelle had thought about that, too.

After a moment to consider it, Anthony said, "I can't pay you, but I can share what people give me for my services, if that's all right."

"That will be fine. More than anything, I need something to do. Is there a level spot to put my RV?"

"I think the driveway is pretty level by the garage in back."

"Okay, if you can help me get the jacks undone, I can drive it over."

Walking back to their cabin, Betty Crawford said, "I know why Michelle wanted that job, and it's got nothing to do with being a nurse. She's just out for the main chance, that's how she is. That's why she married old Arthur."

Jim thought about it and said, "I think you're right. But what of it? If she works out for him, so much

the better."

Betty was miffed, but she said, "I guess it will be all right. At least she won't be around here to go after somebody else's man."

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 39

"There were a lot of chainsaws running down at the park today," Marta said.

Roscoe said, "Yeah! And it's about time! Those fools had about 2 or 3 ricks apiece cut and thought they had enough for the winter. I guess Eddie straightened 'em out. He stopped and told me about it yesterday. Old Jim Crawford asked me if the boy was right about how much wood they should have and I guess my eyes bugged out when he showed me his little stack. They'll be lucky if they don't end up usIng green wood, and it'll take a lot more of that, 'cause the wood has to make enough heat to dry itself out before it gives YOU any heat. I never saw such a bunch of idiots!"

"You can't blame them for what they don't know," Marta said.

"Winter time don't have any mercy on fools, though. You'd have thought they'd know better from last winter. I asked Jim about that. He said they just kept dragging stuff in from the woods to feed the fireplace in one of those old log cabins for cooking. They didn't have any heat in the campers. They like to froze to death, I guess, and last winter wasn't bad at all."

"You think they'll get enough cut in time? We could get a bad cold spell any time now."

"Hard to say. But I guess Eddie an' me put the fear of God in 'em, so it sounds like they're gettin' busy. Maybe I oughta go check on 'em and see how they're doin'."

Marta said, "That sounds like a good idea."

When Roscoe drove into the park, he saw a big pickup sitting by the gatehouse unloading wood, all small round stuff. He went to talk to the men.

"This ain't how you go about it," he said. "You're workin' way too hard for not much. You go after one little load at a time and you'll be at this 'till Spring. You gotta get more done in less time."

Don Blake and Jason Mills looked up at the older man, obviously not liking the criticism. With a little heat in his voice, Don said, "Okay, just how would you go about it?"

"I'd go cut another load to fill the truck, then leave it on the truck fer traction weight. Then start cuttin' logs and use that 4 wheel drive an' a chain to drag the logs up here right close to where you want the woodpile. Then when you get a whole buncha logs drug up, you start cuttin' and splittin'. That way you only handle the stuff ONCE. The way you're doin' it, you got to pick it up to load it in the truck, then unload it, then split it here and stack it up. By draggin' the logs here, all you do is cut it up, split, and stack it. Less'n half the work."

"Better start cuttin' somethin' besides that old red pine, too. That stuff burns up like gasoline and then

you got no fire overnight. Cut some oak, hickory, ash, maple, 'most anything that's got leaves instead of needles on it. That hardwood will keep you a fire goin' all night when it gets cold out. An' you need to cut somethin' bigger'n a fence post, too. I'll come down tomorrow and show you how to cut a big tree without killin' yourself."

"For now, is that the biggest saw you got?"

"We got 6 of the same kind up there at the tractor store, " Don said.

"We need to go back tonight and get you about a dozen more and bigger ones. Those are toy size. You might get enough wood cut with those eventually, but not before it gets cold out. Go getcha a drink and then follow me to the chainsaw shop. We got time for that much before dark."

The next morning the sound of chainsaws reached the schoolroom, but this time it was a much deeper, throatier sound. An hour later, they saw a succession of pickup trucks loaded with wood come out of the forest dragging one big log after another. Two men with heavy saws were cutting logs into firewood size blocks as fast as the saws would go. Two hydraulic wood splitters were running with two boys working each one. By evening, they had cut about 4 times as much as they had in the past week and there were more logs laying by each cabin.

Jim Collier came by the park to see Roscoe about using the Bobcat at his sawmill.

Roscoe said, "That's what I got it for. Go right ahead. I shoulda said something back then."

Jim said, "Looks like the wood cuttin' operation is in high gear now!"

Roscoe said, "I just hope we wasn't too late gettin' started. Those clouds look like snow, and that wind is gettin' colder.

\*\*\*\*\*

The snow started about an hour after dark and kept coming down in big wet flakes. By morning it was 8" deep in the flat areas, with some deeper drifts in places. Roscoe drove down to the park after breakfast and saw nobody outside. He knocked on the Crawford's door and asked what happened to the wood cutters?

"Everybody was tired and they can't work in this snow."

"And just why the hell is THAT?"

"Well, it's cold out! You can't expect people to work in weather like this!"

"You'd damn well better make sure you DO work in weather like this! You ain't got a quarter of the wood you need for the winter an' it takes it at least a couple months to dry down to where it's fit to use! Come on with me and let's get these lazy good-fer-nuthin's outa bed!"

Roscoe got Jim in his truck and drove up to where the cabins were all grouped together. He began to blow the horn until every cabin had somebody coming out to see what the ruckus was about.

"What's the matter?"

"You can stop blowing that horn any time now!"

"What the hell is all this about?"

Roscoe proceeded to explain in no uncertain terms what he thought of layabouts who were too lazy to look out for their own interests.

"You've got less than a quarter of what wood you need cut. If you don't get 3 times that much cut and started to dry out this week you'll be freezin' before Christmas tryin' to burn green wood! I know it's cold out today. That's good weather for wood cuttin' so you don't overheat yourself. I've told you for the last time about this. We've give you all what you needed and got you goin', so now you can damned well get busy and do something for yourselves, or I'm done with ya! You can all damned well freeze to death for all I care!"

"I'll be down at that log pile scrapin'away a little snow with the blade on my truck. If I don't see some help show up by the time I'm finished, I'm goin' to the house and the lot of you can go straight to hell!"

Men began showing up before Roscoe got finished clearing snow around one log pile. One truck, then another came down from the cabins with chainsaws on top of their load. More snow fell during the afternoon, but only flurries. It was enough to motivate the men after lunch, though, and when sundown came the woodpile size had doubled.

Roscoe was tired. He went town to the school house to get Marta and told the men stacking wood by the school, "I'll be back in the morning after I get MY work done at home. I got cattle and hogs to tend to."

Marta said, "You were pretty hard on that bunch today."

"No more'n what they deserved. I've had about enough of that bunch."

Marta wisely kept her own counsel on the way home. She knew her husband would cool off, but this was not the time to talk to him.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 40

The snow of days past had melted off and the weather had warmed enough to make outdoor work more pleasant. Some of the men at the park were still cutting more firewood, although some had given it up for the year.

"My barometer has dropped a lot since last night," Albert told his wife.

"That means bad weather, right?"

"Yeah, within a day, usually. Sometimes less."

Anita said, "Is there anything we need in case we get really bad weather?"

"Hmm. Not that I know of. I bet we'll think of something we should have done if we get a foot of snow. I'll go over and tell the boys next door. They might want to make a trip to town for something."

"Okay. I'd better go talk to Sylvia Collier. They might need to button up the farrowing house or something."

Jacob Knepp had also noticed his barometer dropping, as did Roscoe Beam. Marta said she would pass the word around at the school, and tell the park kids to go tell their parents before they started their school day. They should be sure they had plenty of drinking water in the house and a big pile of firewood close by and covered with a tarp, at least. When she got to school, she had another thought and told the kids that if their parents did not have a snow shovel, they should go get one quickly, and any food items they might need to secure at home.

The Amish families had no real worries about bad weather other than to get plenty of extra fodder in the barns for their stock and keep a big kettle of water hot on the stove, then go out and cover the well pump with a tarp. Amos had his turn at hauling kids to school that week so he passed the word to Clay and his family.

The wind picked up by lunch time, but Eddie and Chris were already back from town with 2 sets of tire chains and some extra kerosene for their lamps in a couple 5 gallon fuel jugs. The wind had died down to nothing by the time school let out and a few big flakes of snow were drifting down as Amos took the kids home on his wagon, bundled up in wool blankets.

Noone at the park gave the weather prediction much thought except Walter Rankin. He had enjoyed hunting and fishing, so he'd paid some attention to the weather most of his life. He had a feeling they were in for some snow. Better safe than sorry, he thought and decided to go get some snow shovels. He couldn't find any actual snow shovels that he thought were worth much, but he did find some grain shovels that would do fine for the purpose. He brought home the 5 that they had at the farm store and got all the heavy chore gloves they had in stock and some cans of starting fluid while he was there. His last stop was at the gas station to fill his truck with diesel and the auxiliary farm tank he had in the bed. It was getting colder and so the generator and the gas station had taken several pulls to get it started.

That night the temperature dropped to the high twenties and the snow piled up past lunch time the next day. The temperature rose to near freezing and freezing rain and sleet began to fall making a slushy covering on the snow. Amos came early to pick up the kids and said he would not go out to bring them the next day for fear of injuring his horses on the ice that was beginning to coat everything. School would be closed until further notice. Roscoe graded the road from his farm to the park with the blade on his truck, then drove on down the valley as far as Clay Whitaker's place. On the return trip he cleared the other lane of snow and slush. He passed Doc Van Derver's place and dropped Marta at home and then went on up the valley all the way to Jim Collier's farm and back. They might not be able to get out of the valley, but they could probably get to all the neighbor's.

The ice continued through the evening until about midnight. When it stopped falling the temperature dropped and kept dropping all night. The world was a frozen wilderness when dawn came, trees glistening with a coating of sparkling ice in the sun. That sun did little warming, leaving the temperature about 10 degrees all day.

Carter Hobart stepped out the cabin door and slid on path to the woodpile. He landed on his backside and slid slowly down the hill toward the lake, unable to stop himself. There were no obstacles between him and the lake that was beginning to freeze around the edges. It was a long slow slide and he was helpless to stop himself. Half way to the lake he got the idea to roll sideways and made enough progress at that to reach the end of the concrete curbing that surrounded the small sand beach by the swimming area. His feet bounced over the curbing, but he managed to grab onto it with his hands and



stop his sliding. He kicked at the ice and found he could punch through it with his foot. Encouraged, he punched through it with the other foot and slowly got to his feet, terrified of the freezing water behind him.

Slowly he stomped another foothold in the ice, then another. He took his time, afraid he would repeat that deadly slide and land in the lake. His mother stuck her head out the door to see what was keeping him. He yelled at her to stay inside.

"What?"

"Stay inside! I slid all the way down here when I fell! I almost slid into the lake! Go back inside, Mom!"

His mother started to take a step out, slid on the ice and luckily held onto the doorknob. She scrambled to her feet and got back in the house watching her son with wide eyes and yelling for her husband to do something.

Carter made slow but steady progress, finally getting back to their cabin half an hour later. His father saw what was going on and imitated his son, stomping holes through the crust of ice. He had come out their back door and met his son 50 yards from the cabin. The pair made it inside without further incident, then Jeffrey made his way slowly to the other cabins to warn everyone. Only Walter Rankin had shovelled a path to the woodpile the previous night before the slush froze solid.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 41

Clearing a path anywhere was heavy work. The inch thick crust of ice had to be broken through, then the ice and 6" of snow under it had to be shovelled away. The Amish solved that by leading their heavy horses where ever they wanted a path. The horses didn't like it much and snorted their fear of the ice because their weight made them crunch through at every step. Several trips to the ponds made a path of sorts so all the stock could get a drink.

Marta had to laugh at their cattle slipping, sliding, and cavorting around on the ice. More than one fell and slid some distance. They got the hang of it after some aborted attempts and got to the creek to drink. Roscoe got the tractor started and drove it to the ponds and the creek to break trails for them, then nearly got the tractor stuck on the creek bank. He gave up the idea of going to check on other families. The roads were simply too dangerous.

Thanksgiving dinner was not such a joyous occasion with nobody to visit, and the trials of day to day living in the icy conditions. A full 2 weeks passed before some warmer days came that melted most of the ice away. It left mud behind, so getting around in the woods was impossible, even with horses. The respite in temperature was short. Soon nights were dipping into the low twenties again and the ground began to freeze. School resumed as soon as the roads melted clear of ice, but slick patches would remain all winter. A few inches of snow just before Christmas made travel a little easier, giving more traction than the icy patches beneath it.

The cold that followed began to deplete woodpiles faster. The day before Christmas was heralded by the sound of chainsaws in the forest at the park. A quiet Christmas pitch-in dinner was held at the

school with a song and prayed service following. Paul Anderson had spent some of the cold days studying his Bible and read aloud the Christmas story. He then said a few words about their need to be thankful for having shelter, warmth, and food, and lead a prayer to that effect. Nobody mentioned Christmas trees nor gifts.

\*\*\*\*\*

Christmas came and went followed by the familiar post-holiday let down and augmented by cabin fever. There were no shopping trips, nor even visits to friends and family for a change of scenery. The bad road conditions and difficulty getting gas from the station in town saw to that. The generator at the gas station was reluctant to start in cold weather, so nobody dared to go to town without at least enough gas to go home and try again on a warmer day.

Living in the tiny park gatehouse upstairs apartment was cramped at best. Destiny Jennings was aggravated about that and then found she had missed a period and was almost due again. She felt different somehow, and when the time came for her next period, she was sure she was pregnant. The thought of living in the little 2 room apartment with a howling baby was almost more than she could bear. She did not relish the idea of raising a child. Jordan was estatic when she gave him the news. His parents were much less enthusiastic.

Raymond Alexander asked his son, "How do you propose to support this family you have growing?"

Jordan said, "Well, just like we have been doing. Everything is going all right now."

"You don't know what we are facing, do you? You don't have a clue what we will have to do to just FEED ourselves next year!"

"Sure I do. We'll plant a garden, I guess. And I can hunt for deer and stuff for meat. That's no big deal."

Raymond hung his head and took a couple deep breaths before starting again.

"Who do you think will plow up a garden for you?"

"Uh, that guy Roscoe is always down here doing something with his tractor. He can plow it."

"And how do you plan to pay him for that?"

"He doesn't ask for pay."

"You are an eternal dipshit, son! The world does not, and NEVER DID exist for your benefit alone! Our life here is only this good because of the kindness and generosity of these neighbors! WE OWE THEM OUR LIVES! Don't you GET THAT?"

"What do you expect me to do about it? I didn't ask for 'em to do anything!"

"What they expect is for us, ALL of us, to stand on our own 2 feet and support ourselves. They have been gracious enough to show us how to make that possible. And we still have a lot to learn. I have never grown anything more than a few flowers and shrubs. I have no idea how to grow enough to eat for a year, AND YOU HAVE EVEN LESS! WE ARE BEGGARS HERE! GET THAT THROUGH YOUR HEAD AND ACT LIKE YOU ARE GRATEFUL, EVEN IF YOU ARE NOT!"

"Hey! Get offa my case, all right Dad? I'm living my own life now, okay? The rules are different now. I don't have to suck up to a bunch of old folks because I need their money, or a job, or anything! I don't need money now! It's all FREE! You just go out and TAKE what you want! You're the one who doesn't GET IT, Dad! There's no rent, there's no car loans, there's no student loans to pay. NOTHING!"

"Just like me, you owe everyone you have met in the past year. You literally owe them all your LIFE, YOU YOUNG FOOL!"

"I don't have to listen to this crap!"

Jordan stormed out of his parents' cabin and slammed the door. He stalked through the melting slush back to the gatehouse. He tracked wet muddy slush up the stairs and onto the apartment floor.

Destiny asked him, "So, what's up with you and your Dad yelling at each other?"

"He's on me like a coat of paint! He's ranting about OWING everybody here! I don't OWE anybody anything! He still thinks you have to pay for everything. We don't have to pay for ANYTHING! Everything is FREE, because everybody out there died and left it there. I'm sick of him being on me all the time and I'm through with that!"

Destiny had enough. She said, "Well, SOMEBODY needs to tell you about responsibility! Like all those muddy tracks you got on the floor after I just mopped it! How about you clean that up?"

"That's your job. I'm supposed to get the food and make sure we have heat and all that, and I'm doing that! So you do your job!"

"I am doing my job. I keep the place clean, I cook and I do laundry. You ought to try that sometime and you wouldn't get your clothes so dirty! And I'm carrying your baby and you act like that somehow makes you royalty or something."

"I'm just acting like an adult instead of a kid that has to suck up all the time."

"No, you are not acting like an adult. You are acting like a spoiled 4 year old and I've had enough of it! Get your stuff and get out of here!"

Jordan looked away from her, out the window and said, "It's MY house! I'm not going anywhere! You don't like it, YOU leave!"

"No! You don't pull that crap on me! Get out of here and don't come back! I should never have trusted you enough to have your baby! You're just a spoiled brat! Now GO!"

Jordan heard that unmistakable sound of a pump shotgun being racked. He turned around, unbelieving, and saw her with the gun held low, pointed at him. Her snarling face was red and she backed a step away to make sure he couldn't grab the gun.

"GO NOW!" Destiny added, almost in a whisper, "Or I'll kill you where you stand."

Jordan got a good look at her face and decided that he believed what she said. He backed slowly away from her and said softly, "Hey, now. Don't shoot, okay? I'm going, all right? I'm going already."

He took each step carefully and went down the stairs backwards, watching her. She kept the shotgun

aimed steadily at him. She followed him, several steps behind him as he approached the door. Jordan felt for the knob and fumbled it open. He stepped outside and backed away slowly, leaving the door open. Destiny followed him outside and said, "Now. Turn around and go to your parents' house. DO IT!"

He glanced back and there she was, grim face and shotgun aimed at him. He walked. When he got to his parents' door, she said, "Now, open it and call your Dad out here. Don't do anything stupid because right now I'd love to see you dead!"

Jordan licked his lips and called out, "Dad! I need you to come out here. I really need you to come out here now!"

Raymond came to the door as angry as he'd ever been at his son. When he looked outside and saw Destiny with the shotgun, he said, "Hold on there girl! Put that thing down!"

"NO! I'm keeping it to make sure you beat some sense into this brat of yours! I just kicked him out for being the a\$\$hole that he is, and I don't want to be looking over my shoulder all the time. Now do your job and give that BOY an a\$\$ kicking, or I'll shoot both of you!"

Raymond stared at her, slack jawed.

"Get busy! I want to see him take the whipping you should have given him a long time ago! You can start with some solid punches to his insufferable ego!"

Raymond did not move or say a word.

Destiny did. She came up behind Jordan and whacked him on the side of the head with the gun, then backed away fast. She looked back at Raymond and said, "Are you going to do it, or am I going to make you watch ME do it?"

Raymond got the idea and picked up his son by the shirt. He told Jordan, "She's right. You've had this coming for a long time now."

He began to methodically slap his son's face until the boy held up his hands to block him. Then Raymond hit him in the stomach hard enough to take the fight out of him. He backhanded the boy's face twice and said, "I'll let you get your breath now. When you can talk, I want to hear you apologize to this girl and then to me."

Jordan's mind was rattled. He didn't know how to respond if he could have. He stood there bent over and gasped for breath. When the gasps slowed close to normal, his father said, "Time's up."

The boy looked at his father like he had never seen him before, and he was afraid of him. "Okay," he huffed out. "Okay, I'll apologize. I'm sorry."

Raymond said, "Now take some time and tell each of us what you are sorry FOR!"

"Uh, I, uh... I'm sorry I yelled at both of you...."

Destiny said, "Are you sorry for being a snot that tracked dirt in on my clean floor? Are you sorry for being an arrogant snot? Are you sorry for treating me like dirt? Let's hear it, BOY!"

Raymond knew that word 'boy' would cut him like a knife. There was no hope this pair would ever get back together. He realized then that his son would never live this down.

Jordan was still breathing heavily, looking at the floor.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 42

"What did he do to you girl?"

"He tried to throw me out of my own house, after he got me pregnant! THAT'S what he did! And he's been an a\$\$ ever since he found out I was pregnant. Acted like some kind of little god, or something. That's it. I want him gone. I don't ever want to lay eyes on him again as long as I live."

"I'll see to it that he doesn't bother you, but he should be providing for you and your baby when it comes. I will be making SURE he does that, too. You got that son?"

"Yeah, I got it."

\*\*\*\*\*

"These bigger cabins aren't all that much more roomy than ours," Jerry Hawkins said.

Paul Anderson said, "We've got the 3 bedrooms, but that takes up all the extra size."

"I'm glad we took the small one," Debra Anderson said. "Our three girls really makes it tight in the other bedroom, but at least they stay warm."

Paul said, "With John and David in one of these small bedrooms, it is pretty tight, too."

John said, "Yeah! Me and David are gonna take one of the small cabins over next year. We can cut enough wood to keep it warm and that'll give everybody more room. We're gonna get us everything we need next time we go to the cities and have a real place of our own."

Their sister Megan said, "So you're gonna learn to cook and do laundry, too?"

The boys made a face at her and looked back at the adults.

Jerry Hawkins said, "You know, that's a good idea. We need to get all the rest of the cabins outfitted soon. These teenagers are growing up and are going to need places to live."

His 17 year old daughter Diana gave John a look and half a smile at that. Nobody caught the look except John and his mother, Cynthia. She didn't say anything, but she and Paul both knew Diana had been spending what time she could with John. They were nearly the same age, Diana being a few months older. After their visitors had gone home and everyone had gone to bed, Cynthia told her husband, "We need to keep a close eye on John and that girl. We probably don't need any grandkids

yet."

Paul frowned and said, "No, we don't, but these kids will get together anyway. I think we're going to see some young marriages. They know they don't have to wait to finish college, or get a good job and be able to buy a home. They can just put a home together like everyone else is doing. There's really not a lot to stop them from marrying young."

Cynthia said, "These kids aren't mature enough to do that. Did you hear what happened with the Alexander boy and Danielle Jennings girl? They had a blow up and she ran him home to his Dad with a gun!"

"Yes, I heard all about that. But that boy is a brat. It looks like Raymond is taking hold of him, though. He's got that kid cutting and carrying firewood to her and getting her water and he just killed a deer they are going to split with her. Raymond has that boy by the ears. Damned shame he hadn't done it sooner."

"People in glass houses....."

"I know. It's hard to tell what kids will do. All you know for sure is that it will be foolish."

Cynthia thought about telling her husband that she thought she might be pregnant. She was feeling more tired lately. She noticed she had been going to the outhouse more often, a trip she hated in cold weather, and she was having cramps today. She thought it was early for her period to be starting and then she remembered having this happen when she got pregnant with Megan, her youngest. But that was 11 years ago and she'd had irregular periods over the past year. She thought she should go see Doctor Van Derver. She decided to wait until after she'd seen the doctor before she said anything to Paul about it.

Debra Hawkins was having similar thoughts about their daughter Diana. Debra knew for a fact that she was pregnant, having missed two periods. They had found the birth control pills at the pharmacy a little too late. She hoped it was not too late for her daughter.

\*\*\*\*\*

Shannon Hobart was pregnant and sure of it, because she was sick every morning, just like she had been with her other 3 kids.

Tiffany Blake had missed a period and was not happy about it, with 3 kids from 4 to 9 years old. She didn't mention it to Don, hoping she was wrong. There had been no birth control available for too long and she was afraid their luck had run out.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 43

"It's so dark in here I can't see to cook even with two lamps going," Marta complained.

Roscoe said, "This would be a good time to get some solar power going, if we can find the stuff to do it. The trouble is, I don't know anything about it and I don't know anyone who does, except maybe the Doc. I'll talk to him."

"You do that. If we could get some good lighting it would keep everyone in a better mood. These

cloudy winter days have been depressing."

He met a truck driven by Destiny Jennings, headed back toward the park. Someone was riding with her, but he didn't get a good enough look to see who it was. There was a truck and a small car in the driveway when Roscoe pulled in at Doc Anthony's place. He went inside and found Michelle Compton sitting at a desk with file cabinets behind her. The living room had been converted into an office and waiting room for patients. Cynthia Anderson was waiting along with Debra Hawkins and her daughter Diana.

Roscoe spoke to the women and took a seat across the room from them. The office was cheerfully lit with solar powered curly cue bulbs and everything was neat and clean. Roscoe was cheered up at the sight and thought his mission to inquire about solar power was more important than he had realized.

Tiffany Blake came out after a few minutes looking rather unhappy. She sat down beside the other women just as Michelle called them both into the exam room. Tiffany sat there for a few minutes before speaking to Roscoe.

"I'm not being antisocial. My mind was wandering. How have you been?"

Roscoe said, "Oh, I'm all right. I just came to talk to the Doc about solar power. I don't know anything much about it and Marta is wanting better lights. They sure got good lights in here."

"Yeah. Lots better than the kerosene lamps we used all winter. We'd LOVE to have solar lights!"

They talked for a quite some time before the other two women returned and were ready to leave. Roscoe wished them well and finally got in to talk to Anthony. He was a gold mine of information about how his system worked and where his father had bought it all. The problem was, most of it had come from far away. Roscoe left somewhat discouraged.

Eddie Grimes and Chris Hamilton were talking to Marta when Roscoe got home.

Chris said, "We're on the way to town to get some hardware and other stuff. Wondered if you all needed anything?"

Roscoe said, "Better ask Marta. She knows more about what we might need. I could use some motor oil, though. We need to bring all the oil we can find out here."

"Marta said you were lookin' into solar stuff for lights," Chris said.

"Yeah. I asked Doc about his setup and he told me all about it. He knows how it all works. The hell of it is, his Dad had to order everything from Florida and Arizona. He doesn't know where we could find any solar stuff around here."

Eddie said, "I know where we can get all that stuff we want."

Everyone looked their questions at him, so he went on.

"Over by the river around Utica, there's a new ritzy subdivision. Built it all overlooking the Ohio River and all. Those houses are big mansion things and they all got solar stuff on 'em. I worked out there for a landscaper for a while and asked what that was on the roofs."

Chris said, "I knew you had to be good for SOMETHING! NOW I find out. Don't just sit there like a stump, tell us how to find this stuff. I feel like I been livin' in a cave by torch light all winter, an' here you had the answer all the time!"

Eddie said, "You're a cave man anyhow, eatin' all that stuff outa the woods. I oughta leave you in the dark!"

"Yeah, well I can get me a meal most anywhere!"

Eddie said, "Mebbe so, but yer cookin' sucks."

Marta said, "I'll make it worth your while to get us some good lights in our house and down at the school."

Chris said, "OOH! We got a customer, Eddie! Let's talk trade here. What can you do for us if we do this?"

Marta said, "Just a minute."

She went to the kitchen and came back with a platter of chocolate iced donuts. The young men's eyes got big at the sight of them.

Eddie recovered first and said, "Where in the world did you get DONUTS?"

"I made them, of course. Help yourself and I'll get some hot coffee to go with them. We can talk about trading later," Marta said with confidence.

Chris made some primal sounds of approval as he bit into a big one filled with apple pie filling. Eddie had cherry pie filling running down his chin, unable to say anything. They chewed with blissful expressions until they couldn't hold any more and began to wash it all down with fresh hot coffee.

Marta leaned back in her chair and said, "What would it cost me in donuts and pies to get some lights in here? Now be reasonable, boys and maybe we can make a deal."

Chris cleared his throat and said, "Ma'am, I didn't think I'd ever taste a fresh donut again. We'll get you some lights."

Eddie said, "How about you make some each week for a while? It will take some for the Doc, too, since he's the one who knows how to hook up all this stuff."

Marta gave them a complacent smile and said, "I'm sure we can work something out."

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 44

Trading had become the new way of life. The Amish began to supply milk, butter, and cheese to those without milk cows. Eddie and Chris were doing a booming business installing solar systems, and



Roscoe's farm supplied beef and pork. Doctor Van Derver took care of everyone's medical needs in exchange for generous amounts of food, firewood, and work around his property. The group at the park began to catch on and some made a business of fishing for a while, until the lake was getting depleted. They began to go to the river a few miles to the north and had a seemingly endless supply of catfish and pan fish.

As the weather began to warm up in March, there was great interest in vegetables and fresh salad greens. Marta passed the word to all her students of a meeting at the school to talk about gardening and farming for the coming Spring. The next Saturday, the place was too crowded, so they moved out to a big shelter house.

Roscoe knew the park people better than some others, so he began the meeting.

"Hello everyone. I thought we needed to talk over how we go about you folks raising gardens this year, since most of you have said you hadn't done much of that. One thing I thought of right away is that the park here is all sloping ground and has been in grass for years, so it's not a very good place for gardening. But right across the county road is what used to be a small farm. The house there is no good, but the barn is all right. The farm ground had been rented out and the 10 acres nearest the barn was in wheat a couple years ago that didn't get harvested, so it was pretty clear of weeds. We plowed it last Fall, so the ground is in good shape and close enough to walk there for daily tending. There's some mowing needs done around the barn and such, but one of us farmers can take care of that the first time. After that, it'll be on you to keep the place cleared."

"Me an' Jim Collier are gonna disk the ground and have it ready to plant as soon as it dries up enough, but it's time to get some plants started right now. I'm going to turn this over to Jacob Knepp to talk about how you can do that at home and my wife says the kids can start some plants here in the school building by those big windows on the south side."

Jacob got up and came to the table by the fireplace where Roscoe stood. Roscoe asked him, "Would you tell us all how you go about raising plants to get an early start on the summer?"

Jacob said, "We grow plants two ways. We put some in small pots set in the windows where they get the sun best. We also have some beds we call cold frames. We dig out a place and bury a layer of horse manure under the dirt. That warms the ground. We cover that with windows on a frame to let the sun warm the ground and keeping frost from the plants. The seeds we sow there are slower to come up than in the house, but they are sooner than outside. We give you horse manure for this year to do this. Next year, you have your own horses. They can cultivate your gardens and we teach you how to take care of horses. Some of you come to help us with farming and learn. You decide who comes. You work for us and we teach. We give you some of the crops for pay. We farm more this year so there is enough for all."

He sat down at the table and Roscoe said, "That's the plan we came up with. Now we have to work out who will do what, and where. Jacob here and Daniel Schmidt and Amos Schwartz have all agreed to work with you folks. They have been planning how they can do this. Some of you will be busy at their farms, and some of you will be gardening. When there is less to do later in the summer, we will begin to make root cellars and smoke houses for this community."

"It's a lot to get done in one year, to turn everyone here into what we used to call subsistence farmers. It will take all your whole families can do to make it happen, but it has to happen or some of us won't make it. If we are very lucky, we may have another year or two of using gasoline and diesel equipment

before the fuel goes bad and the engines won't run on it. By then, we need to all be as expert at horse farming as these 3 families. The days of running to town, or the next city in a car or truck are coming to an end. If we are not ready for that, we will starve. Think about how important it is to learn how to do without those things. Think HARD about it. Our days are numbered."

The crowd was silent as Daniel stood and said, "Our children are still young, so we can use more help with our farming. We think we can use maybe 6 people to help. Those people will learn how to care for horses, how to work them, and how to grow things. We save seeds to trade, so you will learn about that. I can teach some how to shoe horses, and my wife can teach women how to can food, and how to cook what we grow. I will teach how to butcher animals for meat and how to use the smokehouse."

Amos Schwartz stood next and said, "We do about the same as Daniel, but I will teach how to do some blacksmith work and make things of wood. I make buggies and wheels for them. We can use maybe 6 or 8 people to help us."

Jacob stood again and said, "We can use maybe 6 or 8 people to help. All will learn the horses, the farming, and how to keep food. I make harness for horses, and will teach someone about that. There are many people here to learn. I think it is best if someone from each family comes to one of the Amish to learn. They teach their family to do things. The man and wife must learn first, then they teach der kinder."

Roscoe stood beside Jacob and said to the Amish group and the three front tables, "thank all of you for what you are doing. We couldn't make it without you."

Turning to the crowd he said, "You folks decide who is going to work with which family and figure out the details. I think you need to appoint someone to plan how much of what food crops you will raise this year, and from there decide who will be responsible for doing the work. Let's get back together next week and see what has been decided and what we need in the way of seed and other things. There isn't any time to waste here people. That's all I have."

He sat down beside Marta and let the crowd begin to mingle. They heard people talking about what had been said, a few of the kids expressing doubt that cars and trucks would ever quit working, most of them being quickly corrected by their parents. The adults were looking somber. Roscoe had wondered if there would be any dissension about the necessity to convert to animal power, but he hadn't heard any. The idea seemed to have gotten through to them.

Don Blake came over to where they were sitting and said, "I think I found a spring up on the hill behind the cabins. It isn't much water coming out, but it's always been wet back there. We saw it when we were cutting firewood and had to work around that place because it was making icy spots down the hill into that little creek over there." He pointed to a small gully that made it's way toward the lake.

"I was wondering if there is any way to get that water to the cabins so we don't have to carry water from the lake?"

Roscoe thought about that and said, "Let's find a shovel and go poke around up there." He led the way to the park maintenance shop and found a rusty shovel and commented, "Somebody needs to take care of the tools in here, or you'll all be doing without them before long."

They walked 80 yards up the hill and came to a place that wasn't as muddy as the gully below it. Dead leaves were piled deep in the gully, which Roscoe began to scrape away with the shovel. Soon he had uncovered a trickle of water. As he worked his way uphill, the trickle became clearer and more defined.

A few steps uphill it disappeared. He worked his way back down until he found where seeps were coming out of the ground in two or three places. Roscoe stuck the shovel in and dug for a while. The hole he created filled pretty quickly. A few more shovelfuls of dirt and it became mud he was digging out. When he had a hole 2 feet across, there was a good stream coming out of the yellowish clay he'd uncovered.

Don said, "We need some kind of tank to catch the water."

Roscoe agreed, saying, "Yeah. Let's go down and talk to some people."

After looking the place over, Chris and Eddie said they could dig a pond below the spring and catch the runoff. They'd have to divert the stream until they finished the pond, but they both thought it could work.

Chris said, "If we can get a pond here to hold the water, then it ain't no big deal to pipe it downhill. Have to bury a pipe and make a filter of some kind, like a box or a barrel with gravel in it to keep the trash out."

Roscoe said, "How about doing it like Clay did his springhouse, only a lot bigger?"

Eddie said, "You mean a building over it?"

Roscoe said, "Yes. If we can keep it clean enough, this might be good enough to drink without boiling. Maybe we can get Doc to test it some way. But we'd have to keep all the leaves and critters out of it."

Chris thought about it and said, "That's a pretty big job. Take a lot of concrete to do that."

Don said, "It sure would be nice to have running water in the cabins. It'd be worth a lot of work. It looks like we've got another baby coming and you know what that means. My wife would sure be happy to have running water again. Me too, since I get to carry it now."

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 45

"We don't have a landfill to dispose of truckloads of disposable diapers, even if we could find enough of them. We'll have to find some cloth diapers, or make some," Jerry Hawkins said.

His wife was less than pleased at the idea of washing diapers.

"Have you any idea how many dirty diapers a baby can make in a day? Do you want to wash them?"

"I might have to, if you aren't up to it," he said. "I know laundry is a problem now and babies will make it a lot worse. I've been thinking about it, but I don't have an answer yet. I do know we had better get some baby stuff before this gardening thing starts, because they are saying we'll have to work at that every day like a job."

Debra said, "If we could get that spring water piped down to the cabins it would sure help. We need

some big tubs to do laundry, too. The metal trash cans were a big help, but we need something better if we can find it."

She didn't complain too much, because Jerry had been helping with the laundry and knew the problems as well as she did.

A couple days later the pregnant women had all gotten together and talked over what they needed. They had lists of things and had been talking about where they might find what they wanted. It wasn't long until they had their men planning a shopping trip.

"I think our best bet will be to go to Seymour or Columbus," Tiffany Blake said. "The stores around here close are all picked over now and there's not all that much left."

Don agreed with her and said, "There's probably a lot of other things we can get in a bigger city that we'll need. I need to talk to the other guys and make some lists. This might get to be a big trip with a lot of trucks."

\*\*\*\*\*

A longer trip meant more precautions for both people and vehicles. More food was prepared for travelling in case they had trouble and didn't get back as soon as they planned. Some longer term food was tucked away in backpacks. Eddie and Chris loaded their construction truck with all the spare batteries they could find and diesel fuel in the big tank on the back. The side boxes were loaded with mechanic's tools and a few parts. Finally, they strapped down a barrel of gasoline with a hand pump on it and a second barrel of water for drinking, cooking, and radiators if they needed it. Their gas powered compressor and a large generator was checked out to make sure they ran okay then covered with tarps.

Kevin Collier and Walter Rankin had acquired more firearms on the last trip to the Clarkville area. Each had outfitted themselves with combat style shotguns and semiautomatic rifles from the local SWAT team's equipment. They had taken the sniper rifles, too, but didn't have anyone trained to use them effectively yet. Walter made sure every vehicle had at least a shotgun and a long range rifle on board and people that knew how to use them.

They planned on finding spare utility trailers to haul home their loads, but two of the park's trailers that had been emptied of goods were taken along behind diesel pickups. Two more pickups were taken that had both fifth wheel and bumper hitches, hoping they could find some livestock trailers. Those two trucks had crew cabs that allowed 4 of the women to go for choosing what they needed.

Fortunately, the firearms were not needed. The only obstacles the group ran into were tree limbs and a few wrecked cars on the roads. The one highway rest stop had human remains in the bathrooms, so they group elected to use the surrounding brushy area instead, but they did avail themselves of the stock of toilet paper they found stored there. The big truck stop at the interstate exit had a backup generator. It turned out to be easier to get it started than to hot wire their own generator to it. Everyone got their fuel tanks topped off while Eddie Grimes and Albert Harris got busy starting a semi with an empty trailer and a semi fuel tanker they found at the next gas station down the road. To avoid splitting up the group, those two would follow wherever the rest went.

Department stores were systematically looked over and goods carefully chosen. Pallets of canning jars were loaded with cases of spare lids and rings, but the big find was a store that stocked All American pressure canners. Those had a tapered metal sealing design that did not require a rubber gasket and would last practically forever. The Wal Mart, Big Lots, and Target stores were practically emptied of

baby clothes and children's clothing, but no cloth diapers were found. The women loaded 2 pallets of disposable diapers over the protests of some of the men.

The women were on a quest, however, and stopped at a big fabric store where they loaded up on bolts of cloth for making diapers and much more. They found 6 new Janome sewing machines designed to be powered by a foot treadle, but there was no treadle with them. They were intended to be used for converting antique treadle machines, so the women informed their men they would search out every antique store on the way home until they found enough treadle bases. That proved to be the most difficult of all, requiring many stops and searches before they found 8 treadle machines, but some of them were good enough to use without any work. Belts for them were another problem, but the fabric shop had provided a few spares. The men said that Jacob would have to make any more belts they might need of leather.

The fuel tanker truck developed problems before they got out of the city. That was as simple as having to change fuel filters, but finding and installing those took a couple hours. It was sundown before they left the last antique mall along the interstate and began the long trip home. They decided they would press on and endure the 3 hour trip at speeds low enough to be safe on the deteriorating roads. A very tired and stressed out group parked the trucks at the campground and ate a late supper, warmed up by those who had stayed behind.

Walter Rankin observed that they would have a parking problem, but nobody was worrying about it much that night.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 46

"What's the matter?" Don asked his wife.

Tiffany said, "I am so depressed after seeing all the... The dead people. The destruction. No, not destruction. Decay. The whole world is rotting and growing up in weeds. All those cars along the road with dead people in them. I got sick. I'm still sick."

Don stopped unloading the truck and said, "Yeah. Me too. It's depressing as hell to look at what we had and now it's all going to ruin."

He said nothing for a while, just sitting on the back of the semi trailer with his wife. They saw their son Luke, now almost 5, come out of their cabin at a run toward them. He got to the trailer and skidded to a stop, looking up at them.

"Didja bring me somethin'?" He asked with a hopeful grin.

Tiffany couldn't resist him and said, "Yes, we did sweetie. We got you some new clothes. Do you want to come up here and help me look for toys?"

"YEAH!"

Don boosted the little boy up into the trailer and followed him in.

"It's just boxes! Is that all you got is boxes?"

"It's what's IN the boxes that counts. Let's go look in 'em."

"Okay! I'll look in this one. Hey, this is all bottles in here."

"Try the next one."

"WOW! It's fulla toys! I don't want any dolls. There's lot of cars and books and stuff in here."

Luke was bending over the edge of the deep box, only the bottom half of him showing until he came out red faced with an armload of toys. "Can I have these Daddy?"

"Yep! That's why we got 'em. Now, you take those up to the house and tell your sisters to come have a look, okay?"

"Yeah, Daddy. Get me down on the ground."

Tiffany smiled at her son as he ran toward the cabin, arms full with all he could carry. Don said, "That makes it worth the trip, doesn't it?"

She said, "Yeah, I guess it does."

"Let's get through some more of this stuff and see if we can get to the kids' clothes, okay?"

"Okay." She looked at him and said, "The kids are what it's all about. We have to do it all for them. So they have a world to live in."

She wiped away a tear and went back into the trailer to begin sorting again.

\*\*\*\*\*

The track hoe's engine growled and another big bucket of dirt came out of the hole below the spring. Eddie had dug a temporary ditch around to the side for the spring to drain past where they worked and now was deepening the hole where the big springhouse would go. The ground was soft and unstable so soon after the Spring thaw to be pouring concrete for some time yet, but they wanted to do as much as possible now. It was muddy work. The big machine would have sunk into the muck except for the men cutting poles and laying a road bed for it travel up into the woods.

While Eddie worked on the hole, a crew of the men from the park were working for Chris using a Ditch Witch from the town's equipment rental business to lay pipe that would one day carry water to the cabin's water system. They wanted to run the pipe as close as they dared to the springhouse and stop until the concrete work was completed. Three fourths of the 80-some yards of ditch was finished when the machine broke down beyond their ability to fix it. The cutting chain had broken and there were no repair parts, nor did they have the ability to weld anything. The maintenance building had a welder, but there was no generator around big enough to power it.

"Didn't that guy down at Pekin have a welder on a truck?" Chris asked Roscoe.

"Probably. I never was in his shop but once and didn't pay much attention. We could go look."

They promptly set off for the small town about 15 miles away. By evening they were back with the old

truck that had a gasoline powered welder on the back and huge boxes of tools on the side. Chris said, "I ain't no real welder. All I ever did was stick rebar together and patch some stuff on construction sites. Clay is a lot better'n me at this."

Roscoe said, "Let's go see if he'll do it."

The next morning Clay was there with Benjamin. It took several men to wrestle the heavy, muddy chain out of the ditch and back into place. They wired it together until the machine could run just enough to get the chain in position to be welded. Clay finished the repair by noon and the machine was back cutting a ditch.

Jim Crawford had seen the machine while it was broken down and thought that it would be very hard to get it out of the way if it broke down completely. That led him to consider what they would do with the big collection of trucks and heavy equipment they had around the park when the day came that they no longer worked. He thought about this at some length and had some ideas.

The grass was beginning to grow fast around the campground, so Jerry Hawkins, Jeff Hobart, and Raymond Alexander were busy trying to finish a barbed wire fence around the whole camp area, beginning and ending at the lake. The objective was to allow cattle to be pastured all around the cabin area to avoid the need to mow the grass, and grow some beef in the process. Albert Harris had supervised this operation for a couple days until the men learned how it was done. There were few fenceposts needed, and those only down by the lake where the ground was cleared of trees. The rest of the fence wandered in an irregular line from one tree to another. It wasn't beautiful, but it would hold cattle.

A late March storm put a stop to all the work for a couple days, but when the weather cleared up the men were back in the woods building fence. They were cutting some trees for firewood that were in the way when Jacob Knepp's 13 year old son Isaac drove their horse drawn wagon in with a couple cans of milk. Men were waiting to ride to their farm to work that day.

Isaac commented to the workers, "They should have a horse to pull the logs out of the woods. We should bring one over here soon."

Gregory Stone said, "The problem is, nobody here knows how to handle a horse."

Isaac chuckled and said, "Today some will learn. We are cleaning the barn and hauling manure to the hay field. Some of you will be loading the manure with pitchforks and some will be driving the manure spreaders. It would be fair to take turns at both jobs. You can rest while you drive the team."

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 47

"That arm is broken, for sure. We'll have to take him to the doctor in the valley," Jason Flynn told his wife Lori.

David was pale with the pain. His mother had given him a pain pill, but it hadn't taken effect yet, so his voice was strained when he said, "That was a stupid thing to do. I should never have been up in that tree."

Lori told him, "We need to be extra careful now. It's really lucky for us that there is a doctor close by."

Jason said, "It will be a lot longer trip when the trucks quit working. Better be thinking about being even more careful in the future."

Lori said, "I'm going with you. I want to be there with him."

Wayne said, "You go ahead. We'll hold the fort here. But we should all go to their Sunday meeting. We haven't seen them all winter."

Jason had the arm immobilized with a splint and some tape, but his son was still hurting at every bump in the road on the way to the valley. The arm was swelling so they had to loosen the tape.

Doctor Van Derver told Michelle, "I need cast materials from the basement, but first let's get some pain meds in this young man."

Turning to his parents, he asked, "Has he taken anything for pain yet?"

Lori said, "I gave him a Tylenol with codeine. Here's the bottle."

"Okay, he can have another of those now and a couple more in 4 hours. That should help a lot. For now, let's put that arm in some cold water here to reduce the swelling and it will make it feel better, too."

\*\*\*\*\*

Spring rains started and the springhouse project came to a halt. The fencing crew stayed busy, trying to get it finished so they could go to work at the Amish farms. Meanwhile, Eddie and Chris took Kevin Collins and Albert Harris along on a trip to Utica to collect some solar equipment. They worked some long days due to searching for long ladders to dismount the panels from 2 storey houses, then loading and hauling everything back home. They decided to take an extra truck the second day, a new van box style, and pack the extra equipment in it for storage until they could get it installed in the new location.

The battery banks had to be disassembled to load them because of the weight. Even so, it took all 4 men to load the batteries and it was half a day's job from one house. These were Rolls-Surette batteries, and were large, heavy cells.

Eddie said, "Doc Anthony said to look at the control panel and read the voltage meter after we unhook the panels from it. It's reading full charge, so that's good. I guess the whole thing kept working by itself. He said to check the water level, too, but they look all right. I can't see any plates like he warned about."

Chris said, "They're low on water, though. We need to get some distilled water somewhere and fill 'em up. Grocery should have some, if it ain't all froze and busted the jugs. Let's go to Kroger's."

"You and Kevin go ahead. We'll start taking this other stuff apart. We need to keep all the stuff from one house together so we don't get it mixed up, and there's a lot of those oddball outlets to take out."

\*\*\*\*\*



Two weeks later, Marta Beam was overjoyed with her new lighting system. She invited Chris, Eddie, Doctor Van Derver, and Michelle to dinner and did her best to make it a fine meal. By the look of all the groaning people holding their tummies after desert, she succeeded. Roscoe broke out some of his homemade wine after the meal and everyone retired to the living room to let the food digest.

"I truly thank all of you for making this happen," Roscoe told the group. "I hope it lasts a very long time."

Anthony said, "The batteries will be the first to go, unless you get a lightning strike that wipes out some of the electronics."

"How long will the batteries last?"

"Maybe 10 years, maybe a bit longer if you baby them. The Rolls batteries are about as good as it gets for a lead-acid type. Because they had a spare set with no acid in them, that set will last about that long, too, so you should get 18 to 20 years from the system if all goes well. There's enough of the light bulbs to last longer than that. The CFL's last a long time, but the LED's last practically forever, barring accidents or damage."

Marta said, "So, this isn't a permanent thing?"

Anthony said, "Nothing lasts forever. My nickel-iron batteries will outlast me, but they aren't very efficient at charging. It's a trade-off."

Roscoe said, "Nothing we are doing these days will really last all that long. We're just trying to get the next generation a leg up. All we're doing is buying time. Time that we hope will allow us to teach the next generation how to live in a world without oil and electricity."

Michelle said, "That is depressing. Can't we get things working again like they were?"

Roscoe shook his head and said, "Not with so few people. There just aren't enough around to run factories and mines and stores and everything. Even if there are a lot more people like us that survived in out of the way places, it's not enough. The technology will be lost before we have enough people to make it happen again."

Anthony said, "Dad and I talked about a situation like this, only we were expecting a nuclear war. He said he thought we would be lucky to live any better than people did in the 1700's, before steam power. Of course, it all depends on how many people live through it, and what they can pass on to the next generation."

Michelle began to cry. Anthony noticed and put his arm around her, then said, "For our lifetimes, we should be able to keep most of our lifestyle, with the exception of the electronics. They are just not that durable. But the indoor plumbing, modern wood stoves, and water pumps and all that, there are enough things laying around to keep that going for a long time. Manufactured things, too, like dishes, clothing, buckets, and mechanical things. We can live pretty well. Medicines will be one of the first things to run out, so we have to look at herbal alternatives. We need to find some Poppy seeds and get some opium growing. Pain killers will be gone before long. Their shelf life isn't that good."

Marta had looked thoughtful and listened closely. Finally she said, "What should we be teaching our kids? What level of technology can they maintain through THEIR lifetimes?"

Anthony took a deep breath and let it out slowly. He said, "I think we need to teach them how the Amish live now. And they need to learn how to make things by hand. Everyday things they can make of wood and metal and leather, or any other natural materials. I think they can maintain that level of technology, if we can get some of the basic industries going again in our lifetimes, especially steel, glassmaking, and some chemistry. Oh God, we need more people so badly. I hope every woman of childbearing age has as many kids as they can safely. We are going to need them all. People are beyond priceless now."

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 48

The Sunday meeting had wound down from the traditional prayer service and dinner to conversation at the school building.

"We need to teach our kids how to work wood the old ways," Amos said. There's no electric now, and soon there won't be any gas engines and such. They'll have to make things like great grandpa did. Take an axe an' a crosscut saw to the woods and be able to build a house and make furniture for it. Well, they'd need some other tools, like some auger bits, an' a froe to split shingles and that sorta thing, too."

Eddie said, "Why don't we raid every antique shop we can find and get a buncha that stuff together now?"

"Sounds like a good idea to me," Jim Collins said. "There's no time like the present. I'll get started on that tomorrow. Sylvia knows where every antique shop is within 200 miles. We'll take a big truck and get it all. Amos, can you go along to show us what we need to get?"

"Yeah, I s'pose I can. You'll have to tell me ahead of time so I can plan for it. Delilah can tell the men workers what to do for a day or two, and she can help 'em with the horses."

Jim said, "Well, it's still too wet to plow and too muddy for Eddie and Chris to be doin' much, so how about we all go sometime soon?"

Chris said, "We need to collect some good new tools, too. Carpenter stuff, like squares, an' levels, an' handsaws an' drill bits an' all that. Wrenches and mechanic's stuff would be good, too. Gotta have someplace to keep all this outa the weather, too."

Marta said, "There is the big school building in town."

Chris frowned and said, "The roof on that won't last all that long without it gets tarred ever' few years. I'm thinkin' there's a church or two around town that has slate roofs on 'em. That'll last for ages. If we're thinkin' for the long time ahead here, we gotta keep all the metal stuff dry."

Jacob said, "We have not gotten all that is useful from our old communities. We should do that, too. There is much to be gotten there. The wood cooking stoves, that is important, and the farm machinery. If we can get those things where they will be protected, our kids will have them. They will need those things."

Marta said, "They will need to know how to make those things, too. They need to know how to make paper and ink and pens. And make sugar and pottery and leather, and so many more things. If we could

just find another community to share this burden, it would help so much."

Clay said, "Amos, I think I know where to find you all the kind of tools you want. Before you go runnin' off with these guys, come with me tomorrow and I'll show you. You can go get the rest later."

\*\*\*\*\*

On top of the plateau, Clay led Amos to the Cedar thicket and took him into the old log building the way he had come when he was seeking shelter. Amos said, "How'd you find this?"

"I was huntin' and kinda lost and it was comin' a bad storm. I came to the thicket to get out of the worst of it, and ran into this. Come on in and have a look at the rest of it."

Inside the wood shop room, Amos gawked at the finely made cabinets and when he opened them one after another, his jaw dropped. Even in the dim light of the distant doorway, he could see all the tools to make fine furniture and much more by hand. Clay opened the inside shutters and said, "I'll go out and see if I can get you some light in here."

Moments later, the shop flooded with daylight as Clay opened the outer shutters that had protected the windows for so long. Amos was muttering to himself in German when he came back inside.

"What are you sayin'?"

"Uh, I was just readin' on the planes here. These were made in Germany, and they are like new. I know who built this now. There's this story about this Amishman who had a fallin' out with the elders in his community up north. He left and and said he'd never speak to them again as long as he lived. he moved down south someplace and they never heard any more from him."

"His name was Johann Schweitzer an' he made high priced furniture. He'd sold his big farm and had a lot of money an' he moved out here by hisself, just him and his wife. They didn't have no kids. My folks had a beautiful desk he made. Had his name on it just like in this cabinet. They said he'd come around and take orders for furniture, then deliver it when it was done. Never told anybody where he lived. He prob'ly died when I was still a little kid. I guess this is where he ended up. He was a kinda screwy old man they say, but he always did everything the very best. Even made his own hardware for the furniture, Dad told me, 'cause the store stuff didn't suit him."

Clay said, "I wonder why the roof never leaked on this place? It must be 40 years old or more."

They went outside and looked at the roof closely. It had some kind of metal on it, but it was old and dark brown from the leaves and debris on it. Clay took out his belt knife and scraped on it a little.

"It's COPPER!" he said. "The roof is shingled with copper! That must have cost a fortune!"

Amos said, "I told ya he done ever'thing the best!"

Clay smiled and said, "Come around here. I got more to show you."

He found the other end of the building deep in a dense juniper thicket. He had to cut a few small trees with his belt axe to get one of the big doors open enough to get inside. Clay said, simply, "The blacksmith's shop."

Amos' jaw dropped again as he looked over the collection of fine tools, all well preserved in the weather tight building. He looked back at Clay and said, "It's kinda like dyin' an' goin' to heaven for a poor Amish man that loves tools!"

"Ain't nobody claimin' it now, so I suppose it's all yours if you want it."

Amos didn't say anything. Clay said, "Hey, we should look around outside. I was in a hurry to leave the last time I was here, but I thought I saw more buildings off to the South there someplace."

They made their way through the dense thicket and came out into hardwood forest again, slightly downill from the big shop building. One end of the cabin was almost hidden by fallen limbs and leaves, the collection of many years. They ventured around to the front of the cabin on the south side and found the door. The shutters were closed on the windows here, too, so Clay opened them, making a squeaking noise as they moved for the first time in a long while.

Inside, the cabin was as neat as the shop, like someone had simply closed up the place and left. Amos thought about that and said, "He musta gone someplace and died before he got home. I heard that his wife died first. His wagon ain't here, neither, so he musta gone away somewhere's."

Cupboards of simple design and impeccable workmanship lined the kitchen walls. A sink with a drain and a handmade wooden water pump on the counter sat across from the wood cooking range. It was rusted on top, but the nickel plated trim was still pristine. Pewter and china dishes sat in a hutch along the wall near the small dining table with just two chairs. Copper pans hung from pegs overhead, now somewhat tarnished. Cast iron skillets and a Dutch oven sat on the iron trivets near the range, rusted, but not badly. Mice had been in the cupboards and made a mess of some things and also destroyed the mattress and bedding, but the heating stove was still just fine except for a rusted out stovepipe.

Clay remembered seeing a mostly rotted water barrel outside found it still had some water in it, but there was no pipe to the kitchen. He thought then that there must be a well somewhere. Back inside, he lifted the top of the wooden water pump and poured a cup of water in from his canteen. Pumping it a couple dozen times brought out water that ran down the drain in the sink. Clay smiled at Amos and said, "What do you want to bet he had a fine garden spot, too?"

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 49

Amos said, "I wonder how you get from here to a road? He can't have come up that hill to get here."

Clay said, "I dunno. We can look around a bit. There was a field of some sort from here out that way to the west. Let's go look out there."

They missed it the first time past, but then saw where the trees were smaller in one area and went into the woods there. A dim trail led off along the most level part of the plateau. As they followed it deeper into the woods, it became a clear enough old wagon road. Deadfalls blocked it in many places, but the tracks were plain. They walked for a quarter mile and came to a gravel road. Clay walked down the road to a bend and said, "I know where I'm at now! This is the old road to the lake! We go down this road another half a mile and we come off the hill down beside Jacob's place!"

"You're kiddin' me!"

"Nope. We ain't more'n a mile from your place, Amos!"

"That's closer than your place. Let's go to mine and I'll drive you home. Say, let's mark this lane somehow so we can find it from this end. I don't want to climb that hill again to get there."

Clay said, "Good idea. I'll blaze some trees with the axe. If we bring some equipment up here, we can clear that lane again pretty quick. I take it that you want that shop."

"Yeah, I sure do! I just don't know for sure how I'll work it yet. We got a good farm going now and this place would need the brush and trees cleared again. It's like starting all over again."

Clay nodded agreement as Amos went on.

"Maybe I should keep 'em both. My kids will need a place when they grow up, and I'd rather do shop work than farm. Shop work would be a lot easier when I get old, too. I think we'll just take this slow and see how it works out."

\*\*\*\*\*

The last day of March was rainy, so there wasn't much going on at the farms. Jim and Sylvia Collier took Amos in their truck followed by Eddie and Chris in their's to go antique hunting. They began at a large antique mall just off the interstate near Memphis, Indiana and acquired a U-Haul trailer at Columbus to increase their hauling ability. They went on toward Indianapolis to other shops on Sylvia's list.

The Flynn's were stuck indoors, too, so Wayne thought it would be a good time to clean the hog barn on the farm they had appropriated. There was an open shed on one side where they had a manure spreader parked. David couldn't be much help shovelling manure with a broken arm, so he stayed at home to be of what help he could there.

It was a muddy mess around the hog barn. Brandon, his father and his uncle all wore rubber muck boots to shovel out the indoor pens into the spreader just outside. They chased the hogs to the outdoor pens while they cleaned out of the worst of it, then tossed in buckets of water to flush out the rest to the lot outside opposite the spreader. Finally, they scattered some straw in each sow's pen so she had something clean to lay on. All 3 of these sows were ready to have baby pigs soon. Their boar hog had a pen of his own at the end of the barn. He was beginning to respond to being fed twice a day and being less aggressive. Still, nobody wanted to go in the pen with him. These hogs had been nearly wild when they had baited them into the barnlot and closed the gate behind them.

Wayne had figured out the feed grinder and gotten some books on feed rations and breeding of hogs. He was convinced that hogs were the fastest way to produce a lot of meat on a farm, and was on his way to proving that. He admitted there was a lot to learn about how to do it with less work, however. The mess would be less after the baby pigs were weaned and they could be let into the large outside lots.

"They won't let us in the house smelling like this," Brandon said.

"Tell your Mom what Granddad used to say about his pigs. He said they smelled like money," Jason said.

"They'd come closer to believing that than saying they smelled like food," Wayne said. "We can go to

the creek and wash our boots off. That'll keep the worst of it out of the truck."

"Dad," Brandon asked, "What are we gonna do with all those pigs when they grow up?"

Jason said, "For one thing, one of them goes to the doctor for setting David's arm and checking your Mom while she's pregnant. I told him I'd bring him a couple hams and a some bacon. The rest will likely go to those people at the lake. There's about 40 of them and they eat a lot."

"How are they gonna pay you for the pigs?"

"We haven't worked it all out yet. Some of them are out hunting up some tools that we need, though, and another man said he'd see to it we got a truck load of gasoline and diesel fuel with preservative put in it."

Brandon said, "But you could go find those things yourself."

"Yeah, we could, but it takes time and we have a lot to do. We need to get started buidling a grain mill where that big spring is over the hill. We have the crops to raise and doing construction won't leave us much time to go running around."

They all slosed their boots in the fast flowing creek and got them clean then washed their hands and shook them dry as they walked back to the truck.

"We need to get some horses, too," Wayne said. "I want to know how to do all the farming with them before the tractor quits working. We're going to need some help from the Amish people over there to catch some more horses and learn about how to take care of them. I'm hoping the hogs will help with paying that bill, too."

They rounded the corner of the barn where the truck was parked when Brndon looked back as some movement caught his attention. He stopped and looked closely where the road came down the hill.

"Dad, there's something in the woods back there by the hill."

The two men turned to look.

Slowly, four young people came out of the woods and waved at them. Brandon waved back, then the men waved at them. The people began to walk down the road toward them, talking among themselves. As they got closer, it became obvious they were young and very thin.

"Hello!" Wayne said. "Are you folks hungry?"

"We sure are. We ain't found nothin' to eat since yesterday."

"Let's get you fed first, and we can talk later," Jason said.

They looked to be teenagers, all with long hair. Brandon realized after looking closely that two of them were girls and his manner changed immediately.

"If you'll get in the back of the truck, we'll take you to the house and Mom'll cook you something," he told them. He noticed they were stumbling some and looked exhausted.

"Here, we'll help you up," Brandon said, and the men came to help. "Looks like you all are pretty tired."

"We've been walking a long ways. Brandi's grandmother lives down here someplace," one of the girls said.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 50

The kids came in the house timidly then huddled around the wood stove. Lori and Janice saw instantly that these kids were half starved. Hannah, Logan, and David crowded around and were asking questions a mile a minute.

Janice said, Hey, you guys leave these kids alone, okay? They are cold and hingry and we can talk later, so be polite."

She got the pot of hot water off the wood stove and poured 4 cups of it then added a spoonful of coffee to each one and sat the sugar bowl on the table with some spoons. "Sit down and drink. We'll have some soup hot in just a minute," she said.

Lori had moved the soup kettle to the hotter burners over the firebox and opened the stove draft. the kids still had not taken their wet coats off.

"You'll get warm faster if you take those wet coats off and get close to the stove," Janice said. The kids moved slowly to comply, hanging the coats on their chairs. Lori picked up the coats and hung them on the wood pegs by the side door. The soup was warming fast as she got bowls and a loaf of homemade bread on the table, then ladled the vegetable beef stew into the bowls.

By the time the kids had eaten half their stew, their heads were nodding. Lori looked at Janice and said, "We'll fix you a place to take a nap. There'll be more food when you wake up."

The women opened the couch up into a bed, and arranged the cushions of built in couches by the wall into beds. They had designed the living area like a camper to make the most use of the space, and it was paying off today. Originally, they had intended the extra sleeping spaces for their parents, but they had all passed away before the real emergency hit. Extra blankets and pillows came out of overhead cupboards.

Lori led the girls to the fold out couch and said, "Lay down and rest. We'll take care of everything. If anyone needs to use the outhouse, it is just outside the back door there."

All four of the kids were asleep in minutes. The family sat down at their usual places at the table to talk quietly.

"We'll have to use the breakfast bar besides the table so we can all eat at the same time," Lori said.

Janice said, "All they had were those little backpacks. They're going to need clothes."

Hannah said, "I bet my clothes would fit the girls. I'm as tall as they are."

David said, "My stuff will fit the boys, and some of Brandon's clothes will fit them too. We've got lots of spare stuff from going to that store."

Brandon said, "Let's get some things for them to change into and have it ready for when they wake up."

Lori said, "Be sure you find warm socks for them. We'll get shoes later when they can try them on."

The kids jumped up to go look for clothing and disappeared down into the basement.

Jason and Wayne looked at each other and said what they were both thinking. "Instant family!"

Janice smiled and said, "If you wanted more kids, this is a lot easier than the other way to get them."

Lori said, "I hope none of them are sick. They've been out in this weather and you know they've been cold and not had enough to eat. We'd better get them to the doctor soon for a checkup. I'll check temperatures tonight before bedtime."

Jason said, "All I noticed were some runny noses. If that's all that's wrong with them, they are lucky."

"They may not wake up before morning," Wayne said. "I wonder how they survived all this time?"

Janice said, "We'd better wake them up for supper. They all need some nourishment, and if they haven't been eating much, they need to eat small amounts and often."

"Those coats don't smell so good," Jason commented, wrinkling his nose at the kids' steaming coats hanging opposite the hot kitchen stove.

"You guys don't smell real sweet yourselves," Janice said, "Better hang those clothes of yours on the back porch to air out. You can wear them the next time you go to the barn."

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 51

Two long days on the road had the antique hunters worn out and wanting to get home. They had their U-haul trailer packed with things besides both truck beds loaded down, so they called it good and rolled into the valley at sundown. They split up at the tee intersection by Roscoe's farm, Eddie and Chris going to their place and Jim turning toward Amos' place.

Jim Collier drove in and parked near Amos' shop building. It was a large pole barn with a concrete floor, only part of which was in use for his blacksmithing and buggy work. Jim backed the trailer up to the door and they unloaded what Amos wanted for himself and his Amish friends. They left the rest on the trailer to be stored elsewhere, and Jim went home, glad to get there.

Eddie and Chris had shopped in different places, mostly big hardware stores that had modern tools. Their 2 ton truck was loaded down 3 feet deep with tools of all sorts, covered with a heavy canvas tarp they had taken off a semi trailer. They were both tired and left the load sit for the night. Supper was what they could find handy before they tumbled into bed.



\*\*\*\*\*

"Supper's about ready girls," Janice said gently. "Better wake up and get some food in you."

Both girls rolled over and stretched, yawned, then looked up with surprised, almost fearful faces until they figured out where they were.

"I don't even know your name," one girl yawned. "Thanks for everything. We were so tired."

"I'm Janice Flynn. What's your name?"

"Brandy Sullivan. And this is Amy Richard's. I hope we didn't get your bed all dirty."

"Don't worry about it. We have some fresh clothes for you to try on while supper is warming up. You can wash up in the bathroom there. The water works, but we have to heat the hot water on the stove. I'll bring you some. We just stand in the shower stall and wash ourselves then rinse. There are towels in there. See if these clothes fit. If not, we can find you something else. We just guessed at sizes."

"Oh! Thanks!" Amy said. The girls disappeared into the small bathroom.

Brandon and Logan went to the boys who were sound asleep and said, "Hey you guys. Mom's almost got supper ready. Better wake up."

"Mmph. Uhm, what?"

The boys woke as disoriented as the girls, but soon relaxed and began to sit up, yawning.

"Uh, I gotta go..." the bigger boy said.

Logan said, "Out that door is the outhouse."

When everyone had washed up and dressed, Lori said, "It's ready. Come sit down and eat."

"I just reheated the stew, because we need to use it up. But there are fresh biscuits to go with it and we have jelly for them."

"Oh, that sounds GOOD!" the bigger boy said.

"All you kids sit down at the table. Us old folks will eat at the bar," Janice said. When they were seated, she added, "Don't overeat tonight, because if you've been hungry a while it won't sit very well. No point in making yourselves sick. There's plenty of food and we'll have a good breakfast in the morning early, too."

The kids dug in. Logan asked the boys, "What are your names? I'm Logan, and that's my sister Hannah, and that's David with the cast and he's Brandon. Our last name is Flynn."

"Uh, I'm Pat Hughes and that's Nathan Hertel."

"Where are you guys from?" David asked.

Amy said, "We lived in Columbus and we all worked together at his dad's nursery." She pointed at Nathan. "When... when everybody got sick, we left together in Pat's car and tried to go home..."

Tears rolled down her cheeks as she said softly, "I thought I was over that." She wiped her eyes and looked down at her food.

"None of you have to tell about it unless you want to," Jason said. "Everybody's got things they'd rather not talk about and that's okay. Let's talk about now. Go ahead and eat what you want, then we'll see about things like finding some new shoes that fit you and stuff like that."

Nathan spoke for the first time and said, "You don't have to do that for us."

"We want to," Lori said. "Hey, are all of you feeling okay? Are you sick or anything that needs medicine?"

Brandi said, "We're just tired. We were trying to get to my Grandparent's farm down here. The road looks different, but I think it is just down the road. She was pretty old, so I never thought she'd, uh, make it, you know? But it's a good place and they always canned a lot of food, you know? So I thought we could stay there. They had a wood stove and that's the only thing that works now..."

Wayne said, "I'm sorry Brandi, but I don't know of anyone else down here still living. We can go look tomorrow if you want. I guess the place would be yours now if they aren't there."

Despite her words, Brandi looked stricken at the news. Janice said, "Tonight you sleep here. And as many nights after that as you want to. Call us family if you feel like it. That's how we feel about all of you kids. Call this your home now, until you find something you like better, okay?"

Pat said, "Do you really mean that? I mean, how can you just say that? You don't even know us."

Jason said, "It's like this. There's not many people left and we have to take care of everybody now. We know some other people not too far away, but here in this valley there is just us. We'd love to have you here, and that goes for all of us."

Lori said, "Yes, we mean it. Now eat what you feel comfortable eating and we'll make sure you have what else you need, okay?"

Wayne said, "There is room for you all here. We built this for a bugout place. We lived in Louisville and when things got bad, we came here to stay. The place has enough beds for the 4 of you, because we expected more of our family to come here, but our parents had already passed on before the plague hit."

Jason said, "We have been out salvaging things and have plenty of whatever you need. We grow our own food now, so there is plenty for everyone."

Nathan said, "I know about growing things. Dad had a nursery and we grew garden plants and fruit trees and shade trees to sell. These guys all worked there in the summer, so they know about it, too. We can help you. We'll all be glad to work."

Janice said, "That's very nice of you, but you need to get enough to eat for a while before we talk about working."

Lori said, "Right now I want to take everyone's temperature to see if any of you are running a fever. We'll take you all to the doctor and get you a checkup in a day or two."

Amy said with wide eyes, "You know a DOCTOR?"

Lori said, "Sure do. He's the one that put the cast on David's arm. He lives about 6 or 7 miles away in the community that Jason mentioned." She got up and got a thermometer from the medicine cabinet in the bathroom. It was the old mercury type. she read it and shook it for a minute then looked at it again and stuck it in Amy's mouth. She went back for a bottle of alcohol for sterilizing it later. As instructed, Amy held it carefully under her tongue.

"I know this is old fashioned, but it works and it doesn't have batteries to run down," she told the kids.

Pat said, "We didn't think anybody was still alive. Well, except for that one guy that chased us..."

Lori passed the thermometer to the other girl after swishing it in alcohol and shaking the mercury down.

Jason asked, "Are you kids okay with staying here?"

Pat said, "Heck yeah, we are. We been looking for someplace. That's why we came to find her grandparents, 'cause everyone we knew was dead..."

Brandi said, "Thank you."

Amy and the others followed in a chorus of thank you's. Nathan's eyes were looking sleepy and Pat wasn't far behind him.

"Okay kids," Janice said. "Everything else can wait until tomorrow. You boys get your temps checked and if nobody has a fever, we're all going to bed. It's almost dark and we don't use the lights much. We'll get up about daylight and get breakfast started, okay? We'll leave a little light on tonight so you can find your way around if you need to get up. You'll have to sleep in your underwear tonight, but we'll find something else for you later."

The kids didn't wake up until they heard Jason starting a fire in the wood cook stove.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 52

Sylvia said, "We didn't get to look at any of the smaller antique shops on that trip. There's a lot more out there we could collect."

"Maybe next Fall, after the harvest is in we can go look some more."

Sylvia scowled at that. "And how reliable are the trucks going to be in 6 months, or a year from now? I think we'd better be getting all we can together pretty fast. All we hit were the ones at Exit 76, and the one at Bloomington, and those little ones on highway 50. There's a big antique mall up by Richmond, and more around the state."

Jim frowned and said, "I know you're right. I'm just tired of all these trips. I hate to think what would happen if we had a breakdown a long ways from home. I'm always scared from the minute we leave until we get back. There could be nasty people that survived, you know? That's why we take extra men along to stand guard. Just because we haven't seen any bad ones yet, doesn't mean we won't."

"Well, take more people and trucks and get all we can. If we don't do it now, think how hard it would be to go to Richmond in a horse and buggy."

The weather ultimately convinced Jim and several more to call a meeting and plan a second trip. Albert Harris was going to drive a semi, along with Eddie and Jim. Clay would drive Eddie and Chris' construction truck with all the support equipment on it. Chris thought he could handle a semi well enough, so that made 4 of them. Kevin would drive Jim's heavy pickup and pull the stock trailer they had gotten a while back. Daniel Schmidt would go along to help choose the most important tools and equipment.

The women were challenged to figure out food for the trip that would present the least difficulty for preparation. Ultimately, that was little different than what they cooked at home, using cnned food, dried and smoked meats, and biscuits cooked on the way. Walter Rankin and his wife Tina Marie would drive their pickup and pull a U-Haul trailer outfitted as a "chuck wagon", he called it. They had a small gas cooktop and a turkey fryer burner to heat large amounts of soups and stews, and put water barrels in the truck bed.

Jordan Alexander would go to help with labor and act as a guard. His father Raymond made sure he left his ex-girlfriend Destiny with enough of everything she needed for at least a couple weeks. Destiny was at least civil to him now, after several weeks of him catering to her needs. She had even fed him a few times when he took her food and firewood, but Jordan wasn't talking about their relationship.

Jacob Knepp stressed the need for them to find all the best crosscut saws available, and other tools for logging with horses. The saws would be irreplaceable with no industry to make new ones. Amos Schwartz told the group that it was impossible to make such cutting tools in his blacksmith shop, and that cutting tools of all kinds would soon become more precious than gold, because there was almost no way to make good tool steel now. If they were able to make some, it would be very costly in time and fuel. He told the group to get drill bits, grinding wheels and bearings to mount them, hacksaw blades, files of every kind, the old style post mounted drill presses powered by a crank, cold chisels, hammers, and any blacksmith tools they could find, especially anvils, because making an anvil would take a monster of a forge to achieve.

They group left on a Monday morning in early April. They took CB radios to talk to each other, but they would be out of touch with the people at home until they returned.

\*\*\*\*\*

Amos Schwartz took his crew of 6 workers from the lake up the big hill to where Clay had blazed the trail entrance to the old furniture maker's place. They all took chainsaws and began to clear the old wagon road. After 3 days of working, they had opened a passable wagon road to the property and gotten the small brush cut out of most of the little field. It was maybe 3 or 4 acres, and still showed a fair stand of Timothy and Orchard Grass hay among the many saplings they cut down. They dragged the brush into the woods.

The next step was to clear around the old workshop, so they began cutting Junipers, raking the gourd clean, and sowing grass seed. The shop roof was swept clear of the accumulation of leaves, twigs, and

Juniper needles so a rain would wash it clean. The cabin sat in a grove of very old Chestnut Oak trees, so they only cleared the undergrowth and again sowed grass seed among the big trees.

The more Amos saw of the old place, the better he liked it. Just down the slope from the workshop was a small barn with a stall for a milk cow he recognized by the head stanchion, and a horse stall. Paul Anderson's son John found the root cellar and cleaned off the forest debris. The sloped door was made of oak and covered with copper, all still in functional condition. The root cellar had shelves of canning jars, the antique style with glass lids and rubber seals. The seals were all long deteriorated and the contents spoiled, but the jars were intact. Cleaning them would be a job for another time. The hand laid limestone walls were as solid as new.

They found that the cabin also had a limestone foundation, and a four foot deep crawl space beneath the wide plank floor. A trap door of considerable size in the bedroom floor led to the stone cased well under the house, directly under the pump on the kitchen counter. Large copper pipe came out of the well and straight up to the hand pump. When Amos slid half of the stone well cover aside, he dropped a string with a stone on the end until it hit the water. It was only 12 feet down to the water in the stone well. He decided that there was no way anything could have gotten into the well to foul the water, so he recovered the well.

The men cleared out the old mouse-chewed bedding and food remains and scrubbed out the cabinets, leaving both front and back doors open to let the breeze dry it all. There were glazed pottery canisters sitting on the hutch where dishes were stored. A glance inside found one full of sugar that was hardened, but still good, another of salt, one with loose tea leaves that still smelled like tea, and one of coffee beans. A coffee mill sat on a shelf above.

John said, "Amos, if you get a new mattress and some groceries, you could move in here tomorrow!"

Amos said, "Likely so, but I've got a lot to do at home just now. We'd better leave this place for now and get busy on the farm. We need to get a crop in pretty soon, and I think it will be dry enough to plow before long."

Jack Alexander was satisfying his teenage curiosity by opening the large cabinet in the bedroom. He asked Amos why they had a cabinet for clothes instead of a closet.

"Well, that's the way they used to do things. Old houses didn't have any closets."

"These old clothes are pretty chewed up. It looks like the mice got in here, too."

"Okay, just pull all that stuff out and we'll take it outside and burn it. I don't want any fleas or moths in the house."

"Hey, what's this box?"

The boy pulled out a long, finely finished wooden case from the top shelf. The boy grunted as he laid the long box on the floor. Several other cans and boxes on the shelf he ignored for the moment.

Amos unlatched the hooks and opened the box. "It's a shotgun!" John said.

"No, it's 'drieling' they call it because it has 3 barrels. Drie means 3 in German."

He opened the old gun and found it was a double barrelled 12 gauge shotgun with a rifle barrel beneath.

There were aperture sights on the top, and silver inlay in the breech. In the corner of the case were 24 brass shotgun shells, and another compartment had two cardboard boxes of .30-06 cartridges. Further investigation of the shelf found 2 kinds of gunpowder, a can of birdshot, primers, and bullets, and a box of hand tools for reloading both kinds of cartridges.

Amos whistled a low note and said, "This is probably worth as much as the rest of the property. I never seen one before, but Dad told me about them. They were popular with rich people in Germany for hunting. It was made by Gebruder Merkel, it says. I'll be taking this home tonight!"

Amos looked at Jack and said, "I owe you something for finding this!"

\*\*\*\*\*

"Can any of you kids shoot?" Wayne asked.

Patrick said, "I went squirrel hunting a few times with Dad with his .22 rifle."

Nathan said, "My Mom and Dad didn't do any hunting but he kept a pistol by the cash register at the nursery. He let me shoot it a few times."

"How about you girls?"

Both shook their heads no.

"We need to get you all familiar with guns then. There are some wild hogs around here. I guess they got loose from some farms like the ones we caught. But they are all mean now and they are dangerous. If you are outside, you need to have a gun handy, just in case. There's still some wild dogs around, too. They can be really vicious, so don't be trusting any dog you might see."

Nathan said, "Man, that's right! We had to hide in a gas station all night once because there were mean dogs outside! I wish we'd had a gun then. We found some bikes and got out of that town fast."

The girls looked upset at the memory. Wayne went on to say, "We have some spare guns we picked up so you can all have one to carry, but we have to make sure you can do it safely, okay?"

They all agreed, so he went on. "I'll get some out and we'll spend some time shooting at targets today. what I have are 9 millimeter pistols that were police issue. They are all alike and we have the holsters and belts to go with them. We can make them fit each one of you. We'll take our time at this and make sure everyone is comfortable and safe with the guns before any of you get to carry them."

It was noisy in the little valley for a few days as the kids all got some range time in. Lori, Janice and thier own kids all got some practice, too, and all showed the new kids how to handle their guns safely. Everyone carried the same pistols, magazines and ammunition so there would be no confusion. They went through safety drills for many days. It was a month later before the new kids got to carry their pistols.

Wayne's last admonishment to them was, "Don't ever point a gun at anything you don't intend to kill. If something needs killing, then don't stop shooting until you KNOW it's dead, okay? And make sure you keep your head and keep aiming at the target. Misses don't count when you are defending yourself. Now. We are trusting you all to act like adults. There will NEVER be any foolishness allowed with guns, all right? Do you agree with me?"

"Yes sir," came a chorus of responses.

"I have treated you like a drill instructor because that is necessary. We will forgive all of you kids for making mistakes, but you don't want to have to forgive yourself for hurting someone you care about. Nothing is more serious than this."

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 53

The convoy of trucks averaged less than 30 MPH due to debris and a few abandoned cars and trucks on the roads. It was getting late in the day when they came to the big antique mall at Centerville, a few miles from Richmond. They had brought 12 volt headlights to get some light into the windowless building. A small generator was set up to power the lights because it was quieter than leaving a truck running. There were many aisles to look through--the sign advertised 500 booths--but only a few were of interest.

When they came to a tool booth, they cleaned it out. The same went for old kitchen wares, focusing on butter churns, cream separators, cast iron cookware, colanders, and other durable items that suited a life without electricity or gas for cooking. Laundry tubs, scrub boards, and hand wringers were loaded and a couple Maytag wringer washing machines. The Amish had several ways of powering those without electricity. They didn't bother with old milk pails. There was a dairy supply house on their trip itinerary that would have new stainless steel pails. They did take all the old mercury thermometers they could find, since they were far more reliable than the newer kinds. They were packed carefully with quilts that would have sold for very high prices in the past. Now, they were just bedclothes, even if they were pretty ones.

A couple old one row garden seed push planters were a real find, still tagged at over \$300 each. They were ancient, but in good working order and built to industrial duty standards. Three booths specialized in a variety of blacksmith tools and also furnished forge blowers and 4 high quality anvils. Those booths were emptied without a thought. They passed the old wooden singletrees. They could easily make better stuff new. But Daniel said to take the old horse harness just to get the hardware. Jacob could use it on new harness. The hardware was hard to find and time consuming to make.

The center part of the mall building was relegated to flea market type items and held less interest until someone spotted a booth with files and hacksaw blades. They emptied that one and began to look closer at that area. They were rewarded by finding a large booth filled with large industrial grinding wheels and sandpaper of all descriptions. That was carefully loaded by the young men while the others searched. Another booth had gearboxes for factory machinery that Daniel said to grab, because he had seen them used to make a lot of farm items.

Several booths had woodworking tools, from crosscut saws and broadaxes to small molding planes and tiny augers. These were loaded up regardless of condition, knowing they could be used after being restored and sharpened.

It was getting late and the group was tired from the long trip, so when Walter and Tina Marie announced that supper was ready, they all quit the shopping and headed for the food trailer. It wasn't

long after the meal that people realized how tired they were and agreed to bed down for the night. Kevin elected to sleep in the horse trailer bunk. It had windows so he could look around if anything woke him during the night. He slept with his pistol under his pillow and his AR-15 close by. The others variously slept in pickup cabs and semi sleepers. Nothing disturbed them during the night except some coyotes yipping in the distance.

When the sun rose and breakfast was finished, Walter and Tina Marie joined those doing the shopping. Walter found the truck loading dock and got the big door open so more light came inside. Right away the couple saw a booth full of hand cranked corn shellers and began loading them up.

"Anybody know what this thing is?" Tina Marie asked. "It's pretty, all nickel plated and shiny."

Clay was closest and had a look. "It's a lathe of some kind, but I never saw one that small. I'll get Daniel."

"I never saw one like that before," Daniel said. "I guess you could make little stuff with it."

Sylvia came over to look and said, "Why, that's a jeweler's lathe! You just work that treadle with your feet and you can make those tiny parts for watches and things. It's just missing the round leather belt is all. See, it's got those little gravers to do the cutting. OOOH! There's the little drill press that goes with it, and the handsaws and all the stuff. He's even got books in here! You guys load all that stuff up, and you be sure and keep it all together, now, so we can find it all. Amos is gonna love this! See, he's even got that tiny buffing head, too, that they use to polish stuff."

When they were satisfied they had everything they could use from the entire mall, Sylvia made one last walk through the place with Jim. In a booth filled with primitive oil paintings, Sylvia asked, "Jim, do you think you could get the paint off those saws?"

"Jim's eyes lit up and said, "Heck yeah, we can get it off! Hey guys, we're gonna need some help here!"

Albert and Jordan came over and helped carry out 28 crosscut saws, all with some cute country scene painted on them. Jim took 7 large circular saw blades, too, and headed for the trucks with them stacked on a cart. He passed a dim corner booth near the entrance and said, "What's that big wheel back there?"

Daniel wasn't far away and said, "That's a metal lathe with a foot treadle and a flywheel. They had one of those in the buggy shop up in northern Indiana where I grew up. We need to take that."

Sylvia was watching them load the metal lathe and said, "If you guys think we need that kind of thing, we need to go to Elnora. They have a whole machine shop there that they run with a steam engine. I saw it going the last time we were there. It's long ways down there, but it's kinda on the way back home."

Walter Rankin asked, "What's Elnora?"

"It's a little town not too far from Terre Haute, and they have this big antique fair there every year in the summer. People bring in all kinds of things. They had a man making buttons out of mussel shells one time, and they have sawmillw that runs with a steam engine, and all kinds of stuff."

"What makes you think the stuff will be there now?"

"Well, people bring in the old tractors and popping engines and such, and the flea market things. those



won't be there, but there's a whole building full of stuff that stays there all the time. It has the machine shop and a woodworking shop with it's own steam engine. There's a big steam engine they can drive around that they use for the sawmill. I don't know if it stays there or not, but the sawmill definitely stays there all the time, and there's a big building with all kinds of old engines in it. There might be a steam engine in there, the kind that doesn't have wheels, but is bolted down someplace."

Jim said, "Yeah, I saw all that stuff, but I never paid much attention to it. I was interested in the tractors."

Albert said, "I think we ought to go there and get what we can."

Sylvia said, "We don't have enough trucks to haul it all in one trip."

Jim said, "You're probably right. And it is one miserable crooked road from there east back toward home. I say we pass on this trip and make a special trip out there when we're better prepared for it."

Sylvia said, "Yeah, probably so. They have a sorghum mill they ran with horses and they made syrup every year. We should get that and look at how they made the evaporator furnace. It would be too big to move, but we could make one like it, I bet. I guess we'd better stick to our plan for now and go on to the other big antique shops. "

The decision made, in a short time the convoy moved out, keeping enough space between the trucks that they had plenty of stopping distance. They drove the few miles north to Interstate 70 and headed back toward Indianapolis, their goal being a restored antique village called Connor Prairie.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conner\\_Prairie](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conner_Prairie)

When they arrived they parked all the trucks along the highway in front and walked toward the park. They were surprised to smell woodsmoke, and immediately went on alert.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 54

Kevin reacted before anyone else. "There's somebody here. Stay out of sight!"

He had his shotgun at the ready and was looking everywhere.

Sylvia was close to him and said, "Now don't you go shooting anybody. We need every living soul, so don't do any shooting if you don't have to."

It was deathly quiet in the park. A small tendril of smoke was barely visible from the chimney of one of the restored cabins.

Sylvia heard a very small creaking sound and said loudly, "We came to get some things here, but if you need them, we won't take anything. We were just looking for old things to help our community and we can find them other places, okay? We don't mean anyone any harm."

Time passed and there was no answer.

"If you are living here, maybe we can help. We brought extra food along on our trip. Tell you what. We'll go back out to our trucks and start making some lunch. If you are hungry, come on out and join us. We'd like to meet you."

Sylvai turned toward the others hiding behind the big barn and said, "Tina Marie! Go start some food for lunch. Make some extra, in case we have company, okay?"

To the group behind the barn she said, "Come on you all. Let's leave these people alone if that's how they want it. Walter, fry up some of that ham. Maybe these folks will smell it and come out of hiding."

They all trooped back to the narrow highway and began to open up their cooking trailer. In minutes, the smell of frying ham and hot coffee filled the air. Kevin didn't like the idea at all, so he kept his sidearm close at hand and stayed half out of sight behind the food trailer.

Sylvia said quietly, "Jim, you go around and make sure nobody is holding a gun, okay? If we look that unfriendly, they will never come out."

Jim walked around to the others and told them to lay down their guns. Keep them close by, but not so they looked like a threat. The others complied, not very willingly, but they began to concentrate on their food. Most had almost finished eating and some plates and cups were being washed when someone said, "We'd like to talk to you, if you really are friendly."

The speaker wasn't visible, but wasn't far away. Sylvia answered, saying, "You just as well come out here. We're not going to hurt anybody that isn't looking to hurt us."

"How do I know that?"

"You don't. You have to take my word for it."

Minutes went by while Sylvia took her plate and cup to be washed and a couple others did also.

"Okay, we give up. We're coming out, so don't do anything, all right?"

A young man stepped out from behind the nearby log schoolhouse and came toward them with his hands raised slightly. He walked slowly toward the group and said, "I'd sure like some of that ham if there's any left."

"There's plenty left," Tina Marie told him. "I'll get you a plate. We have some fried potatoes, too, some kinda stale bread and plenty of coffee."

The young man came forward and took the offered plate, holding it while Tina filled it. The fellow then turned around with his plate and said, "The rest of you can come on out. These people are okay."

He made a sandwich of the ham and began to eat as a dozen 20-somethings came out from behind various buildings and walked slowly toward the group. Tina said, "C'mon in. We can feed all of you."

Half an hour later, the two groups were talking all at once.

The first one to come out said, "I'm Zachary Felsen. We're all college students that worked here as reenactors. When everybody started dying, we all got together from our dorms and drove out here to

get away from the city."

Jim Collier gave his name and said, "We're from down just north of Louisville. Our farm community mostly got missed by the plague, and we found some other people to join us. We've been looking for things to use when the gasoline and diesel fuel go bad and we have to go back to the old ways of living."

One of the girls asked, "So, are there more of you there, or is this all?"

Jim said, "We number about 80 people now, I think. There are 3 Amish families that joined us and a group of people that were camping out down at Spring Mill State park. And we found some kids that had been living in town close by. There's another dozen that lives about 6 miles from us that have their own farm and such. So, if you count them it's 91, including the doctor and his woman. Her husband disappeared."

Zachary looked at Jim with big eyes and said, "Did you say a doctor?"

"Yes. We ran into him on a trip to Clarksville. He'd been holed up in his Dad's old survivalist cabin for over a year and he was dyin' to talk to somebody. He's found him a woman to help him and he's got a regular clinic set up at his house."

One of the girls came and at beside Zachary and gave him a long stare. Zachary said, "Well, uh my girlfriend here is pregnant and she's been worrying about it. Could we come see this doctor?"

Another girl with an anxious face said, "I want to see him too."

Syliva asked, "Have you got transportation?"

Another boy said, "Yeah. We got some cars running still. We got some gas from other cars that were sitting around."

The discussion grew for an hour and the young people began to exchange looks and nods. When they were assured there were houses and farms available for them, they became very interested in joining this group of farmers. Plans were made and trucks were loaded with the sought after antiques the village held. Another complete blacksmith shop, a furniture maker's shop, complete with stove, hide gluemaking pot, and a wood lathe. The pottery shop only contributed the potter's wheel and some fired pottery, but the invaluable part was, one of the girls had studied pottery making as part of her fine arts degree program.

The college students had grown a big garden the past summer and brought out what was left in their root cellar--potatoes, squash, beets, carrots, and several jars of seeds they had found locally. Those were loaded in the stock trailer. The useful cabin furnishings, tools, and cookware, their clothing and personal goods they stowed into various cars and a pickup truck of their own.

They decided to wait until the next day to make the trip. If they had any trouble, they wanted daylight while they dealt with it. The convoy's food supply was used heavily that night, but they were cutting their trip short so they would have enough. The young people contributed enough to help feed themselves. They were only short of meat, having been living on mostly canned food that was getting harder to find unspoiled. The prospect of plentiful meat was another enticement for them to join the farmers' community.

After a hasty breakfast just after dawn, the now much longer convoy set off for the southern end of the state. It was a 3 hour drive in years past, but with the obstacles on the roads and unmended potholes, it was mid-afternoon when they pulled into the park by the lake. There were still plenty of unoccupied cabins there, so immediate housing was available. The rest of the day was spent getting acquainted with their new neighbors.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 55

The new young people OOHed and AAHed over the antiques they were helping to unload. Misti said, "Those planters will make it easy to plant big gardens! We have an heirloom seed collection and we need to get some things started right now. Can we cut trees here to use?"

Jim Crawford said, "You can cut any trees you want. They don't really belong to anyone. We have chainsaws you can use. What did you have in mind?"

"I want some of those Eastern Red Cedar to make raised beds so we can get coldframes started. Can we get glass or clear plastic to cover them with?"

"I'm sure you can find some clear plastic in town somewhere. We can probably find old houses and take the windows out, but that would take longer."

Another girl asked Jim Crawford, "Are you the head guy in this community?"

Jim was a bit flustered and said, "There isn't any head guy here. There was, sort of, but he was...he had problems and he's gone now. I guess I'm the oldest man in this little community, but that doesn't mean anything, really. My name is Jim Crawford, by the way. What's your name?"

"Anne Cooper. I just wanted to ask about the cabins and who would know which ones we could use. We all slept in one last night because we didn't know and we've been sharing one big log cabin for a while, sorta like a pile of puppies because last winter was cold. But we're pretty tired of that, you know?"

"You can pick any that are still empty. Nobody cares about that. We just moved into whichever one was handy. They are basically all alike."

"Oh, that's good. We really brought quite a lot of stuff, and we need to get more clothing, so it's going to take some room. Some of us are sort of paired off, you know, so they would like to have their own place."

Jim smiled at her and said, "I suppose you have a boyfriend?"

She gave a big smile and said, "Yeah, me and Paul Dickenson are together. We co-oped together at Eli Lilly Pharma. He's pharmacy and I'm chemistry. That's why we're older, because it takes a couple extra years to do the co-op thing. But us poor kids had to do that to pay our way through college. We were just ready to graduate when it all..."

She got a pained look and Jim said, "I know. It's okay now."

He put a hand on her shoulder and said, "We have a good place here. And we can sure use what all you

young people know. We are really glad to see you come here. I think you'll like it, so go find your boyfriend and pick yourself a place to live, okay?"

Anne looked up with a smile tugging at her face through a few tears. Jim moved his hand away and she took it and squeezed it. "Thank you. You're a really nice man."

She turned away and walked off hurriedly toward where the young men were still sorting out the antiques from the semi trailers. Jim watched her go and saw her find her fellow. They stood apart for a couple minutes talking, then both pitched in to unload the trailer.

Pietro Muntii spoke to his friend Alena Lekas and said, "They say we can have any of the empty cabins. Nobody owns them now. I was hoping you would share one with me. I know we are not a couple, really, but you are a good friend. I would feel much better with you there."

She looked at the young man with the dark curly hair and said, "That would be good. We can see how we get along together and if we can stand each other's cooking."

She finished with a little smile and her grinned broadly. "Yes!" He said. "Yes, that would be very good. Will you choose the one you want? Then we can put our things away."

"I thought I would let you choose one. Then if it is not a good choice I can blame you for it," she said with a wicked grin.

"Ah! The Greeks are dangerous!"

"Yes, but we are loyal friends and never dull like the Romanians," she said with another smirk.

They both went back to work moving kitchen items to the big kitchen in the school building.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 56

"It looks different here," Clay told Raymond Alexander. "Looks like the college kids have a lot going on."

Raymond said, "They've got us doing things, too. Every cabin has at least one coldframe planted and some seedlings started indoors. Alena over there has several of us envying her solar oven. She cooked a pot roast in it yesterday and she's making cornbread today."

Clay grinned and said, "If Amy sees this I'll be busy for a year."

"Hey, since the weather warmed up, it gets too hot in the house when she does any baking. It'll be miserable this summer, so I want one of those solar ovens, too."

"It beats cutting firewood, don't it?"

"Sure does. She said anything shiny would work for the reflector, so I'm going looking for something to do that."

"What's on the outside of the thing? Is that mud?"

"Yes, that's mud. She said she'd rather have cement, but mud is available and easy to get close by, with that big hole on the hillside they are digging."

"Have the boys been working on that lately?"

Raymond said, "They left for home just a little while before you got here. Chris said the hole is about finished. They'll dig a footer early tomorrow and said they should be pouring concrete in a day or two. They have to lay rebar first. He said they are going to key the footer for the walls, whatever that means."

"It's a groove on top of the footing so the wall can't shift. That's a good idea when it's going to be full of water. Water's heavy."

"Eddie said they are going back to where they got that equipment and get a big truckload of concrete forms. It sounds like they know what they're doing."

Clay said, "Yeah, they are both pretty good at this. There's going to be a big pile of clay left over. What're they gonna do with that?"

"One of the young girls said she thought it would be good pottery clay, so she wants us to leave it there. Said the gray stuff is great for making pottery. She wants the guys to dig her some pits on the hill to purify the clay somehow with water."

"Hey, if she can really make stuff out of it, that beats trying to grow anything in that muck."

"She's taking over one of the last of the empty cabins to put her pottery wheel in. She needs a lot of shelves in there, so she went to talk to Jim Collier about getting some wide boards sawed. That girl is all business. For that matter, all these kids are wanting to do things. There's another girl, Esther -something, who says she does weaving and she wants a cabin to use for that."

Clay said, "I'd like to meet these girls. I bet Amy would like 'em, too. I'd better go get the schoolkids. It'll be time to do the milking soon."

\*\*\*\*\*

"Why do you want to cut trees on the hilltop? There's plenty that are easier to get to down here," Greg Stone asked.

"Because Jim and Isaac--he was the blacksmith--want to put windmills up there pretty soon and they need the trees out of the way," Ruth Bennett said.

"Okay. What are the windmills for?"

"Anything you want. Grind flour and cornmeal, or run a washing machine. They will power anything a 1/2 horsepower electric motor would run. They saw two of the old water pumping windmills on the way to town the other day and they want to put them up there on the hill. They thought those men who are digging the springhouse tank could help them move the windmills, but they need a machine shop to do some changes to them."

Greg said, "My wife would love that! What can I do to help?"

"We were thinking we need a horse to drag logs down here where we can set up the sawmill. Jim Collier is going to bring it down here, since we need a lot of lumber. Can you get a horse for a couple days?"

"I think so. Daniel wants me get more time driving them, so yeah. We can do that," Greg said. "What's all the lumber for?"

"We need oak for shelving in the pottery and to build vats for my refined clay. Then, we need cedar for building a greenhouse and the stuff inside it. And they want some big logs squared up to build a smokehouse. There's a whole list of things to do," Ruth said. "We need to convert that big storage building to use for horses and other livestock before next winter. We have to hurry because it will be planting time soon."

Greg said, "Yeah, I heard Jacob and Roscoe Beam talking about plowing last Sunday. They thought another week without rain and they could get it going."

\*\*\*\*\*

Collier's truck pulled into the campground slowly with the band mill in tow. Zach Felsen and Richard Dalton saw him coming and showed him with hand signals where they thought he should set it up. Jim looked the spot over, part of the old primitive campground, nodded his approval and eased the truck into position.

Soon he had the bandsaw mill unhooked and shut the truck off.

"I could use a hand here, if you guys are willing," Jim said.

"Sure thing," Zach said and came his way.

"What do you need us to do?" Richard asked.

"Okay, grab some of those timbers in the truck bed. Put one at each corner of the mill, and space out the rest along the sides. Those are for the jacks to rest on. I'll get the jacks."

Once the parts were in place, the work proceeded getting the mill levelled up and stabilized. Jim said, "I'll be back after while with the Bobcat for handling the logs, but I need to go to that propane place and get fill some tanks for my wife. She's about out of gas to cook with."

Zach said, "I think somebody said you raise pigs. Is that right?"

"Yeah, I've got 8 head of brood sows and they all just farrowed last month. We've got pigs everywhere. You in the market to buy pigs?"

"Not right now. I was thinking you could use the pig manure to make gas to cook with. Methane. It's pretty simple to do, and the manure is still good for fertilizer when it's done making gas."

Jim looked at him steadily and asked, "How do you go about that?"

Richard Dalton said, "It's a big job digging the hole, but you've got that heavy equipment. You basically fill a hole with manure and water, then put a collector tank over it. The stuff naturally makes gas as it decomposes. The tank is open on the bottom and collects the gas. It floats over the manure and the weight of the tank provides a little pressure. Then you run a pipe to your stove."

Zach said, "It will stop making gas after the manure is decomposed, so you really need two rigs. That way, you can run on the second one while you clean out the first one and refill it. It's better to build this on a hill so you can drain out the waste. Saves pumping. And you need a source of water uphill from the pits. That's about it. Not rocket science at all and the gas is free."

Jim thought about this and asked, "Can you store the gas somehow for later?"

"Yeah," Zach said, "That's the cool thing about it. It can just sit there in the tank until you're ready for it. You have to match the size of the tank to the amount of gas you use so you aren't having to drain and refill all the time, but we've got some estimates on that. The Peace Corps was doing this in India a long time ago."

Jim said, "I'd better get moving now, but I want to know more about this. Sounds like a long term answer to me. I've read about big hog producers doing this to heat their farrowing houses, but I never knew much about it. Figured it was way beyond my small operation."

"That's the good part of it. Any size will work. Bigger is more labor efficient, but a few dozen hogs would be enough for what you need. It would save a lot of wood cutting for a cook stove."

Jim nodded and said, "I better go, but I'll get back to you guys about this."

"That's great! We have to pay you somehow for the sawing," Richard said. "Look around for a big stainless steel tank of some kind we could use. Maybe a semi trailer or something. Plain steel will work, but stainless lasts longer."

Jim gave them a thumbs up and drove away.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 57

Pietro Mundii put the finishing touches on the wooden sled he'd made and began to put his tools away while he waited for the horses to arrive. His job for today was to help get the logs and firewood off the hilltop where the windmills were to be placed. He was wiping tools down with oil when Gregory Stone and his son Shane came walking up leading a pair of Belgian horses pulling a stout farm wagon. They stopped in the shade of a big beech tree beside the shed Pietro had taken over for his carpenter shop and looked over the sled. It was about 4 feet wide and 8 feet long with runners of bent green wood, each half of a split hickory sapling. Those were pegged to a heavy frame so they could be removed and replaced when worn out. Waist high stakes were spaced along each side to allow stacking firewood.

Greg asked "What's that for?"

"For hauling firewood off the hill."



"We're not going to use the wagon?"

Pietro shook his head. "The hill is too steep. It would try to run over the horses. The sled will be better. It is smaller and goes between the trees easier. You try and you will like it. One horse can pull it up the hill empty and down the hill with a load. The other horse can pull logs to the sawmill. We get more done this way. When this job is finished, I will make sides for it so we can haul other things."

He walked over to the horses and let them smell his hands, then gently rubbed their noses. The one next to him snuffled softly in greeting. The other one half closed her eyes, enjoying the attention.

"These are gentle horses. I would love to have one of my own like this," Pietro said.

"There's a lot of horses around," Greg told him. "You can get one as soon as you have a place for it. Daniel and Amos have pastures with a bunch of them for us. We're supposed to cut hay for 'em this summer and then take them home. They are just keeping them for now. The fence around the park is finished, but we have to fence our gardens to keep the animals out. When that's done, we'll get cows and horses here."

"How do we pay these people for the horses? We have no money."

Greg laughed and said, "Nobody has any money now. You can help them work on their farms. Or you can make something for them. We trade everything instead of using money. Everybody keeps notes about who owes what."

Pietro said, "I'm glad I brought my tools from the village. This will work just like the villages long ago. We that worked at Connor Prairie were just playing at it, but this is real. I studied history at college and archaeology. We learned how people lived and this is how it was. It is a very good thing, until some man wants to be king and then everyone must work for him. That ruined my country. It is why my family came here when I was boy."

Shane asked him, "Where did you come from?"

Pietro smiled and said, "Romania, on the Black Sea. It is beautiful there, much like this."

Alena came down the gentle hill and greeted the men. "I am baking bread today. The sun is hot and the oven is about ready. Gregory, do you want some bread when it is done?"

"Oh yes! My kids eat like horses! I'll take at least a couple loaves. Well, when will you bake again?"

"In 2 days, or maybe three. It will depend on when the sun is hot."

"We'll need a big loaf each day, I think. Your bread is fantastic!"

Alena smiled and said, "I need to go knead it again. It is a lot of work. If your daughter could help me that would pay for your bread, okay?"

"Sure! Go tell Susan I said so."

"Okay. Pietro, lunch will be a bit late, so I brought you a sandwich to help you wait."

Shane saw the looks the couple exchanged and was wishing he had a girlfriend as nice as Alena.

\*\*\*\*\*

Two concrete trucks came into the park and growled their way up the freshly made dirt lane to the 6 men waiting at the springhouse site. As they began to run the wet concrete into the floor area, all the men began to rake it flat. When the foundation and floor were finished there was some concrete left over. Expecting that, there were forms ready to pour sidewalks and some other small jobs. They ran out before all the walks were done, but that was the plan so none was wasted. It was grueling work while it lasted, levelling the concrete and smoothing it with long 'floats', wooden trowels on long handles. Two men began to stick rebar into the wet concrete to tie the floor to the walls while the drivers cleaned out their trucks and dumped the residue on the gravel lane in front of the cabins, where it would improve the road.

A tired crew walked to the shade of trees and rested until lunch would be ready, the smell of baking bread and other foods cooking making them hungrier.

"This thing is huge!" Bill Simmons said. "Is that little spring going to be able to fill it up?"

"Rich Dalton is a geologist and he said he'd checked the flow rate and figured it would take 3 or 4 weeks to fill it up, but it'll be longer if we're using out of it. This is just a reservoir so we don't run out of water in dry times. He's been exploring around the lake and said there are 5, maybe 6 of these springs that fill the lake. You've seen the stream from this spring that goes to the lake. He says we'll have plenty of water for these cabins."

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 58

"We don't need pumps to get the water to the cabins," Rich Dalton said. "I found an old dumpy level in the maintenance building and we measured 28 feet of fall to the highest cabin. It's probably 35 feet or more to the lowest one, so that should be plenty of pressure for gravity flow. That will get you 12 to 15 PSI and we're running big pipes so it will be okay. It won't run very fast like city water pressure used to be, but there's no pumps to break and the valves are the only moving parts. It should be very reliable for many years."

"Do we have to run pipes to each cabin? That's a lot of ditches to dig," Jason Mills said.

"No, we are going to connect to the old water system at the hydrant over there. We'll cap off all the trailer hookups and just run water to the cabins and the school kitchen. They should have 25 PSI down there. It looks like the plumbing system here is pretty new, so I think it will be fine. There never was hot water in these cabins anyway, so that isn't an issue."

"What if that spring house cracks and we get a leak? We'll lose all our water," Alena said.

Rich said, "That's where you women come in. We'll need you to plaster the inside of the spring house. We found a product called Quikwall (TM) that is hydraulic cement with fiberglass mixed in it. It will keep the thing sealed for a VERY long time. It is time consuming to apply it, but it isn't hard work. It sets up fast, like in 5 minutes, so you can only mix up a pint at a time and plaster it on the walls about an eighth of an inch thick. It doesn't have to be pretty, just waterproof. You'll need rubber gloves because it's hard on skin, but not dangerous. If we can get 2 or 3 of you women working on that, it

should be cured by the time the concrete is set up hard. That means you'll have water sooner."

Jason said, "I'm glad to hear it will be finished soon. We have to be at the Amish farms tomorrow for plowing. They are going to plow with the tractors, but we are going to use horses to do some disking for experience. We'll be planting gardens before the day is over Amos said."

"We need root cellars before garden harvest this Fall," Alena Lekas said. "Can we get them finished in time?"

Eddie Grimes said, "We'll be starting on that tomorrow. We're going to do them in one pour, like we did ours, so if we form up several at once, it will save time pouring concrete. The ready-mix plant is running low on cement, though. Chris said there's enough to do these root cellars, but we'll need to get some more cement before we do anything else."

Jason Mills said, "We're all going to owe you guys forever. What's this going to cost us?"

"Me an' Chris are asking 2 hours for one on the work we do because of what we know about how to do these things. It won't be that bad. You'll each owe us about a week of labor for the root cellars and about another 2 weeks for the water system. We haven't figured that up yet, but we kept track of our time on the job. If you guys can fetch us what we need to do some of these things, it will save you time later paying back. Does that sound all right?"

"The price is fine with me. What kind of things do you need us to do?" Jason asked.

"Oh, we'll tell you as we go along. Stuff like running to fetch pipe and fittings and that sort of thing. motor oil, filters, and whatever else to keep the machinery going, too."

"Okay. We can do that. What are you going to want us to do to pay you?"

Eddie said, "We need to fix up the barn at our place and build some fencing for the cattle. We can work on that this Fall after harvest is in. We'll need help with hay this summer, too."

Jason said, "That sounds all right. Count on me to be there."

"I gotta go," Eddie said, "We've got work to do on the forms for those cellars." We can let water in the springhouse in another couple weeks after the concrete is cured, but we're going to put off covering it with dirt until later. That's why we need the cellar forms fixed now."

Eddie drove off in their big truck headed home with shovels, rakes, and other tools rattling around on the bed.

\*\*\*\*\*

Jacob's wife asked him, "These people that work for us, how do we make money on this?"

"I've thought about this. Our children will need places of their own someday. We can use help this summer on the farm, but after harvest, we can have them work on other farms to make them ready for our children when they marry."

Rebekah said, "That is a goodt thing. Yes, they will need their own places. Martha wants this soon, I think. She likes that young man Eddie a lot, but she is afraid to ask you for permission to see him."

Jacob smiled and said, "I see these things, too. Our people will have to marry the English. There are no more Amish we have found. I will talk with her on this. She knows her own mind now. She is ready to make a choice. I like the man Eddie, too. He is a hard worker and is very polite to us. He is a good man, I think."

" He lives with the man Chris. They will need a house, I'm thinking."

"Eddie can make a house. He and his friend build everything. We can help him do this and show him some Amish ways."

\*\*\*\*\*

The sawmill ran for 3 days before Jim ran out of logs to saw. There were women and boys everywhere, stacking lumber, shoveling sawdust, and cutting up the slabs for firewood.

On the hill behind the cabins, Eddie had dug a series of 3 pits into the hard clay for Ruth Bennett who promised him pottery to pay him later. He used the track hoe to move the clay she wanted near the pits for refining. There were 8 of the 16 root cellars dug, but only 8 or the had been poured when planting time came and there was a shortage of help. He and Chris formed up the next 4 cellars then took a break to get their own garden planted. Jim Collier had put a thick layer of hog manure on the plot, then plowed and disked it before he began the sawmill work, so it was ready to plant.

Pietro and Alena worked on shelving for the Ruth's pottery. Their backs ached after days of handling the heavy green lumber, but there was no time to waste. Ruth was hand digging the clay into the refining pits with help from some young boys, and soon had her first batch stirred up with a lot of heavy hard labor in the mud pits. She had to carry water in buckets until Gregory found time away from dragging logs with a horse to haul a sled load of water in two barrels for her. Then he was back to yarding out logs again while Jim Collier was gone planting his crops.

The hill top was cleared, and a dirt road was made with the small dozer to the top for moving concrete up there for footings, and to haul the windmills up when they arrived. James Cooper and Isaac Kelley built concrete forms for the windmill bases, then had to wait on planting to be over before they could go further.

School was out for the year, so boys and girls were busy everywhere helping with planting and all the normal chores, plus being go-fers to fetch things for those working on projects. Their time was accounted for and slips of paper exchanged as IOU's for the value of labor.

A ten acre plot was worked extra fine on the small farm across the road from the park and many rows of seeds were planted with the small antique push planters. Women and children were paired with Amish teens who directed what and how to plant. A separate plot of beans was planted with Amos' horse drawn planter to be used for dry beans. Roscoe would use a combine to harvest those this year and get a big stock stored away.

Jacob had 6 cow hides in his tanning vats soaking that would soon come out to be washed and stretched. A crank powered sheet metal roll had been found that he would use to wring out the hides between soaking in the tanbark solution and the repeated washings. It was a slow process, but the wringer helped take some of the hard work out of it, plus it speeded things up a lot.

Anne Capper had been busy gathering spring herbs and hanging them to dry under the porch roof of the

cabin she shared with Paul Dickenson. They found a pre-fab shed in town that looked like just the thing for storing her herb collection, but had to wait for help moving it until after planting time was over. After telling about the shed, everyone wanted one or more, so this became the reason to procure a rollback truck to make it easy.

Three days after the last crops were planted, it rained for 2 days which put a stop to construction and sawmill work. Eddie and Chris procured the rollback from a wrecker company in town after some time getting it running, then began to haul the pre-fab sheds. Some of the placement was tricky due to the hillside lots around the cabins and it took some time to get the sheds levelled on the hillside, but it was a lot faster than making buildings from scratch and time was important.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 59

"Oh, excuse me," Hannah Flynn said very softly, and ran away from the stall entrance and out of the barn.

In the barn stall, there were hurried movements and rustling of clothing for a few minutes, then a red faced pair of teenagers came out the barn door. Amy Richards and Patrick Hughes looked around furtively for adults then came around the corner to find a shocked looking Hannah standing there.

Amy said, "You won't tell Mom and Dad, will you?"

Hannah shook her head emphatically no, but didn't say anything.

"Uh, we're going to get married," Patrick said.

Hannah nodded her head affirmatively but couldn't find anything to say.

Amy said, "It's okay. It really is. We love each other and..."

Hannah finally found her voice and said, "I, uh... I didn't SEE anything, okay?"

Amy nodded.

"Mom sent me down to get you for lunch. Uh, you better wash your hands and face in the creek. You're both kinda red."

The boy and girl headed for the creek without a word. The cool water seemed to shock them back to something like composure. They picked up their hoes from the end of the big garden patch and followed Hannah slowly toward the converted barn they all called the house. Four of the other teenagers were converging there also. Hannah looked over at the couple and said, "You look pretty upset. I'm gonna say we all saw a snake, okay? A big black snake."

"Yeah."

"Yeah, that's a good idea."

Jason noticed the kids looked odd and asked if they were okay.

"Yeah, we're fine. We saw a black snake down there by the garden. Scared us good," Hannah said.

Jason asked a lot of questions and wasn't entirely satisfied with the answers, but he decided it was just a bunch of scared kids and let it go. The three of them were pretty quiet during the meal, but they began to act more normal by the time the peach cobbler went around the table. Janice had cut her finger cutting up some salad greens and didn't notice anything unusual. Wayne was hot, tired, and hungry so nothing else was on his radar at the time. Hannah and Brandi, both 16 now, had become fast friends and gave each other looks that the other kids saw but couldn't interpret.

At supper that night, Lori felt something was different between Patrick and Amy, but she didn't say anything. They had always been good friends and sat together so she left unsaid what she thought.

The household went to bed shortly after dark and things seemed pretty normal, but when they were in bed that night, Lori told Jason, "There's something going on with Pat and Amy. I just know it."

Jason said, "I don't know. They saw that snake today."

"It's more than that. I'm thinking maybe they didn't see a snake at all."

Jason said, "Maybe so. Teenagers are what they are. Remember?"

Lori said, "Yes, I remember. That's what's got me wondering."

\*\*\*\*\*

"The lumber yard in town still has a lot of stock," Clay told Pietro. "It's soft white pine and spruce, so it works a lot easier than this native stuff."

Pietro nodded while he was eating. He swallowed a bite of dessert and said, "That would be good for these sheds we are working on. It would save time. There are many shelves to build."

Clay said, "Borrow a big truck and I'll come by to show you where it is tomorrow. I never was much for taking Sunday off, but going today would be a bad example for some of our friends here."

"I never was religious, but I agree. These are very good people and we must not offend anyone if we can help it. We do need a day to rest. The days have been long."

"We do make plans for the week at these Sunday meetings. It's the only way to get news now. It gives people a chance to know each other and we all look forward to it. Not much entertainment these days."

Pietro asked, "Do you know where we could find some big jars for Anne's herbs? She's drying a lot of them and will need containers for storage."

Clay said, "The hardware store kept half gallon canning jars. Would that work?"

"Yes, that would be fine. I hope there are enough. She needs some way to grind some herbs into powder, too. That would make them take less jars."

"I don't know about that. I'll have to think on it. You might have her talk to the Amish women."

They both glanced toward Jacob Knepp's family across the room from them. Jacob was talking to Eddie Grimes and had him sit down beside him. They noticed that Martha Knepp was looking down, but they could see her blushing face. Her mother's face was bland, but looked a bit smug.

Pietro was quick on the uptake. He said, "Maybe now isn't the best time."

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 60

It took only 2 days to take the windmills apart and one day to haul them to the hilltop site using the horse sled. A week later, they still had not gotten one of them ready to be put back together. The windmills were old, rusted, and need some serious repairs. Roscoe had done a little work on the old water pumper rigs when he was a teenager, so he got elected to supervise the restorations.

The first item of business was to take the mechanical parts back to town and fire up a local guy's sandblaster. It was a diesel powered rig and fairly new. There was even about 10 tons of white silica sand in the bin. Sandblasting the parts was hot work. Two men took turns at it and got finished in half a day. They tarped over the diesel compressor rig in case they needed it again.

A small local machine shop was the next stop, where Isaac Kelley stretched his minor knowledge of machining to make a few changes. He had worked a couple summers for a machine shop in his home town, but was by no means a pro. His blacksmith experience at Connor Prairie helped some. For the rest of what he needed, it was flying by the seat of his pants, but he got the work done without ruining any parts. They had to fetch a bigger generator from a local steel erection company to even get the shop fired up, and then only one machine at a time could be used when the lights and the big air compressor were running, too.

A run was made to Jeffersonville to get some needle bearings that replaced bushings in the old gearboxes. Some shafts were replaced and some new ones made to fit the new bearings, then the fans had to be bushed to fit. They used a simple static balancing set to get the fans as close to perfect as they could. New modern oil seals were fitted to the gearboxes that were finally filled with modern synthetic gear oil. Many small parts were replaced along with all the bolts that held the tower and gearhead together.

Corn was getting to be knee high by the time the windmills were ready to go back together. The original up and-down motion had been changed entirely by extending the back end of the main shaft and a chain drive added that ran a 90 degree gearbox. The output of that would allow a shaft to be run vertically down to ground level where it could have pulleys and belts added for driving rotary machines. They mocked up the gearhead in 6 feet of tower and bolted it to a flatbed truck to test it. Driving down the highway at 20 miles an hour gave them acceptable speed and power from the rig.

When the first windmill was erected and the power shaft ran freely in a light morning breeze, James Cooper and Isaac Kelley were ecstatic with their success. Pietro and some of the older boys began to build a large shed around the base of the tower to house the equipment the windmill would power. It would be late summer before both windmills were completed, but the first one had been grinding flour for a month by then, and churning a wringer washing machine that everyone used. The women didn't even mind carrying water to it until Isaac could implement the rest of his plan for that. One washing machine wasn't enough for the whole neighborhood, so all the women were anxious for the second

windmill to be ready and then began to talk about wanting several more windmills.

\*\*\*\*\*

The Flynns were still using their wringer machine powered by a gasoline fueled generator. Jason and Wayne had been nagged a lot about how they would power the washer when the gas went bad, but they had no ready answer.

Over breakfast Janice asked, "What are you guys going to do today?"

"I don't know," Wayne said. "Finished hoeing corn yesterday, so we're about caught up for now. Thought I'd look around outside and see what needs attention."

Janice said, "How about figuring out something for power later on? I worry every time we start the generator how long it will be before it quits for good."

Lori said, "We have to take David back to the doctor to get that cast off his arm. The doctor has a big bunch of solar panels on his house. Maybe you could find out from him about how his works. Maybe if we had more panels we could run the washing machine and some other things with them. Marta Beam just got some, too."

Jason said, "I'll ask him, but I know enough to know we'd have to cover the barn roof to have enough power to run motors for any length of time."

Wayne said, "The State was going to restore an old water mill in Cave river Valley, remember? We could work on that now, but that is a major job. It's not close enough to do the laundry, either."

Patrick said, "There's the creek down by the road. I saw a thing in a magazine about the Amish using a little water wheel in a creek smaller than this and they ran a washing machine with it."

Wayne asked, "How'd they do that?"

"It was an old farm machinery wheel with paddles on it. The water ran under it and it turned a washing machine gearbox. That made the agitator thing go back and forth. They put a part on there with a hole in each end and tied thin cables to it so first one then the other cable would pull and push. The cables ran up to the house where the washing machine had just a shaft for the agitator and another piece with a hole in each end for the cables. When the one by the creek was swishing back and forth, the cables made the washing machine do it too. It was real simple."

Lori told Jason, "There's your answer! Can't you do that?"

"I'd have to find another wringer washing machine for parts, but yeah, I can do that. Might have to get some welding done, but they can do that over at the park community." Jason thought about it and said, "Yeah, I'm sure we can do that."

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 61

"I'd love to go with you to town, but I have so much to do here," Anne Capper said. "I work every other



day in the gardens and tomorrow I have to do laundry and get something ready to take for lunch the next day."

Clay asked, "What kind of containers do you need to store herbs? Would canning jars do?"

"Yes, after they are ground up they don't take so much room. I need some bigger things too, though, for roots and such. Some 5 gallon buckets would work for that. Did you say they have 1/2gallon jars there?"

"Can't promise anything but they used to have some."

"Oh! I need some screens of some kind to dry things on. Doesn't matter much what they are. Old window screens is what I used to use at home," Anne said.

Pietro said, "We need to take a trailer for the lumber so we can put all her stuff in the truck bed."

Clay said, "That sounds like the right thing to do. You take notes here and I'll fetch a trailer."

At the hardware store, Clay had to use his big crowbar to get into the back door at the loading dock. They hadn't been in that part of this hardware store yet, so they were surprised to discover a pallet of 1/2 gallon jars and another of 5 gallon glass jars with glass lids and wire bail closures. They even had spare rubber seals for them. They left the pallets so they could fit more in the truck, and filled the bed with boxes of the big jars.

"I'm glad we got the jars first," Pietro said. "Now I know how high to put the first shelves. Those 5 gallon ones will need to sit on the floor. I can space the next shelves to take the 1/2 gallon jars so no space is wasted. Time to get lumber, I guess."

They loaded the trailer with all the 1" x 12" shelving boards they could find and added enough 2 x 4's to make the supports. Pietro spent some time looking at what lumber was in the open sheds and told Clay, "I think it would be good to haul more lumber to store in the maintenance building. Then I can work a long time between trips, and it will stay more dry in there."

"That makes sense to me. You want to look inside the main building? That's where we kept the nails and hardware, the cement patching compound, and all that kind of things. They have some tools, and paint, and all the regular stuff in there."

They headed into the big old brick building through the loading door. Clay knew exactly how this one worked and got it open easily. He said, "That should have been locked. I wonder why it wasn't? Maybe everyone just went nuts and left like I did. Oh, well."

There were remains of the woman in the office, but it had been long enough that the smell had pretty well dissipated. A kind of strong musty smell was still there, with something else a bit foul, but tolerable. Pietro didn't waste any time. He asked Clay where to find things and soon they both had an armload. Clay got a flatbed cart and began to load it. He found some cardboard boxes to stow their load of nails, tools, screws, and other items on the trailer atop the load of lumber. They both worked at getting the load tied down, one on each side of the trailer, then walked toward the truck. Pietro was ready to open the cab door, out of sight behind the load of boxes in the bed when he heard a man say, "I'll take the keys to that truck. Keep your hands in sight, or I'll just shoot you."

Pietro froze and then as silently as possible he reached into the cab and got his shotgun. He knelt on the

pavement and looked under the truck. He recognized Clay's boots and saw only one other pair of feet wearing a new pair of sneakers. He laid prone on the pavement and shouldered the shotgun. Under the high bumper he could see the other man's legs almost up to his knees.

Pietro fired and then rolled sideways to where he could see the man falling to the ground. The man shot his pistol at Clay, but Clay wasn't there. He had ducked behind the load of lumber. Pietro got to one knee and put a load of buckshot in the man's chest as he tried to sit up. He fell on his back again and didn't move. Clay had his pistol out and was looking in all directions like Pietro.

They stayed behind the load of lumber for half an hour, listening, but no sound came. The man on the ground had not moved, but there was a lot of blood around him. They heard a couple birds begin to scold each other and figured that there was nobody else around. Slowly they checked out the rest of the lumber yard together until they were sure the man had been alone.

A driver's license identified the deadman as Jerome Childers and gave a street address in Indianapolis. His shoes were only slightly worn, and his clothing was new. In his pockets were 4 more magazines for the new looking Smith and Wesson pistol. There was nothing to learn any more about him. In the alley where they decided he must have been hiding, they found a top quality backpack with some old canned food and little else in it. They went back to the truck and sat in the cab, eyed peeled and guns at the ready.

Clay said, "What do you s'pose he was doin' here?"

"Just wandering, it looks like. Maybe he had a car and it ran out of gas or something. He might not have known how to get another one going."

Clay nodded. "All we know for sure is that he was a damned fool. If he'd had any sense, he'd have asked for a ride, or somethin' to eat."

Pietro said, "I looked at his hands. He had not been working. He has been living on what he could find."

"Yeah. We know he was thief. Prob'ly spent his life at that. Not over 30 years old, from the looks of him."

Pietro said, "Thieves don't live to be old men."

"You got that right. Let's go home. We need to be more careful than we have been. Now we know there are still a few of that kind around. My fault for not watchin' closer. I guess we got to thinkin' this kind of trouble was over."

"It's never over," Pietro said. "I have seen that in my country."

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 62

"Of course I will carry a pistol! My man was just in a gun fight! There are still crazy people out there

and I will be ready to defend myself!" Both hands on her hips, Alena Lekas stood as tall as her 5 ft. 3 inches allowed looking at Mary Hanover.

Mary said, "Non-violence is a basic part of the Quaker faith. It is one of our most basic beliefs."

Alena said, "I hope that works for you when you get attacked by one those crazy people."

"I don't put myself in a situation where violence is necessary. You should not either."

"I didn't put myself in this situation and neither did Pietro. You didn't either. But here we are, in a world with violent people. I hope you can survive in it, because we need you."

"You are deserting your religion," Mary accused.

"It wasn't mine to begin with. I had to adopt it to be accepted in the college society. I'm not in college any more, so I will do what is necessary. I have seen my country torn apart with violence, and Pietro has seen worse. His family fled Romania to escape the violence there after some of them were killed. He doesn't talk about it. Maybe he should, for your benefit."

Mary turned and walked quickly away. Alena went back to her baking, her pistol was still firmly in its holster. And there it will stay, she vowed to herself. She knew Mary was a brilliant environmental scientist that could contribute a lot to their management of farm and garden crops, their water use, and much more, but she had led a very sheltered life. Alena hoped she never had to face a man like Pietro just killed.

Dissension had come to the surface when Raymond Alexander had offered guns from their supplies to any of the young people who wanted them after the last Sunday meeting. The Amish had no objection to having firearms, although they were a very peaceful folk. Daniel Schmidt and Jacob Knepp had asked for rifles and pistols to defend their homes if necessary. Amos Schartz already had what he felt he needed, but he asked for some extra 12 gauge buckshot shells.

The next day several of the young people were walking to the big garden field with hoes when Mary saw Isaac Kelley with a pistol on his belt and brought up the gun issue again.

Isaac said, "You don't think we should have guns?"

"Of course not! Guns lead to violence and it is our duty to abhor violence."

Isaac said, "I'll tell you a story. My grandfather was a devout Quaker when World War 2 broke out. He was the right age and got drafted before he could get his conscientious objector paper filed. If he had done so earlier, he would have still been drafted, but sent to work in a hospital or some job behind the lines. As it was, he ended up in a tank in France headed for Germany. I asked him about his non-violent beliefs. What he said was, "When you get to the front lines and the bullets go to whizzing past you, then you get the idea real quick."

Mary shut up, but she was clearly not happy about it.

The next day there were some heated discussions about guns among the young people. Anne Capper was horrified that a man had been killed to get her what she needed to ply her trade as an herbalist. She didn't say anything until Mary brought it up.

"I don't know what to think," Anne said. "Pietro is a good friend. If he'd been killed, I could never

forgive myself."

Later that day Anne prepared their evening meal and asked Paul Dickerson what he thought about the gun issue. They lived together and had agreed to be married as soon as they could arrange it. Paul told her. "I will have a gun as soon as I can see Raymond about it. We knew there were such dangers before we came here. We heard the gunfire. It was just luck that we never were confronted with it back then."

"Are you giving up your religious beliefs?"

"No. I will do everything possible to avoid hurting anyone. I am a pharmacist, and probably close to being a doctor now, with your help. I want to help heal people, not hurt them. I thought hard about that when we were at Connor Prairie and decided that when I could get a gun, I would have one. I decided that stopping a killer before he strikes is as important as healing the injured."

"I still think it's wrong to kill anyone," Anne said.

"Would you rather that man had killed Clay and Pietro? That was the choice, you know."

"Surely there was some other way," she said rather lamely.

Paul said, "I don't think so. In their place, I'd have done the same."

Anne didn't say any more. Their evening meal was eaten in silence.

\*\*\*\*\*

The springhouse was finished, complete with a concrete top covered with dirt. The grass seed was just beginning to grow there. Chris had convinced them that any other roof for it would need to be replaced in a few years, so they had gone to the extra work to form and pour the top, supported by a dividing wall down the center. The only wood in the structure was the door on the lower end, a stout one made of white oak. There was a capped 4" drain pipe in case it needed to be cleaned out and an overflow pipe with a screen over it to keep out vermin. That overflow ran to the original tiny creek and eventually to the lake. Food could be kept cool on the concrete ledges inside the springhouse, and water ran to the cabins for the first time since the power went out. Carrying drinking water was a thing of the past now, but there was plenty to do to fill the time saved.

Late June was getting hot and some part of the gardens needed hoeing every day. A team of work horses had been taken to the park community to do the everyday chores of hauling in firewood, hauling water for baths and laundry from the lake, and cultivating the 10 acre garden across the road. One of the sheds housed the team after Pietro and a couple of the boys built a hay manger and stalls in it. The horses did a lot of work, but it took time to feed them some grain twice a day, check their feet for stones or injuries, and keep them groomed. When they weren't needed the horses stayed in the 3 acre pasture below the lake dam. The lake spillway provided a small stream to water them and shade trees were plentiful there.

Jack Alexander, Raymond's second son, had taken over tending the horses, having made friends with them. Jack had never been around anything but small pets in his previous city life, but he liked the huge animals and enjoyed working with them. He mucked out their stalls and fed them, making sure they were in good health. They seemed to like him in return and would willingly do whatever he asked of them.

Angel Hawkins found reasons to spend time around the horses when she could. They were peaceful creatures and she liked that, but Jack was the real reason for her interest. He was a polite young man and not prone to the rough humor of some of the others his age. They began to spend more time together at Sunday meetings and doing daily chores. It did not go unnoticed by John Anderson, but there wasn't much he could do about it.

Jack's older brother Jordan had gotten back into the good graces of his old girlfriend Destiny Jennings. She did her share of the garden work, but as her pregnant belly grew, she spent more time helping the women canning the early vegetables in the school house kitchen. Jordan made it a point to help her with anything he could, which she began to appreciate more as time went on.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 63

The ground in the gardens and fields was dry and cracking for lack of rain when clouds appeared on the horizon. Patrick Hughes and Nathan Hertel were picking early green beans with David and Hannah Flynn. They noticed the cool breeze right away, a welcome relief from the heat. They almost made it to the house before the rain came pelting down in big drops.

Jason and Wayne had been working in the barn down the road and decided to go to the house for an early lunch. They were both soaked by the time they got into the truck cab. The wipers were barely any help in the downpour. The creek was getting muddy and rising as they crossed it going in the driveway. They sat in the truck for a while, hoping for a break in the deluge before trying to go in the house. There seemed to be a brief letup in the storm so they made a break for the back door 30 feet away, but were dripping when they got inside.

Janice said, "It is really coming down out there!"

"Sure is," Jason said. "We couldn't hardly see where we were going. We'd better change clothes."

It was still hot in the house and the wet clothes and people made it steamy. The men changed clothes and they all retired to the basement where Lori and the kids were breaking beans for canning. Lori had the security shutters open and the windows all open for ventilation, but it was still humid and warm. They watched out the windows as the creek began to run full with rolling muddy water. It wasn't long before it began to spill over the banks and run into their fields down stream.

Half an hour later, their small water wheel had washed out and disappeared downstream in the current.

\*\*\*\*\*

There had been some discussion at Sunday meetings about saving water during the dry summer time, but with no way to meter who used how much it was hard to know what to do about this. All knew if they ran out they would have to go back to boiling water from the lake. The spring kept the springhouse water level up, just barely.

John Anderson trudged back from the garden field with the rest of the crew and saw Debra Hawkins

drive in the park entrance with her daughter Diana. He had seen the truck leave and from his position in the bean rows he could see it turn into Doc Anthony's driveway. It had been there for over an hour. John was concerned about Diana being with her and wondered about it. John was only halfway up the park entrance lane when they passed the group of returning workers. He saw Debra park at their cabin, then lost sight of them with trees in the way.

Inside their cabin, Debra said, "It's your place to tell your father."

Diana looked at her mother pleadingly, but said nothing. She still felt a little nauseous, but the doctor had said it would probably go away before long.

"He'll hate me," she finally said.

"No. He won't hate you. He'll be disappointed that it happened before you were older, but he won't hate you."

Jerry Hawkins came in the back door then and heard the last part of it. He was hot and tired and thirsty from cutting trees on the hilltop. He decided to pretend he'd not heard anything. He wanted to wash up and cool off before he got into any long discussions, and he had an idea this would be a long one.

It didn't take all that long to get the facts. Diana was pregnant, probably about 2 months along and John Anderson was the father. They wanted to marry as soon as possible and move to their own place.

"You're pretty young for this," Jerry said. "You'll need doc to keep a close watch on you."

"Dad. I'm almost 18, and the Doc Anthony said I shouldn't have any trouble."

"What he said was, she has wide hips like her mother. Not what every woman wants to hear, but he said it makes birth a lot easier."

Jerry took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "You said you want to marry John? Does he want to marry you?"

"YES! Of course he does! He loves me!"

Jerry said, "I'm glad for you. That isn't always how it is."

Debra said, "Let's get some supper started. Everyone is hungry and the rest can wait."

When the meal was over and cleaned up, Diana sat on the front porch with her sister Angel. It was almost dark when John Anderson walked up as he commonly did some evenings after work. Angel went inside to find something else to do. It was almost bed time, and she was tired from a day in the field. She didn't want to intrude on what little private time they had. Privacy was hard to come by, as she well knew.

"I saw you go to the Doc's today. Are you okay?"

"I'm... I'm pregnant."

John immediately said, "That's great!"

Diana said, "I don't think so! I feel awful and my parents think I'm a whore!"

She cried when he tried to hold her and comfort her. This wasn't going at all like he thought it would. Finally she laid her head on his chest and sobbed softly. John was enthralled by the idea. Surely she would feel better about this soon.

The truth was, he had only begun to pay more attention to Diana after it was clear her younger sister Angel was fixated on Jack Alexander. Angel had flashy good looks, with shining light brown hair, bright blue eyes in a cherub face, and a petite figure. Diana was pretty too, but it was a more mature beauty, with a more angular face and rich brown hair like her mother's. Diana was taller and looked a bit more like her Dad, but very feminine. It had taken him a while to get over the idea that he had settled for second best and really fall for this girl.

Now, he was determined to make her happy, but it looked like he was off to a bad start.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 64

The downpour caught the crew picking vegetables in the field. They got their buckets of produce in the truck bed and some climbed in the truck bed as David Anderson drove out the dirt lane, spinning a little where the drenching rain had already made mud of the dust. He drove straight to the school building where they were to take the vegetables and all 6 of the young people ran inside. They were wet to the skin and dripped on the concrete floor.

Shane Stone grinned at the others and said, "You guys are gonna catch it from Betty! She hates to have the floor messed up in here!"

He was standing in a puddle of his own making, which provoked a laugh just as Betty Crawford came into the kitchen.

Betty had heard his remark and said, "Shane, since rain doesn't seem to stick to you, I suppose you won't mind bringing in those buckets before they get full of water."

Shane said, "I think we should leave 'em out there for a while and let God wash the vegetables for us."

Betty wasn't ready for his quick comeback and before she could think of what to say, the other teenagers all agreed with Shane. Betty took refuge by passing out towels to the kids.

They were all dressed for the hot weather in tee shirts and jeans, now soaked. Wet clothes were stuck to them all, displaying the girls' figures. Shane, David Anderson, and Austin Mills were all quick to notice. Megan Anderson and Angel Hawkins turned away from the staring boys as everyone dried their hair, but Mackenzie Jennings caught Austin's eyes and smirked at him. Austin flushed red and busied himself trying to get dried off. She was still smiling at him when he glanced back at her.

Austin didn't know what to think. He had become sort of a brother to her when his Dad moved in with Danielle Jennings after their mates had died last year at the campground near Mitchell. He'd been careful to get along with Mackenzie and her older sister Destiny, although Destiny had moved out to the gatehouse soon after they got here. He'd always thought Mackenzie was a cute girl, but he had never thought of her that way. He needed some time to process what he had just seen. Was she serious,

or just messing with him? Austin had no way to know and it bothered him a lot.

He watched her give him a last look before she went to the next room where her sister Destiny was standing at a table cutting sweet corn off the cobs to put in canning jars. He thought he noticed a spring in her step as he watched her go. Outside, the rain had not slackened any, so Austin went to the door and considered going after more buckets of sweet corn from the truck.

Jim Crawford was looking out the windows of the big room that had the student desks stacked away for the summer and metal tables set up for food processing and meetings. He saw the gullies across the lake running muddy streams to the lake and knew the water level would be a lot higher before morning.

The rain continued to pour down. The boys decided there was no other way, so they ran out to fetch the buckets of corn and green beans. They emptied the buckets of water into the industrial size sinks and poured the vegetables in with it to drain, then began the slow job of shucking the corn and rubbing the silks off of it. The girls stayed in the other room with Betty.

\*\*\*\*\*

"We have to get some other forms of energy going besides animals and the windmills," Zach Felsen said. He had studied Environmental Science with a minor in Physics because of his deep interest in alternative energy, especially solar power and its' applications.

Richard Dalton said, "There's a lot of water going out the spillway today. There's some useful power there going to waste, but it doesn't last long enough to make it worthwhile."

"Are you sure about that?"

Rich nodded affirmatively as he said, "I've done the calculations. The watershed into the lake is only about 300 acres. The normal rainfall here would only give us a small amount of power, say 1/4 horsepower for a month or so and that would take draining the entire lake. The reason is, there's not much fall available. If we were in the mountains somewhere and had hundreds of feet of fall, that would be different. Here we have maybe 30 feet from the dam down to the road. Not enough. We're better off looking at wind power, even though this is one of the worst places in the country for wind power."

Zach said, "Sounds like we're stuck with solar then. The problem with solar is concentrating it enough to do useful work."

"Storing energy is the worst problem. Wind, solar, and water power are all intermittent. We can't just drop everything and go grind flour when the wind decides to blow. And there might not be any useful wind for a month at a time here."

"There's always batteries and solar panels. I'm sure we could find enough if we scrounged all around the area," Zach said.

"You can get a little that way, but not enough to grind flour, saw firewood, or drive a truck on it."

"Yeah, I know. I just hate to give up and see society go back to the 1700's," Zach said. He began to put away his carpenter tools in their box as they walked to the kitchen where Misti and Mary were making a meal.



"What are you guys talking about?" Mary asked.

"Energy," Rich answered. "Or rather, the lack of it. We have a problem for the future."

"Somebody will surely get the electricity going again, at least the hydro plants. The nuke plants are probably history, though," Misti said.

"Fat chance of that without enough people to tend the generating plants," Rich said.

"Oh CRAP!" Zach said.

"What?!" Misti asked.

"The nuke plants! I had forgotten all about them! They are probably all melting down now! The whole country is going to be one big Fukushima. We could be getting scads of radiation and not even know it."

He laid his head down on the table and said, "And there isn't a thing we can do about it. Damn the ones who built them. Damn them all to hell."

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 65

"The Doc has a radiation meter. It hasn't been calibrated for a couple years, but he says it wil still be good enough to know we aren't getting hammered with radiation," Zach said. "We talked for a long time about this tonight and he thinks it is because of the wind patterns. Or, maybe somebody has kept some of the nuclear plants west of us from melting down. No way to know without going exploring."

"So," Misti said, "we're safe, at least for now."

"Yeah, we're safe for now. The bad part is, a lot of other places aren't safe. You can just about write off everything on the east coast. Look at this map he gave me."

<http://www.energyjustice.net/map/nuclearoperating>

"Wow! The whole east coast has them all over," Misti said.

"Yep. Those people are toast. There are 3 or 4 that could threaten us. We have no way of knowing if they melted down, or not, and we can't tell for sure how much radiation we'd get if they did."

Misti said, "But it has to be 400 or 500 miles to the closest one to us. We should be okay this far away."

"I wish I could say that for sure, but there is the airborne stuff. What happened at Fukishima, Japan sent stuff into the atmosphere and it travelled all around the world. We'll get some; it's just a matter of how much and how long until it gets here."

Misti sighed and said, "Okay. What does this mean to us?"

Zach shrugged and said, "We don't know for sure. Doc said it would mean we'll get enough radiation over time to have health effects. Undoubtedly more cancers, more goofy things happening we can't explain where people get sick and we don't know what it is. Basically, none of us are going to live as long as we might have expected without this."

\*\*\*\*\*

Zach Felson and James Cooper spoke at the next Sunday meeting about the radiation danger. They had spent more time with Doctor Van Derver who also gave his opinions about what to expect and said he would report any changes in radiation level he found. He had some rechargeable batteries for his radiation meter, but they would only be good for a few more years.

He recommended making a crude substitute called an electroscope. It was a simple device with a pair of thin aluminum foil leaves on pivots inside a jar. It could be charged with static electricity and would naturally discharge over time. The discharge, shown by the leaves falling together, would be faster if more radiation were present.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electroscope>

If they built one now and measured both the background radiation level with his meter, and the time it took the electroscope to discharge, they would have a standard time measurement they could compare to future readings. If the leaves discharged notably faster, the radiation level was higher. It was crude, but it did not depend on batteries.

He had also worked out how to operate his radiation meter by powering it with his solar batteries, although if they were damaged somehow, the electroscope was a last-ditch way to check for radiation.

The science graduates were quick to explain how all this worked to the others at the meeting, but one last question came from Jacob Knepp.

"If we have more radiation, what do we do then?"

The doctor said, "There is little you can do, other than move somewhere that has less of it. Right now, we don't know where that would be."

Jacob asked, "If that is so, then all we can do is wait for God's Will on the matter. What does this radiation do to us?"

"It will damage your cells in ways that can cause cancer, or damage to your internal organs over time. It means you won't live as long as you would have without the radiation exposure. I will venture a guess that all of us will be affected to some degree. There is no way to know how much. In young people, it can cause birth defects in their children, or damage to their growing cells that can result in many diseases. We will, none of us, live as long."

Jacob said, "We have unleashed a devil in our midst."

Nobody disagreed with him.

After the meeting, many people had questions for the doctor. The pregnant women were insistent in asking about the effect of radiation on an unborn child. He answered their concerns as best he could.

He finally summarized before a group of them, saying, "If the human race is to have a future, we need to begin reproducing at a younger age and raise as many healthy children as we can. It is the only chance we have."

"We can help stay healthy by washing our food well to remove any contamination, and eating lower on the food chain, that is, less meat and more grains and vegetables. As animals eat plants that are contaminated, they concentrate that in their bodies, particularly in organ meats and bones. Bear that in mind when planning your diet and we can avoid most of the problems as long as it doesn't get too bad. I would particularly avoid fish for a few years."

On the way home from the meeting, Clay told Amy, "This means we better not venture too far away trying to salvage things, and if we need to, we better not stay there long."

The Flynns and the some other parents went home with mixed emotions about the teenage girls in their families. If they had children too young, the mothers would be at risk from their own immaturity. If they waited too long to have children, the risk of birth defects would increase. There were no good answers, and no clear guidance to give the young people.

The teenagers in the crowd had a different take on the matter. Several couples had exchanged looks at the meeting. Later they talked seriously among themselves and all came to the same conclusions. Most of them decided that if they weren't going to live to old age, they should get on with living now. It made no sense to them to wait before choosing a mate.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 66

Jim Crawford had once thought about studying to be a minister, but had gotten married instead and was soon busy making a living. He had begun to think more about this now and had led prayers and the Sunday meetings many times. He could see as well as anyone that the news about radiation would cause a rash of young people wanting to be married, or acting like it whether they were officially so, or not. He made his decision and told his wife that he wanted to take on the task of ministering to their community.

Word got around that Mr. Crawford would be the minister and he had met with Marta who agreed to keep records of marriages he performed. They talked at some length. Roscoe pointed out the need for records of who had taken over which properties and thought there was a need to record those officially, also. He had a heavy old safe he had bought at auction years before where he kept a few valuables. He would provide that to keep records for the community, mostly for fire protection.

Within two weeks, Mr. Crawford had several weddings scheduled. Kevin Collier was marrying Andrea. In the Flynn household, Patrick Hughes would marry Amy Richards. Other couples were Jordan Alexander and Destiny Jennings, John Anderson and Diana Hawkins, Jack Alexander and Angel Hawkins, Zachary Felson, environmentalist and Misti Fordyce, gardener/historian, James Cooper, the biologist/environmental science man and Ruth Bennett the potter, Pietro Mundii and Alena Lekas, and Isaac Kelley the blacksmith/physicist would marry Esther Morris the weaver.

Anne Capper would have immediately married Paul Dickenson before the gun issue came up, but they were still trying to come to terms with that. Mackenzie Jennings had not yet convinced Austin Mills

that it would be a good idea.

\*\*\*\*\*

Patrick and Amy were working hard on the old farmhouse down the hill from the Flynn place to get it cleaned and repaired for them to move into. Patrick had gotten himself a new truck at the Ford dealership and was hauling a load in every day to make repairs and set up their household. Their work had to slow down when the big canning season rush hit, but they spent every spare minute working on their own place.

The other young couples had to look further for a place to live. All the cabins at the lake community were filled, either with occupants or, in one case, the pottery business which was off to a fine start with Ruth's first firing of pots made from the local clay. It was a resounding success in her mind, even though she had many pieces crack and some glaze failures in this first run in the newly built kiln. Part of that was due to a crack in the kiln that she quickly repaired.

When Eddie Grimes and Martha Knepp announced they were to be wed, Chris Hamilton had arranged to move across the road into a small house. It wanted some repairs, but it already had most of what was needed for him. Eddie helped him get it in shape, motivated by wanting to hurry up his wedding date. They had agreed to get him a personal garden fixed up for next year, but the one they had worked together this year yielded enough for all concerned. Jacob Knepp gave the couple a fine team of horses for a wedding present. Eddie was a bit scared of them but his new wife would mock him into learning how to deal with them. That was not the first nor the least of the personal adjustments each would be making.

The housing crisis at the park was solved temporarily by Jordan moving back into the gatehouse with Destiny, then two other couples took over a pair of camping trailers that had been left at the park. They were fairly large Airstream trailers that were in perfect condition, and water was available to them from the new springhouse system. They did, however, have to build a pair of new outhouses since the sewage system no longer worked for the trailer spots. There simply wasn't enough water available to operate flush toilets.

\*\*\*\*\*

"We are going to need a sawmill someday," Pietro said.

Alena said, "There must be sawmills around here with so much forest. We will find one. Roscoe or Mr. Crawford will know where to find you one."

"No, Mr. Crawford already has the bandsaw mill. What I meant was, we will need a sawmill we can run without fuel like we have now. That is much more difficult to do. It is an energy problem. We have to find ways to do such heavy work that does not depend on diesel fuel and gasoline. Already, some of the gasoline engines are hard to start."

"Ah, I see," Alena said. "Can't a sawmill be run by water power?"

"Yes, if we had water power. There is none here. I asked Isaac about that. He said Rich Dalton told him the lake doesn't have enough water for that, and it is not high enough to get much power from it. Some of us have been talking about a steam engine, but we don't have anybody who could make one. There are a few very old steam engines that exist, but they could be dangerous. Steam boilers can explode and kill people."

"Is there no other way? What about biodiesel fuel? That was a big topic at college."

"We could do that, but it wouldn't last very many years before we have problems with the machinery involved. The oil presses were mostly made in China, and are not durable enough. In a few years we would have put a lot of work into raising the oilseed crops and getting that all working, then we would have problems running out of chemicals, or the electronics on th processor would go bad, or some other thing put a stop to it. We need something we can make ourselves, and fix ourselves. Like a water wheel. Something simple."

"I will talk to the women and ask what they know about. They may not know how to work a machine but someone will know where to find a machine."

At the meeting two days hence, Alena asked Marta Beam who was the woman who knew about the antiques?

"Oh, that's Sylvia Collier that led us to you folks! She's over there talking to Anita Harris, her neighbor."

Alena went to talk to Sylvia and explained what she wanted to know.

Sylvia said, "Yes, I know where there are steam engines, several of them. We talked about getting them on the trip when we met you, but we put it off until another time. We knew we'd need them sometime. I suppose now is the time. We'll have to plan another expedition to get them moved here."

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 67

"I never thought it would be this much work to get married," Patrick said.

Amy said, "We're not just getting married. We're starting a whole life."

"Yeah, I guess so. Still, it's a lot of work. I never thought about most of this. We gotta have water, so we need a new well pump. Thank goodness the well is okay. And on and on it goes. I don't know how many trips we've made to get stuff."

"I wonder how many trips it took to get the family's house set up. They started with a BARN! Why didn't they just buy a house out here?"

"Didn't want it noticeable, Wayne said. And they could make it the way they wanted, since it was just empty space inside."

"That carpet needs to go," Amy said. "It's so dirty it's awful."

A big sigh from Patrick indicated his feelings about it, but he said, "Yeah, it's pretty bad. Let's rip it out. I can put it in the burn pile I suppose."

He got a pry bar and ripped up the molding, then used it to start tearing out the carpet. In the process he

broke a short piece off the wide baseboard by the front door.

"Well crap! Now I'll have to fix that!"

The foot long piece of the tall molding fell away easily leaving a dark hole behind it. He automatically used the pry bar to drag out some trash inside the wall, a wad of very old newspaper. There was a dirty old jar behind the paper and it was heavy. He pulled out the blue glass pint jar and looked at it for a minute before he figured out the rusty wire bail thing on top and pried it open. It was filled with very old coins. Gold coins.

Amy came over to see what he was doing and said, "That's GOLD! That's worth a fortune!"

Patrick looked at it for a minute, then looked at her and asked, "Where ya gonna spend it?"

\*\*\*\*\*

A five day trip to Elnora, Indiana netted the community 3 semi's with lowboy trailers, 2 of them the drop center type loaded with steam engines and machinery. The smaller machinery from the wood and metal shops rode on 2 other flatbed trailers. Isaac Kelley had a wonderful time checking out all the equipment and fired up the big steam engine from the sawmill to drive the monster onto a trailer.

Isaac told Clay, "There's no other way to load that thing. It has to weigh 5 tons or more. Besides, if it didn't work, there's no point in taking it home."

Except for clearing some tree branches from the highways, the trip home went smoothly until they got just past the small town of Loogootee. In a river bottom there, someone shot a hole in the windshield of Jim Collier's truck. The convoy instantly opened fire on the surrounding thick forest and kept driving. They didn't stop until they got to the town of Mitchell, over 20 miles down the road, having learned by radios that everyone was okay.

"I'd sure like to get a piece of that SOB that shot at me!!" were the first words out of Jim's mouth when they stopped for a break.

"I think I did," Kevin said. "He shot three or four rounds and I saw a muzzle flash in the thicket. I emptied a mag in there and cut a lot of weeds. If he was anywhere close he was livin' hard."

"Why the hell would anybody shoot at us? We ain't hurtin' anybody!" Jim was white with anger.

"I can't figure it out," Clay said. "Martin County is about a pore a place as I know about. They ain't nothin' there worth stealin', and we ain't takin' anything that belongs to anybody."

"Nothin' worth stealin', 'cept for the trucks we drove," Chris Hamilton said. "Mebbe somebody didn't have nothin' that would run."

Clay said, "That guy in town was goin' to shoot me 'n Pietro for our pickup. Could be you hit on it."

"Why'nt they just step out and ask for a ride?" Isaac said.

"Some folks don't think like that," Kevin told him.

"Well, we'll just leave that sort to their own misery," Roscoe said. "We don't need to go back that

direction for anything I know of."

Kevin said, "Yeah. And let's hope they don't decide to come our direction, either."

Jim Collier had calmed down some, but he was still as mad as anyone had ever seen him. He said, "I think a good forest fire this Fall would flush out some of 'em where I could get a shot at 'em."

"Nah," Kevin said. "Let 'em try to come to us if they want to. They ain't got any idea where we're goin' anyway."

Isaac said, "I hope you're right."

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 68

"That little steam engine is just what we need to run things around the park," Isaac said. "We got a burr mill, too, so we can grind meal and flour with it."

"I think we'd better not use it until we have to. No need to wear it out while we can use regular engines," Zachary said. "Better not load the cabbage too deep in the truck, or it'll get bruised."

"Yeah. I think we had better take this load to the women and maybe they'll let us sit in the shade and cut it up for sauerkraut. That would be a lot better than being out in this heat."

They got in the truck and started for the school kitchen.

Isaac was driving and said, "I'll park under the shelter house for now. We have to trim this stuff, so we might as well do it in the shade. Leave the trash in the truck bed and I'll drive it down to the compost pile later."

"This is going to be a lot of work to get it all shredded," Zach said.

"There's got to be some kids around to help with that. I wish we had more of those mandolin things for shredding it. Two of them are just too slow."

"Better than using a knife. I've done it that way and it's a real bore," Zach said.

"Back to that steam engine," Isaac said. "What did you have in mind for it to do?"

"Nothing special, except that burr mill. We need to figure out how all this stuff works while we can still do something about it if we have problems," Zach told him.

"I guess that's right. I was just worried about what we will do when these things break or wear out. We don't have any experts at making parts for them, or even running them, for that matter."

"You're as close as we've got to a machinist, Isaac."

"I know. That's what worries me."

\*\*\*\*\*

"Does anybody know if there is a bigger source of water power around here?" Richard Dalton asked at the Sunday meeting.

"There's Spring Mill Park, where all those folks were camped," Roscoe said nodding in the direction Jim Crawford and Bill Simmon's families.

"How far away is that?"

"Mmm, 'bout 30 miles, give or take," Roscoe said.

"Anything closer?"

"There's Beck's Mill, about 4 or 5 miles south of town. Say about 12 miles from here."

"That's more doable. Any others?"

"There's a big cave spring over at Cave River Valley, but no mill there. That's over close to the Flynn's place, about 6 or 8 miles to the west."

Richard said, "The reason I'm asking is, we need a sustainable way to grind flour and corn meal, and to power some other things."

"That's nice and all, but what about using the steam engines we got?" Clay asked.

"They'll break down eventually and we don't have anyone who can make parts for them. The boilers will go bad someday and leak, or blow up. We need to do things we can keep going."

It got quiet for a time before various people began to talk to nearby friends and family. Bill Simmons stood up and said, "We need somebody in charge of this power thing. Somebody to make sure the right things get done. Time is going by and we all know what that means. Some day we'll wake up with no gas or diesel engines that will run. We have to have a leader to make sure we get things done."

"Are you campaigning Bill?" Raymond Alexander asked.

"Most certainly not! I want somebody in charge that knows what they are doing here."

Richard Dalton said, "I don't think we need an expert in charge for this. We have some people with expertise, but what we really need is an organizer. Like Mrs. Collier did with the steam engine trip. She doesn't know much about how steam engines WORK, but she knew where they were and she knew who to talk to about getting it done. That's what we need on the energy problem."

"How about one of you young people? You are all educated and you're smart," Roscoe said.

Isaac Kelley said, "I don't think so. We're not managers, were scientists and engineers and historians. We need someone with management skills."

"Jim Crawford was our territory sales manager," Jeff Hobart said. "Jim, do you want to do this?"



"I think I may have a full time job marrying young folks," Jim said.

Roscoe smiled and said, "They'll all be married pretty soon, and besides, it doesn't take that long. Looks like you're it Jim."

"But I don't know anything about energy and water power!"

"Don't have to know about it Mr. Crawford," Misti Fordyce said. "You just have to know who DOES know about it. And we can help you with that."

Bill Simmons laughed and said, "Looks like you've got the job, Jim!"

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 69

"How can we work this? I need to know who can tell me something about what's going on with this energy thing," Jim Crawford said.

"Well, I'm into blacksmithing, and wind power and steam power," Isaac told him. Rich Dalton knows more than anybody about water power. Zach Felsen is the guy for solar power, especially on the engineering side of it. But Alena has built a few solar ovens and done more cooking in them than anyone I've heard about. Pietro is a historian. He knows about how old water mills were built in Europe and around the world."

Jim said, "Good! You are all nominated to my advisory committee. Anybody else know about energy?"

Marta Beam said, "Yes. Doctor VanDerver knows a LOT about solar electric power. And Eddie and Chris put my solar lights in."

Roscoe said, "Jacob Knepp knows more about horse power than I ever dreamed. We're going to need him."

Jim Crawford said, "Okay. If there is anyone else who can help us figure this out, we really need you to tell us. I'm going to say we need to have a get acquainted meeting to start this off. No time like the present. Everybody do what you need to get comfortable and meet here in 10 or 20 minutes then? Can we do that?"

Murmurs of agreement accompanied nodding of heads as Jim looked around the group. He said, "Okay. See you in a few minutes."

\*\*\*\*\*

It was Monday so Ruth Bennett/Cooper, Esther Morris/Kelley, and Mary Hanover/Dalton got on the horse drawn wagon to go to the garden field for the day. Jordan Alexander and John Anderson loaded up two one-row cultivators and joined them. When they got to the field, the boys would use the horses individually with the cultivators. It saved an immense amount of hoeing. The horses could still get through the row middles, even though the crops were mature and growing tall.

The women took a 5 gallon bucket each and began to cut okra, pick beans, and pick squash and cucumbers. The bean picking went slowest, a job that suited Mary Dalton. It was quiet and peaceful in the field with the other women 100 yards away in rows of the far side of the field. The two boys were watching their horses walk down the row middles and steering the cultivators. All Mary could hear was the occasional clank of a cultivator hitting rock and the soft rattle of trace chains brushing the plants. She paid close attention to the size of the beans, only picking the ones that were full grown.

She didn't hear a sound, but something made her look up ahead of her. A wolfish looking dog stood in the bean row, his eyes gleaming at her. He was too thin to be healthy. Mary was startled, but spoke to the dog and it growled in return. It began a stalking walk in her direction, lips curled away from its' long canine fangs. The low throaty growl stopped when it speeded up to a lope.

Mary screamed loud and long, and instinctively held her bucket in front of her in defense. The dog had 10 feet to go before it reached her and was just preparing to lunge at it's next step when two shots sounded loud. The dog fell but tried to get up. Jordan was running across the bean rows, his pistol aimed, trying to get closer for a surer shot. Mary stumbled backwards, keeping her bucket in front of her. Jordan stopped, aimed, and shot three more times. The dog collapsed in a pile, shot in the head.

Mary stood in the field, a puddle forming under her. Her face was pale as she watched Jordan look at the dog, then kick it once to make sure it was dead. Satisfied, he went over to Mary who looked wide-eyed at him, then at the pistol in his hand.

"You look like you're more scared of my gun than you was of the dog," Jordan said.

"I....I guess I am. Guns kill people!"

"Bullsh!t! People kill people. They might use a gun, or a rock or whatever."

Mary said nothing as she kept staring at the gun.

"Look lady, I just saved your butt, y'know? That dog was gonna have you for lunch! Don't you understand that?"

"Get away from me with that gun!"

Jordan stared at her like she was from another planet. Finally he said, "Okay. I'll do that. You don't need my help, so you figure out how to get the dead dog outa yer bean row. You can figure out how to find dry clothes, too!"

He turned and stomped back toward his horse, standing nervously a few rows over. He spoke to the horse to calm it down and looped the driving lines over his shoulder, telling the horse, "Whoa, settle down. It's all right."

Jordan finally remembered to reload his pistol, put it on safety and stuck it in his holster. By that time, John Anderson had stopped his horse, tied it to a bush, and was running their direction. The other women were following him. Jordan stayed where he was until John reached him.

"What happened?" John asked, breathless.

"Dog tried to have Mary for lunch. I shot him. She peed her pants and then she ran me off! More scared

of my gun than the dog! She's a damned idiot! Fulla that religious crap about non-violence! Next time I'll let her fight the dog and see if she likes that better. I'm outa here!"

He slapped the lines on the horse's rump and said, "GIDDAP!"

He had made two more rounds cultivating when he saw the women walking toward the park road with Mary. John had watched from a distance, then wisely left the women to attend to Mary and went back to cultivating himself. It was an hour later when he saw Ruth and Esther return to the field, but he didn't see Mary. Ruth and Esther were carrying pistols on their belts.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 70

"Why?" Rich Dalton asked Mary. "Why are you so terrified of guns? There has to be a reason and I don't want to hear about church teachings."

"Guns kill people!" she said defiantly.

"About the same number of people used to get killed each year by car wrecks as guns, but you ride in cars and trucks and you always did. Now tell me WHY!"

"My little brother was shot and killed. He didn't do anything! They just shot him! One of those gang things. A drive-by they called it. We have to get rid of guns! We have to!"

"Where did this happen?" Rich asked softly.

"He'd gone to Indianapolis to the Zoo with a church group. They were walking a long ways back to where they parked the bus. This car went by and they just started shooting! They hit another girl, but she lived. They said Cody died instantly. He was only fourteen! He was a GOOD kid!"

It was a long evening at the Dalton house before Mary went to sleep crying.

\*\*\*\*\*

"She's a nut case," Jordan told Destiny.

"Something made her that way. I'd like to know what it was."

"I don't want any more to do with her. I'm not perfect, but she treated me like dirt for no reason! I can do without people like her."

"It wasn't you, it was the gun she was afraid of," Destiny said. "No, you're not perfect, but you're a good guy. And I love you for it. You did save her from probably being killed."

"Makes me wonder if it was a good idea," Jordan said. "The dog needed shot, though."

\*\*\*\*\*

While canning and drying were proceeding at the park kitchen, the Flynn homestead was doing

likewise. The hot weather made the creek bottom steamy with humidity, so the family had taken to getting up very early to work in the garden and other outdoor chores. It was nearly noon when they all trudged toward the house with their buckets of produce to make some lunch and cool off in the shade while they processed the food for canning.

Nathan Hertel walked behind Hannah and couldn't help admiring her walk. Her mother Janice was beside her, so Nathan was careful about cadging looks at the girl. He had made friends with her since they began living here, but she didn't seem to have nearly the interest in him that he'd hoped. She had a pixie face and she was a feisty kid. He liked that, so he made the most of her sharp wit and teased her just enough to get her attention. He was wondering how he could get her to like him more.

He was also thinking about how he could start a place of his own. The adults were talking about that for all the kids, and he took it seriously about what he needed to do like Patrick and Amy had done, fixing up the farm house. There was a place on down the creek that had a really nice house, but no outbuildings except a big pole barn. He had mentioned that he'd like to have that place and nobody had objected. The family wanted to fill the whole valley and get the fields in shape before they got overgrown from neglect.

Nathan had a truck of his own now, and had a big gas tank in the bed they had gotten at a farm store. The truck had a heavy trailer hitch and he had pulled home a trailer from the same place, a 12 footer. They were running out of parking places, or he'd already have a tractor at home, too. He decided it was time to work on the property down the road, as soon as the summer work was finished. He would need a Bush Hog to clear the fields with. He could probably haul that on his trailer, he thought.

Then he noticed Hannah walking up the steps to the house ahead of him and got distracted again. She was past 16 now and she had really nice legs like her Mom. Her Mom was pregnant again and had a big belly, but her face was beautiful. Nathan wondered if all pregnant women looked that good and if Hannah would look that much better pregnant? If that were true, she would be a knockout, he thought.

He wondered, too, if it was just because she was the only girl available to him that had him so interested. Brandi Sullivan had made it clear that she had dibs on Brandon Flynn, so she was off the market as far as he was concerned. That only left Hannah for him, since the girls at the park were too far away.

They sat their buckets in the shade of the porch they'd built on the lower level of the converted barn. Hannah turned and looked at him with a smile and said, "You're awful quiet back there."

Nathan tried to think of something to say and only got out, "It's too hot to talk."

He was busy taking in her flushed face, the dew of sweat in her upper lip, and the bangs that came almost to her eyes. No, he thought, it's not just because she's the only one around.

Lunch was cold sandwiches and a salad from the garden, made rich with boiled eggs from their chickens. They talked some while they cut corn off the cobs for canning and sliced squash for drying. Nathan had his head cleared enough he could think, so he made his bid for taking over the property down the road. He talked with Wayne about that and got some good ideas about what he needed to do there.

At the hand well pump, he found himself washing ears of corn with Hannah who was washing more squash. She said to him, "I'll help you work on that house down there if you want."

It took him a minute to realize what she meant. He was always slow on the uptake about that sort of thing. As quickly as he could get it out, he said, "Yeah. I'd sure like that."

They exchanged smiles that lingered and worked with more enthusiasm. Something had changed between them, and Nathan was overjoyed.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 71

"We're growing into quite a little community," Misti said at supper. "It's getting to be like the ancient villages I studied."

"How so?" Zach asked.

"Well, we have the weaver and the potter, the farmers and the doctor, a blacksmith, a carpenter and a baker. What else does it take to be a village?"

"Hmph. Pretty soon you'll be wanting a village head man. A mayor, or tribal chief, or whatever."

Misti said, "It might be a good idea."

"We need a foundry a lot worse. And a machinist, and a stone cutter and a mason and I don't know how many more."

"We're going to need a government and laws pretty soon," Misti said.

"What for? We all get along pretty well. If somebody has a problem they work it out. It's not like this is a big city."

"It's going to be big some day, so we need to lay the ground work for that," she said.

"I wouldn't talk about that too much. People aren't going to like it," Zach said.

"Why not? It's for their own good. They'll understand that."

Zach chuckled and said, "Tell you what, you talk to Alena, or Pietro about that and see what happens."

"Oh, Alena is a sweetie. She'll like the idea."

"Uh-huh. Don't say I didn't warn you." Zach grinned as he said it.

Misti didn't know what to think about Zach's remarks. Alena was a friend of hers and they gossiped a lot. Surely Zach must be wrong.

Tina Marie Rankin was baking bread with Alena when Misti went to the big outdoor oven to get some bread. Alena had begun to take IOU's for bread because trading sometimes got too complicated. She gave the IOU's to Roscoe who was grinding flour for her, and to whoever went to town to get other things she needed. People were beginning to treat the IOU's like money, trading them among

themselves for many different things. When someone 'collected' on an IOU, they tore it up, signifying the debt as paid. It was working for everyone when they didn't have an obvious trade to get what they wanted.

Misti said, "That sure smells good!"

"It'll be out in a few minutes," Tina Marie said. "Have you got any eggs? We're going to need some later today."

"No, but I can go get some from Michelle. She said her hens are laying their heads off. You can use the older ones in the bread, can't you?"

"Yeah. We usually ask her for the old ones because we don't want any to go to waste, and they mix up easier, too. Fresh ones are better to fry for breakfast. Here's a basket to put them in."

"I'll be back in a minute," Misti said, glad to get away from the blistering hot oven. She had noticed that both women were sweating profusely. They definitely earned their pay for baking.

She gave Michelle an IOU for 2 dozen eggs and came back with them as the two women were scooping out the round loaves with a wooden paddle they called a 'peel'. Pietro had made that and a wooden cooling rack where the loaves sat until someone picked them up.

They had agreed some time ago that a dozen eggs were worth 2 loaves of bread. Alena and Tina Marie measured their dough out in a small metal bowl for a loaf, so they always came out the same size. Misti put her 4 loaves in the basket she'd brought, covered them with a towel, and said goodbye to the women, knowing they were too busy to discuss government and laws. She had to agree with Zachary that things were indeed working very well. It was just fine now, but people were bound to have disagreements and then it would be good to have someone to help settle them. They needed to agree on what laws would be, too. She had to think about this some more.

\*\*\*\*\*

Jacob Knepp was thinking about what to do about the problem of money. IOU's had become the way of doing business in the valley community, but that was troublesome when he had sold a beef for butchering last winter, and he was still collecting on it, in products and labor from various ones. He wasn't sure if he had gotten a fair price for his beef, or not.

Money would make things simpler. But nobody would accept the old money now with the government gone. Everyone still put prices on their IOU's in dollars, but they also wrote what it was for--a day's labor, or a weaned pig, or a bushel of beans. They needed some form of money that everyone would accept to make trading easier.

He had heard of silver and gold coins, but nobody had any of them here. And if they found some, who would own them, and what would they be worth? Paper would someday all be gone, so they had to find something else for money.

Jacob didn't like the idea of paper money anyway. The Amish had always done most of their money business among themselves until recently they began to use banks more. He had some money in the bank when they closed forever and now it wasn't worth anything because anyone could go break into a bank and get all the paper money they wanted. He had to find a better way, and one that everyone would agree on.

To make it even harder, some things weren't worth much now, like clothing, or kitchen things, but they would be priceless years from now when the supply of them ran out. Nobody could spare the time to go collect a lot of those things and there was nowhere to store them. He could see a lot of problems coming, but he had no answers for them.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 71

"It's cool here in the shade," Hannah said.

She sat down on the front porch step of the nearly new house with the big old shade trees. Nathan went to the fake rock in the overgrown flower bed and got the house key. He had been inside several times, she had not. He wondered what she would think of it.

"I left some windows open. It shouldn't be too hot inside," he said, and opened the door for her.

"Wow! It's a really nice place!"

"Yeah. It looks good, but it's all electric. There's a chimney in the basement, but no stove. I don't know why, but I didn't find any busted pipes. There wasn't any water leaked out or anything like Pat found in their old house."

"It's all so neat and clean, and the kitchen is really nice! Lots of counter space. Wonder who lived here?" Hannah asked.

"It was some old couple. The guy left a note to his kids, I guess. Said his wife was sick and he was taking her to the hospital. They never came back, 'cause there's no car here, just an old truck in the garage."

Hannah was opening cabinets. Mice had been in them and made a mess of anything in paper and cardboard packages, but the rest was intact. "I can have this in shape pretty quick, but we'll have to find some way to cook and get water."

Nathan said, "The old well outside is good. The pump works and everything. That's part of why I wanted this place, 'cause I didn't want to have to dig a well."

"Why didn't Pat and Amy go for this place?"

Nathan grinned and said, "They'd never been in here and I wasn't telling him about it. The weeds were all grown up so it looked pretty bad until I mowed it last week. First time I ever got ahead of Pat. He's gonna be sore when he see's what he missed."

He opened the sliding glass door to the back porch and said, "There's good sidewalks to the pole barn and around to the front porch. There was a walker in the bedroom, so that made me think they were old people. And you can see where there were walks to some other buildings. The root cellar is the only thing left. It looks like they tore down some old farm buildings and just put up this pole barn. Like they built this house and just quit farming."

Hannah looked around outside and said, "It's sad to think they probably spent their whole lives on this farm and then didn't get to enjoy their retirement."

"There's a big disc sitting out there in the weeds. Somebody was farming the ground. Probably rented it out. I figure the tractor has to be in the neighborhood somewhere."

"We'll need to make a place for horses soon," Hannah said.

"There's plenty of room in that pole barn. It's huge. There's some straw bales in there, and some bags of grass seed the mice didn't get into."

Hannah asked, "Do you think we can find wood stoves for the house?"

"I already did. My truck was full when I saw them at the farm store or I'd have brought one home."

He licked his lips then and said, "Uh, do you... I mean, we're talking like we're gonna move in here, but is that for real, or are you thinking it's just for me?"

"Of course I want to live here with you! You can be so dense sometimes," Hannah said.

She stepped closer to him and kissed him. That soon got more serious.

Later, they sat at the table and ate the lunches they'd brought along. Nathan said, "I dreamed about this for months. It is so cool to be here with you. I was afraid it would never happen."

Hannah smiled around her mouthful of food and finally swallowed. Then she said, "You're really sweet."

She reached for his hand and said, "Let's make a trip and get what we need here. I want to move in before winter comes, you know?"

Nathan said, "I'll get some paper and make a list."

He headed for the beautiful desk in the living room and came back with a note pad and pencil, then said, "What are we getting in town? You can have anything you want. I mean, it's like the end of the world, and we're the only people left. We can have it all."

"We need a wood stove to cook on," Hannah said. "Where could we find one of those? They're like, all old and rusty, if you can find one. Mom and Dad had to do all kinds of work to get theirs fixed up."

"Oh, crap. I forgot about that. The chimney is in the wrong place, too. I'll have to build one, I guess. I hope I can do that."

"What about those metal chimneys like Dad used? They just put the pipes together and stuck it through the roof."

Nathan said, "I'll have to ask you Dad where to get that. We might find a cooking stove at one of those antique places."

Hannah said, "I heard the Amish girls talking about having their stove outside in a barn in hot weather to keep the house cool. That sounded good to me. Let's see if we can find two stoves, then we won't



have to move it out for summer and back inside in winter."

"Yeah! That'd be cool. Hey! Nobody has been to the little towns out here looking for stuff. I heard 'em all talking about where they went to get the old farm machines and stuff. I bet we can find something in Paoli, or Orleans, or someplace like that."

Hannah said, "That's where Amos came from, the Amish guy. I bet there are more Amish out that way that had wood stoves. That's where we ought to look."

"Those things are heavy. I'd better get Pat to go with us, and maybe Wayne and Jason, too."

"We can eat at home for now. We need to get plenty of firewood cut and food canned for winter. The stove can wait until later," Hannah said.

"Okay," Nathan said. "Oh, I've got to get the fields mowed and then plowed up, Wayne said. There's little bushes starting to grow out there. Man! This is going to take a while."

"I can drive a tractor," Hannah said. "You need to get me one that's not too big. I can mow and you can plow, okay?"

"Yeah!"

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 72

"Firewood and solar are our best resources for future energy," Richard Dalton said. "They are the only forms of energy we will have access to in the future. That's what our last meeting with Jim concluded."

"Indiana has a lot of coal," Zachary Felsen said. "Wish we could use that. It's so concentrated."

"Yes, but. We're too far from the mines to haul it here without trains or big trucks, and without diesel fuel to run draglines, we can't strip mine it. That's a thing of the past. Besides, it has so much sulfur in it that it would be a major polluter without modern technology to clean it up."

"The community is growing already with so many women pregnant. It won't be long until we have to go a long ways for firewood," Zach said.

James Cooper said, "There is plenty of forest in the area to keep us going if we selectively cut it. We have plenty of cleared land for farming, so we don't need to clear cut forests. It's a matter of sensible timber management. Our big problem is going to be keeping enough of the cleared land from growing up in trees. That needs to be on everybody's agenda or we will be short of cleared land within a generation. As long as we don't try to live too close together, we'll be okay. We need to spread out."

Isaac Kelley said, "If we can keep the diesel stuff running for a few more years, we'll have a good chance. We could put a lot of land in grass pasture and gather cattle and horses to run on it to keep the ground clear of trees. Just have to mow it every year. That's easy enough with big equipment. We don't want our kids and grandkids having to clear land with axes and pulling stumps with oxen."

"We need to keep a sawmill running," Pietro said. "The steam engines will last for a while, but they will want repairs and we don't have anyone who knows how to make parts for them. This could have us building log houses before many years."

Isaac said, "At least we've gathered enough tools to do it that way for a while. What worries me is that the whole area will run out of steel to make things. Smelting steel and making castings is heavy industry work and it takes iron ore, coal and limestone, IF we had a furnace and we don't. We have limestone, but crushing it would be a problem. Indiana coal has too much sulfur to do good smelting and Kentucky coal is across the Ohio River from us. Iron ore is not available within hundreds of miles. We had better preserve all the steel we can get our hands on."

Zachary said, "This is getting beyond my ability to think about with a head full of Paul's strawberry wine. It goes down like Koolade, but then it kicks your butt. I'm going home to bed."

James said, "I need to go in the house, too. It's getting late. Somebody make sure the campfire gets put out. We don't have a fire department, y'know."

"Yeah, we'll get it," a couple men said as more of them started to drift away.

\*\*\*\*\*

Mateo Rojas had awakened stiff from sleeping slumped in the corner of the truck cab. He opened his eyes and looked all around him before he moved a muscle, then reassured all was well, he moved around to loosen up and quietly opened the cab door. His wife Paulina still slept soundly in the seat. He saw his brother Luis stir in his truck when he heard Mateo's truck door click shut. Luis looked under the brim of his hat, saw who it was and closed his eyes again. Not much got past him, Mateo thought.

The thicket at this old rest stop hid the trucks well. Mateo walked behind a tree from their camp and relieved himself, still cautiously watching the area. There was no water available here, so they would have to move soon. He would not use water near a city, having learned that city water supplies carried the dreaded plague, a bio-warfare attack. His Uncle Alejandro had told him he accidentally heard that on the National Guard radio, although his CO had denied it. Alejandro had reported for duty when he was called, but when his commanding officer had lied about this, he decided that his enlistment was up. The few who had reported in were outfitted to quell riots in Dayton, Ohio, a few miles south.

Alejandro hated being lied to. He told 2 of his buddies the truth, then went outside the Armory. He did not think twice as he walked out the door and started his assigned duece and a half. The rest of the troop watched him leave and the CO did nothing because there were several troops standing around the CO yelling at him as he pulled onto the street. They had not been outfitted with CBN gear, and felt betrayed like him. Alejandro guessed that they were going to be assigned to "containment" duty, to keep the plague from spreading. That would explain all the M4 carbines and the .50 cal in his truck.

When Alejandro got to his family home, he was wondering how many others left like he did. His truck was loaded with enough supplies and gear for 8 men for a 2 month tour and pulled a 500 gallon fuel trailer. He thought that would take them wherever they wanted to go. The duece and a half was an old one, typical of Guard equipment, but it was in good shape. It had not been to the sandbox and was still painted OD green.

Mateo liked the big old truck. It would go practically anywhere, although not very fast. He looked at it and saw Alejandro peering out at him. He nodded in the direction of his uncle and walked back to the

camp site. The rest of their large extended family was beginning to stir, so he got the camp stove going and proceeded to make coffee.

The family had decided it was not safe so close to the city and immediately packed up and left for their cousin's place south of Mitchell, Indiana. Their 5 pickups and trailers following the deuce and a half made it slow going, but they had arrived at the small farm in 3 days. Their cousins were all dead or missing. None had come home during the entire winter. The livestock were healthy, though, being watered by a generous spring in the pasture. They had laboriously carried water from that spring and boiled it before drinking for months. They finally began to use from the hand dug well near the house after trying it on a couple chickens and pigs for weeks.

The following April, they had gotten his cousin's tractor going and put in a crop of vegetables and corn, then taken hay from a deserted neighboring farm for the cattle and horses. The horses had been brought home after the riding concession had closed for the season at Spring Mill State Park. His cousin had contracted horses to the park for years and made a good living by farming some while his wife worked for a dentist in Bedford. Mateo guessed correctly that she had contracted the disease from patients and gave it to the family.

It was that Spring when they heard vehicles in the park not far away. Luis' son Vicente was tending the cattle and had given chase on horseback as far as the highway to learn what he could. All he had seen was a school bus followed by several trucks going south. He thought it better to stay out of sight and let them go. They had stayed on the farm except for rare trips to Mitchell for some needed things, and had no knowledge of the group at the park. Although they were less than 2 miles away, their paths had not crossed.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 73

Vicente rode a little behind Alejandro through the big trees long the edge of the valley. The horses were thirsty, so they let them have their heads and go to the small creek that wandered through the valley. A pair of whitetail does pricked up their ears and looked at their approach. Unafraid of the horses, the deer went back to drinking 50 yards downstream. The creek was shallow, but the water moved pretty fast and was cool and clean. The horses drank deeply while Vicente went up stream and filled their spare canteens.

Vicente liked his uncle a lot, his father's uncle really. Alejandro was 29, enough older than him at 21 that he idolized him, hanging on every word he told about his deployments to other countries and his military experiences. Both of them had grown up in Ohio working for a big cattle operation there as teenagers, mostly helping with haying and winter feeding, but they had some riding work when cattle were moved to fresh pastures, not unlike their grandfather's tales of living in Texas.

The family had moved to Ohio when Vicente was very young, so he had almost no memory of Texas, but had learned the family's cowboy background from stories. The wages were better in the northern industrial towns, and they had made friends with several families in the small towns north of Dayton. It had been a good life, far better than the poverty of Mexico where his ancestors had lived. The whole extended family had thrived, first working on the farms in the area, then in various city jobs. His father Luis had become an electrician, and his uncle Ignacio had become a machinist, but when the automobile plants around Dayton had fallen on hard times, Ignacio went to work for a steel fabrication company building special equipment for other industries.

"Es no peligro, Alejandro. The deer are not worried. Why are you so wary?"

"Es no peligro until peligro finds you," Alejandro said.

"Si, but it is a beautiful day, no?"

"It is God's day. He gives it to us. We do our best with it."

Vicente loaded the canteens back on the horses and mounted to follow again.

"This is a good place," Alejandro said. "The soil is rich here. There may be floods, but not bad, I think. We may do better here. We will look a while."

Their course along the creek was parallel to a county road that led toward some farm buildings in the distance. The sound of an engine starting shocked them both. Alejandro pulled up and got off his horse, leading it deeper into the brush. Vicente dismounted and followed.

The tractor drove from near the big barn to a field of tall grass and small bushes. Soon the sound of the big Bush Hog began and the tractor travelled along a fence, beginning what looked to be a day's work of mowing.

Vicente said, "It's a CHICA!!"

"Si. Her man is close I think. We stay here a while and watch."

The sound of hammering came from the barn, then a generator fired up and the whine of a saw filled the air. Half an hour later, a young man came out of the barn and went to the hand pump in the yard for a drink. He wore a pistol on his belt, but did not appear to be worried about anything.

"We will ride the horses down the road," Alejandro said. "It will tell him that someone comes so he does not get so scared."

"Will he not shoot at us?"

"I think not. He is young and he is working. That is a good sign."

They walked the horses to the road and rode them at a walk until they came in sight of the farm house. The young man came out to the road to meet them, his hand on his pistol.

"HELLO!" Alejandro said, waving his hand in greeting as they both stopped their horses.

"Hello!" the young man answered. "Who are you?"

"My name is Alejandro Rojas. This is my nephew Vicente. We come to look for a better place to live, if it is possible."

"Uh, I'm Nathan Hertel. This farm is taken, but there are plenty more. Is it just the two of you?"

"We have a big family. We live on our cousin's farm now, but it is poor ground. This land here is rich, no?"

"Oh, yeah, it's good ground. Our family raised good crops last year. Where did you come from? How did you live through the plague? You're not sick are you?"

"No, my friend, we are not sick. We come from Ohio to find my cousin, but he was gone like so many. He never came home. We lived on his farm, all of us, five families, so it is crowded and we want to find a better place."

As they each told their stories, Nathan invited the pair to come sit in the shade and offered them a drink from the well. They were still talking when Hannah came around the field and noticed the visitors. She stopped the tractor and came to the house, her hand on her sidearm. Introductions were made and after talking a while she decided she liked the polite men.

"It's almost lunch time," She said. "Will you eat with us? It's just a pot of soup I made, but there's plenty of it. We have cornbread, too."

"That is most gracious of you Senora, but we have our own food. We would not impose on your hospitality,"

"It's no bother and we have plenty," She said. "It is so good to meet new people! Nathan, come help me get the food out. Let's eat outside. It's hot in the house."

Nathan thought a minute and said, "You can put your horses in the barn if you want. Do they need water?"

"Thank you. No, we watered at the creek."

As they walked to the barn, Vicente said, "You are building something? We heard hammering and a saw."

"Yeah. I'm making a pig pen. We have to get some livestock caught up before winter. Animals are running around loose down here, but they are getting mean and hard to catch. We want to catch more for breeding stock."

Alejandro smiled and said, "We can help you with that! Most of my brothers worked on ranchos. We have horses and can do a round up. We will kill a cow and have a barbecue for everyone! Will that be good?"

"It sure would! You need to meet our folks. After lunch we'll go down there. It's the next farm on that way," Nathan said, pointing over his shoulder. "But I'm hungry. Let's go eat."

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 74

Four windmills were spinning in the afternoon breeze atop the ridge behind the campground. Each had a washing machine operating in small buildings, and 2 had small grist mills. Despite the objections of many who were concerned about their safety, Clay Whitaker, Eddie Grimes, and Chris Hamilton had

made another trip to Elnora, Indiana and loaded a semi trailer with all the antique artifacts they could find in the area. They took a roundabout route home to avoid the spot where they had been shot at on the last trip and came back unharmed with a load of wringer washing machines, horse implements, new horse collars, and the entire stock of a complete leather shop.

Eddie Grimes had found an old, but serviceable crane at a fabrication shop and learned to use it to lay down windmills they found standing on farms. That reduced the recovery time a lot by allowing them to disassemble the windmills on the ground without risk. They had a total of 11 windmills now, 7 of them still in town where they would be sandblasted and repainted before installation. They were stored in an old truck terminal that had been converted years ago to use as a truck service garage.

The self-named Energy Team had copies of books on making improved wood-gas generators and the conversion of gasoline engines to wood gas operation. They concluded that this was a sensible way to power a sawmill and planing mill and had tasked Eddie and Chris with recovering the materials needed. Those were stored in a now empty hay barn on the farm where a large bandsaw mill had been in operation up until the plague hit. Searches of the business records there located their suppliers and began a mission to collect the necessary saw blades and maintenance items to keep the mill going for a long time. At a Sunday meeting in late August they reported their progress to the community group.

"No, it is not a long term answer," Isaac said, "but it will work for the medium term and get us what we need to build sustainable things. Jim Crawford's mill can supply us as long as we can keep his diesel running. We've looked at biodiesel production, but for now, it is more productive to use the available diesel fuel we find and add preservatives to it. By keeping it in the underground storage tanks at filling stations, it should be good for at least 10 years, or until the tanks rust out and it leaks away, whichever comes first."

Roscoe asked, "What about the steam engines we have?"

Zach Felsen answered. "We have done our best to preserve them for now, after some research at the library. Keeping them in good repair is our concern, and that will take special skills we don't have. But I have some news about that! On our trip to look at Cave River Valley yesterday as a water power site, we talked to Wayne and Jason Flynn. They are getting new neighbors! There are 5 families that were living near Mitchell, not far from Spring Mill Park. They want to move to the creek bottoms near the Flynn's because of the rich soil down there. There is one man who is a journeyman machinist! He has some experience in steel fabrication, too, and his brother is an electrician!"

Questions about the new people filled the air, until Zach called for quiet.

"We will meet them soon. They have agreed to come to our next Sunday meeting. There are 5 couples, all with children from newborns to young adults, and they have a variety of skills. They are Hispanic people who have done ranching and cattle herding the old way. Their cousin had the horse riding concession at Spring Mill Park and they have over 20 head of good riding horses. Two of the families are now in the process of moving to farms in the Flynn's valley and the other 3 families will move into Cave River Valley. They plan to build a water mill there next year."

"Why didn't they just use the mill at Spring Mill Park?" somebody asked.

"They said it was too old and not worth the trouble to keep it going. Their machinist said he could build a mill that made more power with less water using a turbine wheel. He wants to power a machine shop that way," Zach said.

\*\*\*\*\*

Michelle Compton had finally tied the knot with Doctor Van Derver after she told him last month that she was pregnant. Anthony was delighted, much to her surprise. She had been taking birth control pills until she became worried that he would choose his younger nurse assistant over her. The fact that she had been sleeping with him for months did not keep her from being jealous of the time he spent with the young girl.

Michelle had taken more than one man from another woman, so she assumed this was what Melanie Draper was up to. Melanie was an early blooming 16 year old and a young beauty that overcame 39 year old Michelle with jealousy. Michelle decided that it would be necessary to latch onto the doctor permanently as soon as possible. It wasn't her first pregnancy. The first one had ended in an abortion, paid for by the parents of the boy responsible. It wasn't what she wanted, but she was a poor working girl at the time and thought it was her only choice. She had regretted that choice every day since then, and was determined to have her own child and the best husband she could find. Anthony fit the bill perfectly and she would not let some young girl take him away from her.

Melanie had sensed jealousy from the older woman, but had done her best to get along with her. Learning medicine was foremost in her mind, something she would not give up. She thought about how to deal with the problem, to no avail.

That problem solved itself when David Flynn came into their clinic with a case of ringworm. She saw the looks on his face, the hurried brushing his hair back, and all the classic signs of teenage infatuation. He was a nice boy and Melanie let him know she thought so. She flirted with him outrageously and asked him if he was coming to the meeting next Sunday? It would be a date.

Michelle saw all this from her desk and thought maybe, just maybe, the girl would be out of her way soon. Doctor Anthony had no clue what was going on except for noticing that his nurse aide was happy to see David. He liked young people and thought it was a good thing.

\*\*\*\*\*

Vicente walked back toward the house to carry more household things out to the horse trailer for moving to their new place. Alejandro and Mateo were in the yard discussing what to take with them on the move and the women were inside. Vicente noticed movement in the woods beyond the barn and saw a reflection of light from something that told him it wasn't an animal. He got to the porch where he was out of sight of the woods and waved at Alejandro who was facing his way, imploring him to come to the porch.

"Que' es eso?"

"COME!" He mouthed silently, but waving frantically.

Alejandro glanced around and then walked to the porch, asking, "Que'?" (What?)

"Someone is in the woods behind the barn. I saw light from something in the sun there."

Mateo was looking their way when he jerked as they heard a shot.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 75

Another shot hit the house from beyond the barn. Alejandro ducked and grabbed Vicente, shoving him into the house ahead of himself. As they came in, the women shrieked. Paulina had seen Mateo fall to the ground and tried to get past Alejandro to go to her husband. Alejandro grabbed her and threw her back into the room, saying, "They will shoot you! Get on the floor, all of you! Crawl to the next room and get the ninos in the cellar!"

Alejandro crawled to the closet and got out 2 of the short ugly black rifles he'd taken from the Guard truck. Vicente caught the one tossed to him and then the bag of magazines as it slid across the floor. He looked at His uncle with wide eyes.

Alejandro said, "Tell Luis to get his shotgun and stay in here. I look for a way to get outside."

"But, Mateo..."

"He is dead, or his is not. Let him lay for now. We will try to fight them. There are at least two, probably more. We go to the lane where it is low, and we will take the fight to them."

Alejandro said a few harsh words to the women and children in the cellar and closed the door. Vicente found his father Luis and relayed what he'd been told. Luis agreed to stay inside and defend the house with his brothers Ignacio and Miguel who had been taught with Vicente about the black rifles. Vicente crawled back to the kitchen with Alejandro who motioned him to follow. They began to crawl to the side porch where a huge Clematis vine covered a trellis on the side toward the woods. They slipped outside leaving the door for Miguel to close and belly crawled first to the woodshed, then to the edge of the lane.

Weeds covered their movements from the side the shots had come from as they slid into the old dirt lane that led to the back of the farm. Alejandro was faster than him, but Vicente did his best to keep up at a low crawl. A hundred yards of that was exhausting, but he was running on adrenaline. They stopped where the lane entered the woods and rested for a minute.

Over the edge of the bank beside the lane Vicente saw two men, no. Three. They came out of the woods and made their way toward the lane, apparently hoping for cover to approach the house. Another man's head briefly appeared at the edge of the woods from behind a tree.

"Wait!" Alejandro said softly. "They come this way. Put the lever here, so! It shoots tres times, eh? Remember?"

"Si! I remember."

"Shoot one tres times! Move to another and shoot tres times. Okay?"

"Si! I got it."

"I shoot one on right, you shoot one on left, we both shoot the middle, okay?"

The one in the woods made the mistake of sticking his head out again to look at the house. A heavy rifle fired once and he flopped back out of sight. The other 3 ran for the lane where they met a hail of



shooting and dropped like falling stones. Alejandro held his hand up flat for "WAIT!"

The two men laid in the lane for what seemed like hours. No sound came their way except those of nature. When their hearing began to normalize they could hear birds chirping and the harsh caws of a crow in the field as it flew over the fallen men. It landed on a high limb at the edge of the woods and sat there silently.

"Our friend the crow says there is nothing in the woods. We go look at the ones in the field from the hill top."

They crawled back up the lane slowly, every movement reminding Vicente of where he had banged into rocks on the way out. From the higher ground they could see the men lying motionless in the field.

"I go check them now. You stay here and watch the woods. If something moves, kill it."

Vicente scanned the edge of the woods but saw no sign of anyone. He could see out of the corner of his eye that Alejandro had reached the men lying in the field, but then he crouched lower. Alejandro had picked up one of the men and then dropped him again, going on to the next one. A minute later, Vicente heard a scream, but he could see Alejandro standing with his rifle pointed at the man on the ground. He heard his uncle say, "TALK TO ME!"

Soon, Alejandro was coming back to the lane, carrying his rifle in one hand and dragging a man with the other. He got to the lane and laid the unconscious man down. He looked dead, but soon began to moan. Alejandro said to him, "How many are you?"

The man moaned again, holding his bloody side. Alejandro stuck a thumb in his eye and said, "HOW MANY ARE YOU?"

The man screamed as he took the thumb away and covered his face with one hand.

"TELL ME NOW, and I will make it short."

"Four," came out in a gasp. Then the man curled in a ball and moaned again.

"Four is all?"

The wounded man nodded yes.

"Are there more where you came from?"

"No."

"Do not LIE TO ME!"

Alejandro reached to gouge the eye again and the man recoiled away.

"How many at home?"

"Four. Two men. Two women," he said faintly.

"Where are they?"

"Mitchell. Two trucks," he gasped. Then he shuddered and died.

Vicente stared at the dead man, no older than himself. He gagged at the smell. The dying man had fouled himself. His belly was covered with blood and his pants were wet.

Alejandro said, "Get the guns. I'll get the packs off them."

Vicente was still staring at the dead man.

Alejandro said forcefully, "Do it PRONTO!"

"We must bury them."

"No. We will go now. The devil will dispose of his own."

At the house, Vicente and Alejandro dropped their burdens and went to Mateo, sitting on the porch. He had a bandage on his shoulder and looked pretty weak. Paulina said, "He needs the doctor! We must get him to the doctor!"

"Is everything loaded?" Alejandro asked.

"Si. We are ready to go now," Miguel said.

Paulina was getting frantic and screamed at Alejandro, "We go to the doctor NOW!"

Alejandro held her hand and said, "Paz, Senora, paz. We go to the Flynns and they show us the way to the doctor's house. Mateo will be fine. I have been shot before. I know of what I say. I give him medicine for pain now and he will sleep as we go."

He went to the military truck, got a pack from the back, and went to the kitchen with some pills. He crushed them into powder with a spoon on the counter and scraped up the powder. That went into a small glass of water that he stirred.

"Drink this and the pain will be less," he told Mateo.

The salvaged gear from the intruders was thrown in the back of the duece and a half while Paulina and Ignacio's wife, Regina helped Mateo into his truck.

"Can you drive?" Alejandro asked Paulina.

She nodded and bit her lip. "I can drive."

"The roads are crooked. We go slow. Be careful on the hills and go slow. We will get Mateo to the doctor in plenty of time. The bullet passed through, so he does not need surgery, only good cleaning and medicine. Keep him warm to keep him from shock. It is better for him to rest now, so take it easy, okay? The ninos can ride with Luis, okay?"

She nodded again and said, "Thank you Alejandro. We go now."

He approved of the look of determination on her face. He started the big military truck to lead the way. Rosa climbed in with him and they started down the road.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 76

David Flynn volunteered to go with his father and the Rojas family to the doctor and introduce them. As they rode together, he asked his dad, "Why did somebody shoot the man?"

Jason said, "Some people would rather steal than to work for what they want."

"That's stupid! They don't have to work for anything! Stuff is just lying around everywhere for the taking!"

"I know, but trucks need work to get them going, and food needs gathered, and firewood needs cut. Some people never learned how to do those things. That's what this looks like. No way to know, now that they're dead."

"There's no need to kill people for stuff!"

"I know, son, but they do it anyway."

Jason parked in the doctor's driveway and went inside quickly to tell them what was going on. Anthony hurried outside just as Paulina stopped her truck.

"I'm Doctor Van Derver. Let me look at him before we move him."

"Si, he is sleeping. His brother gave him pain pills. He said to tell you they were "Dilaudid", two big ones an hour ago."

"How did he take them? Under his tongue?"

"No. He mixed them in water and Mateo drank it."

The doctor nodded his head at this and said, "It will be a little slower acting that way and last longer. Okay. How do you feel Mateo? A lot of pain?"

"Nah so bad now. Sleepy."

"We need to get you inside and clean that wound. Can you walk okay?"

"Dizzy."

"Okay. Ma'am, you take his good arm and help him walk. I'll hold him from this side. Mateo, let's put your hand in your pocket, okay? You need to hold it still."

The doctor came back out of the bedroom he used for examination and said, "He's resting now. Don't worry, he'll be fine. I don't know your name Ma'am."

"I am Paulina Rojas. He is my husband Mateo. We are very grateful to you. We will pay you somehow."

Anthony shook his head and said, "I don't take money. People help me with what I need, but that is all. You should not be worried about that now. First, we will do our best for your husband so he heals completely. He is a young man, and strong, so he will heal fast. I gave him some antibiotics and cleaned the wound, and I gave him all he could drink with some electrolytes in it. You will need to change the dressing on it regularly. I will show you how to do that."

"I will take the best care of him!"

"I'm sure you will. I'll show you all you need to know about it. But right now, he needs to rest. He is sleeping in bed now and I strongly suggest you stay the night with him right where he is. It will be less stress on him. This is my wife, Michelle. She will show you around the house."

Michelle asked, "Are you hungry?"

"I have no thought of food."

"Well, come have a cup of coffee with us and we will try to make you comfortable. There's not much to do now but let him rest."

Paulina said, "I must do something for your kindness. What can I do?"

Michelle sighed and said, "I'll let you do the dishes or something, if you insist, but let's get some food into you. When your panic is gone you will be very tired."

"Si, I am tired. The trip was hard. I do not drive much and I do not know the roads."

Paulina collapsed in a kitchen chair while Michelle poured the coffee and lit the gas stove under some pans.

Jason told Doctor Anthony, "Could David stay here tonight to direct them back to our place? I'm not sure the woman could find it, as strung out as she was coming over here."

"Sure! We have an extra room. That will be fine."

"David, are you okay with that?" Jason asked.

"Sure, Dad! I'll stay."

Jason noticed his son's glance at the girl in the nurse's outfit, but didn't comment.

\*\*\*\*\*

Alejandro helped his brothers unload the trailers at the farm he and Rosa had chosen, then followed them down the road to the next farm where Ignacio would live. For now, both his and Miguel's families would stay together and get one place in order. When the women were cooking supper over a campfire in the yard, Miguel said, "We have to go back. There are more of them you said."

Alejandro nodded, then said, "Manana. For now, we eat and rest. It is a long day today."

Miguel said, "Si. Muy malo day."

Jason's truck drove up to the Ignacio's place causing everyone to gather around for news of Mateo.

Jason got out and said, "Mateo is sleeping. The doctor said he'll be fine, but it will take some weeks for him to heal up. Paulina will stay with him there tonight and my son David stayed to make sure they can find their way back here tomorrow."

Luis said, "We will all stay on this place for a while. We will take care of their ninos and all will be well."

Jason said, "It bothers me that there are that kind of people still around."

Alejandro said, "Not for long. Tomorrow we will go hunting."

"There are more of them?"

"Si. The one told me there are four in the town called Mitchell. He died before he said any more. We will find them. They will not come here. They will die THERE!"

Jason said, "You want some help?"

"No, my friend. This is our fight. You have done enough. We will do this."

"Hey, you need anything, let us know," Jason said.

"Gracias, my friend! We will ask where to find some things, I am sure. We are new to this place," Luis said.

"No problem. We can find whatever you want." Jason shook Luis' hand and left for home thinking they had some good neighbors.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 77

David walked Melanie home to Roscoe Beam's farm, a third of a mile away. Marta invited him inside, saying, "What brings you to our neighborhood today?"

"I'm staying the night at Doctor Anthony's. One of the Mexican guys got shot at their old place and Doc is fixing him up. I'm going to show them the way back tomorrow."

"OH! Is he going to be all right? How did that happen?"

Melanie said, "He's okay. I mean, he's hurting and all, but he'll be all right. It was just under his shoulder, like in his armpit, so it didn't break any bones or anything. His wife is pretty frantic, though."

"I'll bet she is! So, his wife is there with him?"

"Yeah," David said. "She drove him in following me and Dad to show 'em how to get here. They're

moving in close to us, but they haven't been over here yet. They're from Ohio. His brother said they were attacked at their old farm and had a shootout. The bad guys got killed, but he said there were more of 'em in Mitchell and Dad said he bet the Mexican guys go kick their butts. That brother of his is a bad dude."

Melanie said, "He was a nice guy! He was being really good to Paulina. His name is Alejandro. It sounds like that is Spanish for Alexander. I liked him."

"Yeah, he's okay, but I mean I wouldn't want him mad at ME! He's a soldier, or something."

Melanie said, "Paulina said he was in the National Guard before they came here, but he's a rancher, sort of a cowboy. They worked on a big cattle farm, him and his nephew."

"His nephew shot some of the bad guys, too, she said. They killed four of 'em that were trying to take their stuff."

Roscoe heard most of the talk, having come in from doing the feeding. They filled him in on what he had missed and he said, "I hope we don't run into that kind of trouble here."

David said, "I bet the Mexicans all go kill the rest of 'em. They said they found out there were 4 more in Mitchell somewhere."

Roscoe said, "It's been pretty quiet here for a long time. I hate to think there are still people out there that will kill you for nothing. What did they want?"

David said, "I don't know, but I got the idea they wanted to take over the farm and steal their stuff. It doesn't make any sense to me. They could just get stuff that nobody is using, like everyone else. You don't gotta kill anybody for it."

Marta looked at Roscoe and then said, "Probably they were after the women, too."

David said, "That would be stupid. Paulina really loves her husband and I think she would kill anybody that hurt him if she could. You shoulda seen the looks on her face!"

"We need to put more thinking into security around here. We've gotten pretty lax about that, with everything peaceful for so long."

Melanie frowned and said, "I don't want to have to carry a gun the rest of my life, but it looks like maybe I should. That's just crazy. I want to help people get well, not kill them!"

\*\*\*\*\*

The next morning after a good breakfast, Mateo was hurting, but he was feeling a lot better after a long night's sleep. Paulina said, "You look better today."

Mateo groaned as he got up from the table and said, "I don't feel so good."

Anthony said, "It will take a few days to get your strength back, but each day will be better. Just keep the wound clean and take all the medicine to keep from getting an infection. I'd like to see you again in a few days. This is Tuesday, are you coming to the Sunday meeting with us here?"

Paulina said, "Yes, we want to meet everyone here. It has been lonely, even with a big family."

Mateo said, "You will do the driving, okay love?"

She smiled and said, "Si, I will drive."

\*\*\*\*\*

Alejandro drove cautiously to the edge of town just after dawn and stopped the truck. He told his brother Miguel to climb on top of the old factory building and listen for sounds of people. Vicente climbed on top of the truck and listened while Alejandro walked across the street and climbed up on top of a drugstore, listening and watching in another direction.

Vicente said, "There! I see smoke. Someone is cooking, maybe."

Miguel came down at his brother's signal and joined the other two.

"It is close, maybe 3 or 4 blocks," Vicente said.

"We should walk so they don't hear the truck," Miguel said.

Alejandro nodded agreement and they set off down the residential street, away from the industrial section of town. Shade trees were plentiful and overgrown grass and weeds in once well kept yards, now deserted. Some gutters were sagging and there were missing shingles on some houses, a few showing a broken window, but the area looked pretty much like everyone had simply left. From their sidewalk perspective, there was no sign of habitation.

That changed when they came to a corner at the end of the fourth block. They had been smelling smoke for some time, and some kind of meat cooking. Miguel extended an arm for them to stop when he saw a little smoke over the top of the house on the next corner. Alejandro noted that there were no birds singing and was looking in all directions. Vicente brought up the rear, looking back the way they had come at intervals. At Miguel's signal, he stopped and stood beside a big tree.

Alejandro signalled for them to go around a house out of sight from the target house, and approach the rear of a defunct body shop. A rusted old flat bed truck was parked behind the shop. Climbing on top of the truck allowed Miguel to get on the flat roof of that building where he took a position at the roof's edge. He hand signalled to the others on the ground that he saw two men. He poked his .270 hunting rifle through the vines that covered the front corner, resting the rifle stock on the raised concrete block facade of the building. A few bugs crawled around frantically, but he paid them no attention, sighting on the opposite side of the house from where the others lay hidden.

Vicente and Alejandro began a slow stalk from one parked car to another to approach the house from the side, waiting for a signal from Miguel that no one was in sight. From their hiding place behind a stone wall they saw a teenager and an older man begin to take food from a skillet over the fire. The voices were low, but clear enough as they began to eat.

"Reckon we'll have to save some fer the wimmen. Didn't feed 'em yestiddy," the older man said.

"I ain't givin' 'em nuthin', after that girl clawed me up," the young one said. He rubbed the side of his face and winced, then greedily began to eat again. "Ain't much to a couple squirrels, any how."

"Better'n that weevily oatmeal we had fer 2 days, ain't it?"

The young one gave him a dirty look and kept eating. The canned food they'd found lately had all been frozen and burst. There was little left to salvage in the houses they had plundered. It had been short rations for too long and the men were both on the skinny side.

Vicente looked at his uncle who nodded his head and signalled for him to take the one on his side and he would get the other. The shots were very close together and both men fell heavily. Some noises came from inside the house, but no one came out while they watched for several minutes. The fallen men did not move. Alejandro hand signalled to Miguel that they were going in the house. He signalled in return that he would cover the front of it.

The back door was open as they stepped inside. As quiet as they could be, their footsteps were still audible on the creaky flooring. Alejandro cleared one room after another, with Vicente beside him for backup. They found them in a bedroom, tied to the bed with wire around their wrists. The two women were nearly naked and emaciated. They were conscious, but had a glazed look to their eyes when Alejandro spoke to them.

"We are here to help you. Those men are dead," he said.

The pair made no answer, but looked at him with wide eyes. Alejandro told Vicente, "Get them loose. We will find clothing for them."

Vicente set about untwisting the wire that was tight enough the older woman's hands had begun to turn blue. When the wire was taken off, she cried in pain as circulation began to return to her hands. The younger girl was in better shape, but not by much. One of her wrists was cut by a sharp end of the wire. When she was freed, she collapsed on the floor. Both had cracked lips and were breathing shallowly. They were thin to the point of being emaciated.

Alejandro said, "Go get Miguel. We need to get some water and food into these women."

That was done and at noon the women were still sleeping. The truck had been fetched and food and water with electrolytes given to the women. Miguel had stirred the fire in the back yard and heated some water to make soup from the contents of a couple MRE's. Vicente spoke softly to the women, saying, "Wake up, there is food."

When he touched the women in turn, they jerked in fear and tried to curl up in a ball, but he persisted and got them awake enough to recognize him. When Miguel presented the soup in their canteen cups, they nodded thanks and began to drink the broth. Alejandro gave them spoons and the men joined them eating their own MRE's.

Two houses down they found some clothing in a house with no human remains and brought it back for the women. After they were washed, dressed and fed, the older woman said in a cracked voice, "Thank you." The younger girl had not spoken yet, except to cry out when she was awakened.

Miguel said, "All the men who were here are dead. Four of them attacked us at our home and we killed all of them. One said there were two men and two women here before he died. The two men are dead. You are safe now. Our family will take care of you. We will get you to a real doctor and make you well again. You will come with us?"



The older woman nodded her head, agreeing. The younger girl looked at her and gave a sigh. Whether it was relief, or resignation was hard to tell. They loaded up in the truck willingly enough, Miguel and Vicente giving up their seats to ride in the truck bed. The girl was in the back seat of the crew cab, lying down. On the way down the highway at twenty five miles an hour, the woman began to talk.

"Where are we going?" the older woman asked.

"We just moved to two farms in a valley outside Cambellsburg. It is near Cave River Valley, if you know that place." Alejandro said as he drove. "We were leaving to go there when we were attacked at our old place near Spring Mill Park. My name is Alejandro Rojas. In the back are my brother Miguel, who did the cooking today, and Vicente, my nephew."

"I'm Sandra," she said softly. "Sandra Cummings. This is Shelley Crane, my neighbor's daughter. We're all that was left in Paoli, until those men came."

She bit her lip and was silent then.

"We are a big family," Alejandro said quietly, hoping to calm the woman. "There are 5 brothers and their wives and all the ninos, ah, children. We will all have our own farms, but for now we live on 2 farms. There are neighbors, who invited us to this place. They are two brothers named Flynn. And they know people who live in another valley, near Salem. There are many people there. We go to meet them in 3 days at their Sunday meeting. You may go with us and meet these people if you like."

He glanced in her direction for her answer, but she was leaning into the corner, sound asleep. A look at the girl proved her to be sleeping as well. He said no more until they reached Ignacio's farm.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 78

The rest of the Rojas families had been busy. There was food waiting on the table, covered with a cloth. Buckets of water were sitting on the kitchen counter, and a pot was steaming over the campfire outside. Beds were ready for everyone for that night, and the chickens were scratching and pecking happily in the yard that had just been mowed with a scythe and the cuttings raked for the cow. Pigs and a milk cow had been moved into the barn and fed, and the morning's milk was cooling in plastic bottles sitting in a tub of cool water on the porch. Someone was mowing the field behind the house and barn with a big tractor. Alejandro thought that must be the young man he had first met in this valley.

Vicente was the first to hop out of the truck bed and run to his mother Camila at the back door.

"Mama! We found them! They had two senioritas tied to a bed and we saved them! They are with us! "

"The senioritas are not malos?"

"No, Mama', no. They were tied with wire! They were very hungry, and muy asustada (afraid). They do not speak."

"Oh! Let me see them. They were prisoners?"

"Si! The men, they treat them muy malo (very bad), I think."

Sandra had come awake when the truck stopped, and the girl Shelley was beginning to stir in her seat. When Camila got to the truck, Miguel was helping Sandra out and Alejandro was talking to Shelley who was just waking up. Alejandro's wife Rosa wasn't far behind the others. She met and kissed her husband's cheek as he talked to the girl.

"There is a good bed in the house for you," he said. My wife Rosa will help you there. Come, we will find you something to drink, and Rosa will look after you."

Rosa helped the girl out of the truck and was astonished at how light she was. "This girl is skin and bones! We must feed her! Shelley leaned on her shoulder and made it to the house where she sat down on the porch, too tired to go further. Paulina came out with glasses of water and Ignacio's wife Regina brought plates of food. Both women ate again, but could not hold much.

Camila said, loud enough for all to hear, "You men go away now. We will take care of them. Go!"

Soon the women had shepherded the new arrivals inside to minister to their needs. Miguel went to the truck and came back with a large plastic bag of clothing he had gotten for them. He left this on the porch after telling his wife Luciana what it was.

The men talked a while about the trip and then went their separate ways to work on getting the place into shape to live there. A couple hours later, Camila came out and told her husband Luis, "These women have been hurt. They must see the doctor that helped Mateo."

"Should we go now? Are they bleeding?"

"No. They are too tired. We go manana (tomorrow). We bathed them with warm water, they ate, and they are asleep again. Let them sleep tonight. They have many bruises and may be hurt inside. The doctor will know what to do."

"How is Mateo doing?"

"He is resting, too. The doctor said for him to rest and let his arm heal. He ate a good meal at noon and is sleeping now."

Miguel was thinking that the house would be overflowing with people tonight. It was okay for the women to have his bed. They were hurt and very weak. He didn't mind to sleep on the floor for awhile. He'd had worse before. He would tell Luciana she could sleep on the nice couch in Ignacio's new house. Women were to be treated with respect and courtesy. When he thought about how these two had been treated he wished he'd had a shot at the men.

\*\*\*\*\*

Ignacio looked over the mowed field in back of the barn with satisfaction. These were good people who would help a new neighbor get started. He had been very discouraged when the disease had killed so many. Already he had started over in life 3 times, once when they left Mexico when he was a just married, again in Texas after he lost his oil field job and he had to work on a ranch for very low wages, and last in Ohio where they had gone to live near Luis to find better jobs.

There, he had served an apprenticeship as a machinist and gotten a good job in the factory. That job

ended when the factory closed, and he was back to working on a big cattle farm nearby. There he had learned some welding and had proven to be a good mechanic, so the owner had given him a raise just before the plague hit.

Although the plague and its' aftermath had worn him down again, he was encouraged here. There were no rules now, except what men made for themselves. He had owned a small home in Ohio with a big mortgage, but here there was no mortgage, only the challenge to find what you needed and make it work. He had wondered if he could endure starting over again, but the mowed field encouraged him. Ignacio decided he could do it again, and this time, he there would be nothing in the way of his success. He had to succeed. If he did not, his family would suffer and he would not allow that.

He thought about the big spring Jason had told him about. It was somewhere not too far away. He had said he could build a water mill there and he was sure he could do that with is brothers' help. There was much to do before the cold winter came, but he would go see that spring soon so he could think about it this winter. He would have to help Mateo and Paulina while his brother's wound healed, so they must first get everyone settled in a home and make sure there was enough food and firewood for winter. Then they would find hay and feed and livestock. It was a lot to do in very short time.

\*\*\*\*\*

Sunday came and the Rojas families were up early.

Rosa said, "Find a box for me, Vicente. Something to carry the food. And get your brother and sister dressed in clean clothes! We must not look like beggars to these fine people who make us welcome."

Luis and Camila loaded up with Vicente and their other three children in their crew cab truck and would haul the food because they had a camper shell to protect it in case of bad weather. The only other pickup was Mateo and his wife Paulina with their 4 year old daughter Natalia, and the two rescued women, Sandra and Shelley. Everyone else rode in the canvas covered bed of the military truck driven by Alejandro with his wife Rosa and two children. They would lag behind and let the 2 pickups arrive first to assure the meeting crowd they were not being invaded. It made sense to Alejandro to drive the big truck because they had plenty of diesel fuel for it.

The Sunday meeting crowd was prepared for a big crowd at the park campground. Several extra picnic tables had been brought to the meeting area for more seating and gallons of extra drinks prepared. It was Jacob Knepp's turn to lead the prayers at the meeting and he was a bit nervous ab out it. His close friends were Amish and he was now accustomed to the Baptists, Quakers, and others of indeterminate faiths, but he had never prayed with Catholics before. He hoped they would join in the multiple faith gathering and feel welcome. He planned his opening remarks with that in mind.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 79

Jacob led the group to pray for the new arrivals in the community, then asked Jim Crawford to lead a song that most people knew. Jacob then spoke for a few minutes, a simple message about the value of each soul before God, and His love for all of us. It followed naturally to quote Jesus' answer to the Pharisees, who sought to entrap him into a blasphemous remark when they asked which commandment was the most important? Jacob read from his Bible that he said "there are two; love God and love your neighbor". He closed with the Lord's Prayer, the words slightly different when he translated from

German, but everyone understood.

Jacob watched the Hispanic people each pray with him, with bowed heads, then make the sign of the cross when he finished. He decided that this was going to work and breathed a little easier. He said, "Amen" and then, "Let us go in peace and enjoy the blessings of food and friendship today."

That was the signal for everyone to turn their thoughts to the meal at hand, and the young people hurried to get started. Jacob noticed that the Hispanic children hung back until encouraged by their parents to get in line for food. Other children joined them and began to talk and ask bold questions, as children do. Jacob's concerns melted away as all the children began to mingle and all the adults, taking their example, also began to talk together. The tables filled with hungry people, associating in that most basic of rituals, that of sharing food together as a sign of unity.

"You have chickens already?" Marta asked Rosa as she savored the chicken burrito.

"No, we must find more chickens. This carne (meat) we canned last year. Soon we must can more for winter. We only have a few chickens now. We keep them for eggs."

Marta said, "Oh, we can find you some chickens. They are running loose all over the place south of town. There used to be a big chicken farm there. The fun part will be catching them!"

"AH! We will catch them with trampa (trap)! We must find some corn and it will be easy," Rosa said.

Roscoe was sitting across the table from Luis and Camila, eating heartily. His plate was piled high with unfamiliar food they had offered him.

"Man! This sure is good! What is this sausage in the cornhusks? And the cheese is wonderful. I love this stuff."

"Ah! Ees Chorizo!" Camila said. "Last year we had goats. I make cheese and we canned the meat. I make the Chorizo yesterday."

"Would you show Marta how to make this? I want some more of it."

"Si! We must find more goats for queso (cheese)." Camila said.

Luis asked, "Are there goats here? We only have tres (three) and we are so many we must find more."

"There was a guy down south of town had a lot of goats. We can go look. Maybe some survived. I'll show you where they were," Roscoe said. "We have livestock trailers and we can get you some grain until you can raise a crop."

Luis said, "It is bad to be a beggar, but we must find everything for farming. We have a tractor! There was a John Deere not far from us and Jason helped get it started with a new battery. Good batteries are hard to find."

Roscoe nodded as he chewed a mouthful. He swallowed and said, "There is a big battery delaeer in Louisville that has dry charge batteries. We can go get some and put the acid in. They will be like new and and they have all kinds. We'll take a big truck and get some more."

Luis said, "We must do something for your kindness. How can we help you?"

Roscoe said, "First we get your farms going. Then we can work together on some things. I was told you are an electrician, is that right?"

"Si, I worked for a contractor who did factories and business buildings."

"Boy, do we have work for you! But all in good time. Right now we have to get you ready for winter."

Luis looked worried and said, "We need to cut firewood and we need wood stoves in our houses. It is a problem for us."

Clay and Amy were at the next table and overheard. He smiled at Luis and said, "Don't worry about that. We'll get you some chainsaws and stoves put in. Gotta take care of folks who make great food!"

Luis was enjoying some fresh corn on the cob, the last of the season, with butter and salt. Mateo was doing his best with some one-handed, his injured arm in a sling. The children with messy faces gathered at the hand pump and washed up, some clothing getting wet in the process, then they were off to the playground swings with some new found friends to show them around.

\*\*\*\*\*

"I finally got Sandra to talk to me a little," Marta said on their way home. "Shelley didn't say much, but they both ate good, so maybe we can get some meat on their bones and they will start feeling better."

Roscoe said, "Those women looked--I don't know what to call it--haunted, maybe. They must have had some bad times."

"They did, from what Rosa told me. She was worried about them. Melanie said the doctor checked them out and said all they needed was rest, food, and kindness and they would heal up just fine. I think he was doing his best to encourage them."

"Doc is a fine man. He loves people and it shows. I wondered how it would go with them seeing a man doctor after what happened to them."

"Melanie said she went in with them and I'm sure that helped. Doc saw them together, too, so I think he knew what he was doing to make them as comfortable as he could while he did their checkups. That girl Shelley was pretty traumatized, but she was talking to a few people today. I think she'll come out of it. I told Sandra to come over and we'd go through the Wal Mart trailers and find them whatever clothes they needed. That kinda floored her, but I explained hwo we did things around here and I think she'll come over soon. I told her we'd find her a car and some gas so she and Shelley could go where they want to, but she seemed like she wasn't ready for that yet."

"You could go see them and pick them up to shop for clothes and stuff," Roscoe said.

"I told her we'd do that. She asked if it was safe to travel around here and I told her I always carry a gun and she could, too. And, we'd find a man to go with us to make her feel safer, too. I think I'll give it a couple days before we do that, but we have to get them out and going fast, or I'm afraid they'll just crawl into a shell and stay there, especially Shelley."

"I told Luis we would help them find canned food that is still good, and anything else they need to get started. I'm going over there tomorrow and we'll go look around town with a couple of his brothers."

They are ready to make things happen on their new places and hope they can get enough done to be on separate farms before winter. That's a tall order, but from what Jason and Wayne Flynn said, they are making things happen fast on the two places they already tackled."

Marta said, "Those women are workers, for sure. They dove into cleaning up after the meal and had things done before the rest of us could get started. And they had their kids in there helping, too. The kids are a really sweet bunch. I can't wait to get them in school this Fall! We'll need to get some more desks. I think there are about a dozen that are school age."

Roscoe said, "Luis said they would come help with harvest this year for a share of the grain. I told him they were welcome to what they needed, but he insisted on working for it. I told him that if they could plow this Fall on their farms, we'll find seed for them and they can get a wheat crop and some pasture going. He got a little choked up over that and said he had never been treated so well. I told him we needed him and all his people, and we need them bad to make our community work like it needs to. I don't know if he understood that, but he will before long. I shoed him the windmills up on the hill and he said he could wire that kind of thing."

"I have to talk to Sandra and Shelley about where they want to live soon. They did get to talk to several people today, but it's a lot to take in all at once. After we get some good clothes on them, we'll see how things go."

They turned into their farm and Roscoe said, "I need to do the feeding and then have Dylan help me get the stock racks on the truck so we can haul more for Luis tomorrow. One step at a time, and we'll get there."

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 80

Three weeks later the weather was just beginning to cool off from the heat of August. A third farm had been taken over by Luis and Camila. Miguel and Luciana would live there with them and help get the place going, while Mateo and Paulina were going to live with Ignacio and Regina for the winter. They had collectively decided that 3 farms were all they should tackle before cold weather, and it would be a race to provide heat, fuel, cooking facilities, livestock and feed, and food for all before winter closed in.

Part of their reasoning was that these 3 adjacent properties had old fashioned wells with hand pumps on 2 of them, and a gravity feed water system from a hillside spring to Ignacio's place in addition to the hand dug well by the house. All the families had gotten their fill of carrying water at their cousin's farm. Ignacio's house was the largest, a refurbished old farmhouse that was probably over 100 years old. His property was the only one that still had a functioning wood cooking range, the reason everyone gathered there initially.

All these farms had barns of one sort or another, and some machinery, but most of it was old and they were only able to get 2 tractors started out of the lot of them. That was enough to make some things happen, mostly mowing and repairing fences using a tractor mounted post hole digger. The pastures chosen were the ones with ponds for livestock water where they kept the horses and the milk cow they'd brought along from their cousin's place.

Clay had helped haul in the goats they captured at a farm 5 miles south of town, most of them happy to see people again. Eddie and Chris Hamilton had taken their backhoe to the valley and dug pits then constructed outhouses on the 3 newly occupied properties. It was easier than carrying water in to flush the toilets in the houses. Jerry Hawkins, Don Blake, Jordan Alexander and others from the park community found wood stoves, canned food, and other needed items then hauled all that plus whatever clothing was wanted to the Hispanic community, then returned a couple days to cut a some firewood.

With the immediate needs taken care of, a cattle roundup was planned. There were cattle scattered all through the creek bottoms, having broken out of their home farms. Most had gathered into one larger herd overseen by a big Charolais bull. He was big and he was mean, so the men pondered how they would tackle the problem of getting the herd home.

Luis said, "We must not risk anyone being injured by this bull. It has to be done carefully."

Miguel said, "There are other bulls around. I have seen them. They don't get close to the big old one. They stay away, but not too far. I have an idea we should have a barbecue with that big bull and use the younger ones to breed the cattle."

"He is huge!" Vicente said. "That is too much beef. It would spoil in the warm weather."

Alejandro said, "We promised these people a barbecue. We will invite them all! What we don't eat, they can take home and use, or can the meat. We owe them for all the help. Let Miguel use his rifle. We will tell all the people when to come, okay?"

All the men looked at each other and remembered all the people at the Sunday meetings. Yes, it would work out, if they planned it well. They decided they would try to arrange it for the next week, a day or two after the Sunday meeting so everyone could be notified. Meat not cooked and used immediately could be cooled in the creek water and distributed among all who could come. Women would be invited to help cut meat so it could be done fast and the meat cooled quickly. It would be a major event for the surviving community.

\*\*\*\*\*

At the next Sunday meeting, not everyone was there, but it was still a big crowd. After the meal, Jim Crawford called for attention and announced the cow hunt and butchering day. He introduced Ignacio who explained what they planned to do, and it was set for the following Wednesday, if all went well and the bull cooperated.

"How big is this bull?" Wayne asked Ignacio.

"Vicente said he is as big as two of our cows."

"That's a ton of beef," Jason said. "The one we had butchered several years ago came out with about half the weight of meat. That would be 1,000 pounds of meat."

"That's too much beef to deal with here," Lori said. "We need to set this up here at the park and use the big kitchen here to can all that extra meat."

Plans were made and canning equipment would be readied.

\*\*\*\*\*

Miguel got up well before daylight again on Wednesday as he had the past 2 days. As he expected, the herd of cattle was bedded down in their usual place along the creek where it bent in close to the foot of the hill. Some small red cedar brush was between him and the herd, but he wanted to be downwind from them. That bull had winded him once on Monday and got pretty disturbed, pacing around his herd and snorting.

Miguel's hiding place was about 20 feet higher on the slope the other side of the hollow where the herd was. He felt the cool night air coming off the hillside behind him, so he was confident it was the same where the cattle were and would take his scent away from them into the valley below. He was comfortable on the ground, a blanket beneath him and his rifle resting on a very old deadfall log. The rising sun was to his right, so no reflection of light would reach the herd. He thought about how this was so much like hunting wild game, and realized that the cattle were probably as wild now as they would ever be.

The big Charolais bull walked slowly out of the shade of the big trees and into the overgrown meadow, switching his tail and moving his head from side to side, sniffing the breeze. Miguel wanted a head shot. It was a very big animal, and his .270 was about the minimum to take it down from 150 yards away. He had his favorite Remington core-lokt 150 grain ammo, the heaviest load available for his rifle. This load had dropped everything he had ever shot with the rifle, but the white bull was bigger than anything he'd tried before. He knew that shot placement was vitally important. He had to be right on target.

The bull turned his head away from Miguel and started to walk that direction, but then he lifted his head and turned back. A young bull was in the trees above Miguel and to his left somewhere. The old one stood his ground like a statue and waited for the intruder to show himself. It got quiet and Miguel was afraid the old one would turn away again, but he stood there while the crosshairs lined up on the curly spot between his eyes. Miguel's finger tightened and the smooth trigger on the old Remington surprised him as usual when it broke.

The noise of the shot crashed through the trees and Miguel was vaguely aware of a disturbance to his left as the young bull ran away. The rifle came down again after the recoil and Miguel reacquired his target in the scope, having unconsciously worked the bolt in the meantime. The bull stood for another two seconds, then his knees buckled and he fell forward on his nose. Miguel could feel the thump he made when he hit the ground. There was no movement except for the big head slowly falling sideways. The 6X scope showed clearly that the bull's tongue was hanging out of his open mouth. Still, he waited for another five minutes, watching, giving the animal time to die.

Most of the herd had jumped at the sound of the shot, but didn't go anywhere, looking around nervously. One old cow walked out toward the bull on the ground and stopped 15 yards away, snorting her suspicions. She shook her lowered head and then walked a few steps closer. The bull didn't move. When she went past him and the breeze brought the smell of blood to her, she bolted back toward the trees, tail in the air. A few others joined her panic for a ways then stopped again.

Miguel kept his rifle at the ready and walked to where the bull lay. The eyes were glassy looking, but he was taking no chances with the huge animal. He walked behind the bull's head and from a foot away he put another round into the brain stem. The cows in the trees scattered up the hill away from the shot. The bull did not move, except slightly from the impact of the bullet. Satisfied the bull was dead, Miguel took out his knife and cut the animal's throat, letting him bleed out on the grass.



He keyed his radio and called his brothers to help field dress the animal. Twenty minutes later, they had Luis' old tractor hooked to the bull and were dragging him toward the road a 1/4 mile away, leaving the gut pile where he had fallen. It took half an hour to skin and cut the animal into quarters, then lift the meat with the bucket loader onto the trailer. It took another few minutes to make the half mile trip back to Luis' farm where they used many buckets of water from the creek to wash the meat and cool it. By 7 AM, they were on the road to the park with the beef on the trailer and the rest of the families following in an assortment of trucks loaded with what it would take to process the meat.

Word spread from the park entrance when they came in and people began to gather at the old restaurant kitchen. A car left to notify others and soon vehicles began to pour into the park. By 8 AM there was a big fire burning in a prepared pit and meat was being cut up on several picnic tables.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 81

The next day Marta looked at the jars of canned beef sat on the kitchen counter and said, "I thought that bull would be tough, but it was really good!"

Roscoe chuckled and said, "Slow cooking it over the pit all day made a big difference, I'd say. I bet you still have to cook the canned stuff for half a day to get it tender."

"Maybe so, but every family got 20 pounds or more of beef canned and that will make a difference this winter. We can cook it in soups and stews, or make pot roast with it and it will be good."

"That will be okay, but if you tried to fry a steak from that critter, I bet the GRAVY would be tough!"

Marta rolled her eyes at that and changed the subject. "I was talking to Rosa and she said they need more canning jars. We need to show them where they are at the Wal Mart warehouse in Seymour."

Roscoe said, "We could take one of the women along and go make a trip for them. That bunch has all they can do and more before winter. They need all the help they can get. Maybe take those two women they rescued, too. They showed up with nothing at all."

"Wonder who that is?" Marta said, hearing something in the driveway.

\*\*\*\*\*

Mateo was chafing at being unable to work. He did what he could with one hand, but it wasn't much. He was still weak from loss of blood, he thought it was, and that would only change with time and good food and water. He just finished throwing some grain to the chickens when Luis, Miguel and Alejandro rode in on horseback. They had begun gathering cattle from the wooded hollows beside the valley floor. The doctor had told him that riding was strictly forbidden for a couple weeks yet, no matter that he could sit a horse just fine.

The men unsaddled their tired horses at the barn, then led them to the creek for a drink and closed the gate behind them, leaving them to rest and graze. At the house, Ignacio called Regina and asked if she had coffee made.

"Si. It is on the stove. I will get cups."

Alejandro said, "It is hard to get the cows from the woods. They have been there too long and know all the ways to get away."

Mateo listened to his brothers talk about rounding up cattle and how much trouble it was in the wooded hills. He finally asked, "Where are you taking them?"

Ignacio said, "Some to each farm, here, to Alejandro's, and to Luis' farm. Each will have plenty of cattle, and we will find hay for them for the winter. There is hay to be found, not far away."

Mateo said, "The cows lived through the last 2 winters where they are. Why not leave them there?"

"But we must..." Ignacio began, but Luis began to laugh and interrupted him.

Luis said, "I like that! It is like the Texas ranchos. The cows go where they please, until time to round up and brand them. We don't even have to brand them! There is nobody to steal them!"

Alejandro and Ignacio looked at each other, then at Luis and finally Mateo. Finally, Ignacio said, "It is a good idea. We can put hay where we want them to go, and mow pastures for them. They will stay where they have good feed. There is no need for ranching like in Ohio, where everyone had fences. It can be open range again, just like 100 years ago."

Alejandro nodded agreement and said, "We might want to chase some out of the hills to the pastures. We could put salt blocks out there and they will come to them. Little brother is right. We have been working too hard."

He aimed a bright smile at Mateo who felt a lot better after his idea was accepted. Regina came out with a pot of coffee and sat it on the porch floor. Vicente came out with a tray of cups and his 18 year old sister Elena followed with a big bowl of pastries.

The men were in a much better mood after settling on their new plan and laughed as they told the family about it. Paulina smiled at her Mateo and gave him a wink. His arm didn't seem to bother him much as they all talked about mowing more pastures and gathering hay from anywhere they could find it.

\*\*\*\*\*

Marta peered out the glass in the door and said, "It's a little white car, but I don't recognize it."

Roscoe automatically reached to the shotgun by the door as he looked out. The car stopped and two women got out. Marta said, "Oh! It's Sandra and Shelley!"

She opened the door and said, "You two look so different I didn't recognize you at first!"

"We just got haircuts and some different clothes," Sandra said. "We came to ask if you know where we can find work."

"Come in! I'll get some coffee on and we can visit. What's this about work? Doesn't the Rojas family have enough work to do?"

Shelley said, "Yeah, they do, but we feel like we're imposing on their good nature. We need to find a job and a place of our own."

Roscoe looked at the women with a puzzled expression. "You can have any place that isn't already claimed by somebody else. Why do you want a job?"

Sandra said, "Well, uh, we want to have our own things, and we hate to be just living off somebody else. It's pretty crowded there at Ignacio's. They really don't have room for us. We were hoping you might know somebody who needs help, like in the house, or something. I can cook pretty well and I did cooking at the school cafeteria. Shelley worked at a restaurant and she can learn fast."

Marta sat some cups in front of the two young women and said, "You need to think about this. Where did you get the car?"

Sandra said, "Mateo took us to town one day and got it at the car dealer. He got the jumper cables to get it started and it ran okay, so he stole some gas from a couple other cars in town and filled it up. I hate to be driving a stolen car, but I guess there wasn't much choice. I mean, there was nobody to sell it."

Roscoe asked, "How did you live after the plague hit?"

Shelley said, "We were neighbors out at the edge of town. My Dad got sick and went to work, but he never came home, so I moved in with Sandra."

Sandra said, "My husband died on the way home from the quarry. He had a wreck, but I think he had it and maybe that caused him to wreck. I found him, but I was afraid to touch him."

"We just went to the store and there was nobody there," Shelley said. "We took what we needed and we left money for it, because there was no clerk there."

Marta said, "So you found enough to eat?"

"Oh, yeah. We had some chickens in the backyard and I went and got more feed for them. I was out of money by then and I left a note that said I'd pay for it."

"We've just been stealing since then," Shelley said. "That's not right, but we didn't have any money."

Marta shook her head and said, "You need to think hard about this. Money doesn't mean anything now. We have to do for ourselves. And we need to make use of what is still out there before it all goes bad, do you understand what I'm saying?"

Sandra looked horrified and said, "That's what those men said! They said they could just take what they wanted and nobody could stop them! They took us and made us watch while they killed an old couple and took everything they had! I won't be like that! I WON'T!"

Marta could see near hysteria in Sandra's eyes and agreed with her to calm her down.

"Yes, that is very wrong. They tried to kill your Mexican friends, too, and that's why they killed them."

Shelley said, "Alejandro and Miguel and Vicente, they came and got us loose. Those men needed to be killed. I would have shot 'em but I didn't have a gun. They were too fast and they had guns and they...."

She began to cry and laid over on Sandra's shoulder. Marta until Shelley had calmed down some and

said softly, "That is over now. We have to go on and live. It will be lunch time soon. Would you give me a hand in the kitchen? Roscoe, it's about time to see after the pigs and chickens, isn't it?"

He took the hint and said, "Yeah, I'd better get busy at it. You all give me a holler when lunch is ready."

He quickly put on a cap and went outside while his wife comforted the women. He found Dylan at work building a pig feed trough, and went to help him. He was glad that Emma had gone to spend the night with Gina at Clay and Amy's place. Those women would need all the help they could get for a while.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 82

"Well, I tried to make them think about the new world we live in now, but it's going to take time for them to get it into their heads. They are both stuck in how things used to be," Marta said.

Roscoe shook his head and said, "Yes, that was obvious with them asking for a job. There are so many jobs all around us we'll never get them all done! They need to get with the program and do it fast."

"They are both hanging onto the way things used to be because they don't have what it takes to face a completely different world. They are going to have to get there gradually. I got them both started thinking about where they would like to live now as something to focus on. I think the Rojas family will get them going that direction, too. Those folks are not going to wait on anything."

Roscoe chuckled and said, "Yeah, they'll have to get up to speed quick or be left behind that bunch. Did you know they are already surveying in Cave River Valley for putting in a water mill?"

"Really?"

"Yeah, that's what Luis said when we took the goats over there. He said Ignacio wants to look for a machine shop he can move to their farm. I told Luis I'd show him the one in town and see if that suits him. I was in there with the college boys working on the windmills, and there is some heavy machinery in there. Isaac Kelley knew how a lot of it worked, and got the windmills fixed up with better bearings and all. We need to get him together with Ignacio and see what they come up with."

"Hmm. I'm going down to the park today to work on getting ready for school, so I'll talk to Isaac and see what he says about that."

\*\*\*\*\*

It was a slow trip back to the Rojas farms and Sandra had been thinking furiously. She hadn't said anything much, but she was seeing things differently. She got yanked out of her thoughts when Shelley said, "I just want things to get back to normal."

Sandra was driving and had to concentrate on the crooked road. She came to a straight stretch and said, "I don't think things will ever get back to the way they were. Didn't you see all those empty stores in

town?"

"Yeah, but they just need people to run them. Then things will be okay again."

"There aren't many people left, Shelley. Marta was right. We have to make our own things now. There's nobody to run the factories and stores, so we'll have to make things at home."

Shelley said, "But we can't make everything! I don't know how to make houses and dishes and phones!

"I know how to make clothes, if we can find fabric. And there are a lot of things you can do to help like we have been at Ignacio's."

"I don't want to live there forever," Shelley said, sounding dejected. "I want to have my own house and all."

"Like Marta said, there are houses free for the taking. We'll have to find a way to get food. And make sure there is water to use."

"I don't know how to farm, or make a garden, or a water pump. Maybe it woulda been better if those men had just killed us," Shelley said. "What are we going to do?"

Sandra was quiet for a minute. She stopped at an intersection, although there was no chance of any traffic. She looked seriously at Shelley and said, "We're going to find men who know how to do those things, that's what. It's what women have always done."

Shelley's face got more pale than her normal blond complexion. She said, "I don't want a man close to me. I just CAN'T!"

"You can find a good man. Vicente is looking at you like you are the most beautiful thing he ever saw! Haven't you noticed that?"

"Yeah, but he's just..."

"Just what? A kid? He's past 20, and he's a nice guy."

"Yeah, he's nice."

"Then go after him. It's either find yourself a good man or do it all yourself."

Shelley stared at her. Sandra had taken the place of her mother for the past months, or more like a big sister. Shelley was going on 19 and Sandra was only 30-something. Shelley couldn't think of anything better, and she realized that Vicente could probably take care of her. He seemed to know what to do for a lot of things. Then she wondered about Sandra and asked, "What are you going to do?"

"I'm not sure yet, but I'll think of something. I can't bring Billy back, that's for sure."

Shelley saw the tears on Sandra's face and thought how hard it must be to have lost her husband. Her mother had left a long time ago, but her Dad had been good to her. She wasn't finished grieving for him, and that left a hollow place inside her that she hadn't had time to think about. Their car was still sitting there idling when Sandra said, "I have to go on and live. And you do too. We have to leave all the rest behind us."

Sandra looked a question at Shelley, as if to ask could she do that. Shelley looked at Sandra and saw the pain and loss showing, but she saw determination, too. Shelley nodded and said softly, "Yeah."

\*\*\*\*\*

Shelley was in the kitchen helping make tortillas when Vicente rode in with Miguel. She watched them stop at the creek where it wound behind the house and get off their horses. He does have a nice butt, she thought, then turned a bit red when Camila gave her a slight smile.

"He is a good boy, you know," Camila said.

"Yeah," Shelley said, thoroughly embarrassed. "He's really nice."

Camila left her alone to her work and her thoughts while she went about cooking the meat for a vast number of tacos. Camila hoped she had a better poker face than the girl, but she wanted her to know it was fine with her if she liked her son. The girl needed someone now, and Vicente could make her feel better, she was sure. It would be a good match.

Camila felt a bit of smug satisfaction when Shelley sat next to Vicente at lunch and she saw his eyes light up.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 83

After the Sunday meeting and dinner, the crowd quickly gathered into smaller groups like always, with purposful conversations everywhere. Eddie and Chris had landed some work for the Hispanic clan, digging new and bigger root cellars. Eddie was off visiting with his in-laws the Knepp family and talking about how they could make their farm more productive. Chris Hamilton, left to his own devices had sought out the company of the unattached young woman Sandra. Marta was talking to Jim Crawford about getting more desks installed before school started, and Roscoe had gotten into a conversation with Isaac Kelley and Ignacio about how best to put together a machine shop to serve the community's needs.

Ignacio asked Roscoe, "Is there somewhere we can find steel to make things? Maybe in the bigger cities, there is a place that sold steel?"

Roscoe frowned and said, "There must be, but I don't know where it would be. Eddie might know. He grew up in the city."

He walked over to the Knepp family table where Eddie was and said, "The machinists need to find a place to get steel. Do you know where we might get it?"

Eddie thought for a minute and said, "There's a couple big steel places in Louisville, and one in Jeff. When I worked construction, they sent trucks over with the I-beams and trusses. They probably had other steel, too. We need a phone book to look 'em up."

Nobody had a Louisville telephone book, but Chris overheard the conversation and said, "I know where

it's at. Neill Lavielle is a big yard over on Floyd street. I've been there a few times with the boss to get steel. I can take you right to it. They got everything! Rebar, beams, plates, round stock, angles, and all that. Better take a lot of help, 'cause they used a big electric crane to load trucks, and if you have to do it the hard way, that stuff is heavy! It'll take a semi with a flatbed, 'cause all that stuff is 20 or 40 feet long. It's gonna be a hard day to haul much steel."

Ignacio said, "To build a water mill we will need many things. We need some big bearings, too, and a way to weld heavy steel. Maybe a big generator, or a welder with an engine on it."

Eddie joined the conversation and said, "We've got a gas powered welder. It's 200 amp Miller, and it's a good one. We got hydraulic jacks, and chain hoists, and all that stuff for riggin' steel. If there ain't a forklift we can use at the steel place, we can take a loader tractor or something."

Chris said, "Sounds like we'll have to pour a lot of concrete. How big is this building going to be?"

Ignacio and Luis talked a little then Luis said, "We think it should be big enough for a flour mill besides the machine shop. Maybe 30 feet by 60 feet."

Chris said, "That is a lot of concrete. I hope we don't have to move a lot of dirt for it."

Luis said, "We have looked at this. If we can get a big pipe to bring the water to the mill, there is a good place that is flat. It will take a lot of pipe."

Chris said, "There's pipe supply house in Indy. They got big stuff. I been there once and it's a huge place."

Isaac said, "We need to measure that spring and see how much water is coming out. Dick Dalton knows how to do that. Then we can plan how big the pipe has to be."

Chris said, "This is going to be a big job. It ain't gonna happen in one season. It'll take a lot of manpower. Is it worth going to that much work?"

Isaac said, "Unless you like to grind wheat and corn by hand, it is. And we have to have a way to make machinery parts. A water mill could low a bellows for a big forege, too. We don't need it right now, but when we can't get gas or diesel engines to run, we'd better have an alternative."

Nobody said anything about that, but there were a lot of sober faces in the group of men and a few women who were listening. Jason Flynn spoke up.

"The old woman we bought our place from talked a lot about that spring. She said it was a shame the old mill had been let go to ruin. Said they used to run that mill year around, because the spring never slowed down. There's a lot of water behind that. I think it's our best bet for power of some kind. If we go to Louisville, we can get some of our equipment to help. We've done a lot of steel erection, and we have a 20 ton crane. I'm not very good with it, but Wayne is. We can make this happen. It's what we used to do."

Chris Hamilton asked, "How does everybody get paid for a job like this? We've been trading for our work, but this is way bigger than makes sense to trade for food and firewood."

Jim Crawford had been listening and suggested, "How about shares of ownership in the mill? Somebody keeps track of the value of what each person puts into it, and then they each get stock in the

mill when it's finished?"

That promoted a long discussion about how to value each person's work, and how the shares would work. In the end, Jason and Wayne Flynn were to be the general contractors and they would keep books on how much each person contributed in old dollar amounts, since everyone was familiar with that. Each subcontractor would be allowed a wage rate they would all agree to, then their hours would be recorded to get a value for their contribution. The mill would hire people to work it for a wage, and mill charges would be high enough to allow a profit for the shareholders. The women wanted in on this, too, and suggested that they make it large enough to include a room for textile work, and Jacob Knepp wanted a space for certain work in his tanning of leather.

The community's first company was born that day, and Jim Crawford was scratching his head, trying to figure out a way to get money going in the community. It would make this sort of venture work so much simpler than barter, but he was still at a loss.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 84

Louisville was far more of a mess than anyone had anticipated. The bridges were bad enough, but there were not only vehicles blocking the streets, there was trash everywhere and human remains, if you could call those bits of bone and clothing human. The overall stench was the worst. In some areas it wasn't so bad, but in others it was an unidentifiable odor of death and decay.

Eddie drove construction truck as the support vehicle, pulling their equipment trailer with the heavy backhoe on it. Isaac rode shotgun and scanned the area for threats, but found nothing moving, not even a stray dog or cat. Clay drove his pickup with Kevin Collier on board for security. Ignacio Rojas drove his own pickup with Alejandro for security, each having a shopping list of their own, and Ignacio designated to select steel for their needs. Chris and Jim Collier drove a semi to haul steel if they could find it and get it loaded and Jason and Wayne Flynn drove another one. The convoy drove slowly, about 25 MPH, down I-65 dodging stalled cars and a few wrecks. The elevated expressway let them see the carnage of burned buildings and overgrown lots below, the air full of that stench of decay. They made steady progress until they came to the exit for the Watterson Expressway. A major pileup of semi's, cars, and medium sized trucks were in a hopeless snarl blocking the exit ramp.

Clay and Kevin were in front and looked it over, knowing they had to take another route. After some discussion with the other drivers they concluded they could get around the mess by moving a couple wrecks near the on ramp from the airport and then driving the wrong way on a couple others through the complicated maze that served the major airport, the Kentucky State fairgrounds, and much more. It was a roundabout route, but they got headed east down the Watterson Expressway with no real blockages and went off the exit ramp to Newburgh Road and then turned onto Bishop Lane where they found the steel warehouse intact behind a locked gate in the chain link fence.

It was an industrial grade lock housed in a tamper proof cover that disallowed using bolt cutters on it, but Eddie got rid of that in short order with his cutting torch. He noted there wasn't a lot left in his tank of oxygen, and although he'd brought a spare full tank it was the last full one they had. They'd have to find some tanks of acetylene and oxygen soon, or do without that most important tool. He had a rough idea where the Airco distributor was located, but they'd have to follow the old city map he had to get there.



The gate rolled back, protesting with loud squeaking. Kevin looked nervously about, but saw nothing that could be threat. Still, he stayed in the bed of Clay's truck, looking around over the steel toolboxes they had added to it, grateful for the M4 carbine given to him by Alejandro.

Inside the huge steel building, two semi's with the company name on the doors blocked access to the steel stored inside. It would be a lot easier to move them under their own power than to overcome the airbrakes, so they got to work. Two hours later, after much ado, both trucks started roughly and smoked a lot until their fuel additive reached the injectors and the engines began to run smoothly. Eddie and Jim Collier looked them over and decided to use these trucks instead of their own. They had obviously been well maintained and were right for the purpose. Besides, they were full of fuel, too. They spent the next 3 hours loading steel, mostly by hand with some assistance by the backhoe, before they broke for lunch leaving the semi's idling inside the building. The diesel exhaust was getting thick in there, so they managed to get a huge rolling door open on the other end and let a slight breeze begin to clear it out before they returned to work.

With both semi's loaded heavily, they moved them outside and loaded the ones Chris and Wayne had driven. They had no way to estimate the loads, but were sure they had all they dared put on the trailers as indicated by the tires that were sagging a bit, although they had made sure they were up to pressure. Tiedown straps were pulled tight and they agreed to not try any high speeds on the way home. The crew closed doors and gates and departed for the Airco distributor.

A truck was loaded with tanks ready to run the delivery route with welding gases, making their job easy after they got it running 2 hours later. One inside dual was low on pressure which Eddie filled with their gasoline powered compressor on the service truck. It was holding pressure an hour later when they were ready to leave, so he thought it would be okay. They added all the tanks the truck would haul to those already on the truck, electing to change some of the MIG welding gases on board for more acetylene and oxygen tanks. Alejandro volunteered to drive the Airco truck and they were on their way, already planning a second trip to get all the full tanks they could find.

Once across the Kennedy bridge, the convoy of 4 semi's and 2 pickups with the service truck trailing them drove sedately back up I-65 to the Salem exit and toward home. The plan was to house the trailers inside the exhibit buildings at the county fairgrounds. Until they had a better place to store the materials that would keep them out of the weather. It wasn't until they pulled into the fairgrounds that Isaac noticed the little spiral bound notebook under his feet and picked it up.

"Here," he said to Eddie. "You probably don't want to lose this."

Eddie was stopped, waiting for the other trucks to get into position and parked. He looked at the notebook and said, "It ain't mine. Where'd you get it?"

"It was on the floor. I thought you dropped it."

"Huh. Let's see that." Eddie opened it and found printed with a pencil on the first page. He read aloud:

**"DID NOT WANT SHOT, SO DID NOT SPEAK TO YOU. IF YOU WANT CONTACT, MONITOR THESE RADIO FREQS 2 HRS AFTER SUNDOWN EACH DAY. OUR GROUP WANTS TRADE AND NEEDS MEDICAL HELP. CHARLENE"**

Below was a listing of radio frequencies.

"I'll be damned! How the hell did they get that in this truck?" Eddie exclaimed.

"Musta been when we were working in the steel warehouse," Isaac said.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 85

"Those are military frequencies," Alejandro said.

"Oh, crap," Kevin said. "That could be trouble. Better be real careful about contacting them. They could triangulate our location and be on us like a coat of paint."

"Yeah," Alejandro said. "But I can take the Deuce way off somewhere and let 'em wonder where we are. It's got radios. If I go up on those hills above the river, it would reach a long ways into Kentucky. And I can be gone from there in nothing flat and watch the spot for trouble. What does everybody else think about that?"

"We'd better take it up at the meeting Sunday," Jim Collier said.

"Ignacio nodded and said, "That would be the right thing. Everyone should know about this."

Slowly the group of men got back to the task at hand and unhooked trailers in the fairgrounds buildings. The semi tractors were taken outside, not having enough room otherwise to close the doors. The Airco truck got parked at Eddie's place and the men made it to their respective homes just after sunset. When the evening meal was over, Alejandro drove the Deuce and a half with Vicente and his wife Rosa to the top of the ridge surrounding the valley where they lived. When his watch said 2 hours had passed, he switched on the military radio and got a decent signal on the chosen frequency.

A woman's voice said, "This is trader calling steel trucks. Trader Charlene calling steel trucks. Do you read me, over?"

After a few seconds the call was repeated, then again at intervals. Alejandro was determined to not reply until after they had discussed it with the community, so they sat and listened. They could hear an engine running in the background.

"This is Charlene. Good security would be to not answer, but only listen. That's okay. We are a group of mostly women who survived the dying. We now live a long way out Dixie Highway in the country. We have food and water and everything we need except medical care. We have four women who are pregnant and want prenatal care. We have healthy livestock to trade. We can get gold and silver. I will repeat this message each evening for at least a month. We have means to keep our batteries charged. Please respond."

She repeated the calls and the message a couple more times before Alejandro turned the radio off and they headed home.

\*\*\*\*\*

Chris Hamilton and Eddie Grimes got back to preparing the mill site the next day. They had decided to worry about the mill sluice pipe later because it winter wasn't that far away and they wanted to get the concrete poured soon. An old building in the nearby small town of Campbellsburg had seen better days, but the old steel trusses were still as good as new. It was less work than it looked like it might be to get them removed with the benefit of the crane they had. Sandra proved to be a willing and able helper at this, unafraid of heights and having some farm construction experience. The lowboy trailer hauled them to the site 2 at a time and the backhoe and crawler with the high lift bucket got them unloaded at the site.

Mateo volunteered for go-fer duty at the construction site because he couldn't be much help at home, leaving the other men free to haul hay and grain home from neighboring farms. Their livestock being thus provided for the winter, the men got back to work at construction.

Four days passed and it was Sunday and meeting time again. Everyone had heard about the note and the radio messages by this time, and everyone had an opinion. A lively discussion ensued at the meeting, with a consensus being reached to contact the people in the safest possible manner. Alejandro had removed the radio from the big, slow military truck and installed it in his own pickup. He drove to the little town of Floyds Knobs and stopped at a tiny strip mall there, once a popular meeting spot at the corner business named The Hob Knob Coffee Shop. From there, he had 3 directions to move away quickly, north, east, or west. And it was line of sight over the ridge of hills above the Ohio River Valley to Louisville.

It was early on that Monday evening when he and Kevin Collier arrived and turned on the radio. They heard nothing but a low level hiss until the appointed time.

"Breaker, Trader Charlene calling steel trucks. Come in. Over."

Kevin waited until her third call and responded. "Steel trucker here, over."

"Thank God! Uh, Charlene here. So glad to hear you. We thought we were the only ones left alive until I saw you."

"We're alive and well. Let's keep this short to avoid anyone tracking us. State your business."

"Would you meet with one of us somehow so we can talk? We need a doctor and we need help with farm equipment. We have some experts who might be able to help you, a chemist and an engineer among others."

"Where and how would you want to meet?" Alejandro asked.

"It doesn't matter. We have vehicles that still run, so you tell me and we'll do it your way."

"How about two days from now at the old Hap's Airport in Clarksville, Indiana?"

"How do I get there?"

Kevin gave directions and said to be there at noon. They would expect only one vehicle and if more than two people showed up, they would not respond to the meeting. They should go to the tower and wait outside in plain sight, unarmed.

Two days later, Charlene and another woman, both obviously pregnant, drove into the old airport and

parked a short distance from the tower. When they got to the tower, they found directions written with crayon to go to the first truck stop north of there on I-65. Kevin, Alejandro, Vicente, and Roscoe Beam followed them at a distance in their pickup, then pulled up beside them in the parking lot.

The women looked pale, but resolute as they got out of their car.

Kevin said, "I apologize for the formalities, but things are not as they were."

He introduced the other men and said, "What can we do for you?"

Charlene said, "This is Mallory Dorsey, and I'm Charlene Kail. We are hoping you know where we can find someone to help us when our babies are due. Mallory is the chemist I spoke of. I am--was--a math professor at U of L. There are a dozen others that worked at the University and we live at the farm of one of the maintenance men. If we have anything you want, we'll be glad to trade for medical attention."

"We know a doctor, in fact he lives in our community," Roscoe said. "But before we show you where it is, we want to see where you live to see if there is any threat to us. We've had some bad experiences."

Kevin looked over the two women, deciding that they were in their thirties, and looked to be healthy. He didn't get any bad vibes that they posed any danger, but he kept watch on them just the same. He said, "Do you mind if we look in your car for weapons?"

"Uh, no. Go right ahead. There's a pistol under the seat on the drivers' side and there's a shotgun in the back seat. We're women, but we're not stupid," Charlene said with a little heat.

Roscoe glanced in the car and saw the shotgun, then turned back to the women and asked, "How far is it to your home? We need to see your group and make an assessment."

"Well, it's not ours," Mallory began, "It belongs to the maintenance guy, Carter Whelan. We're not supposed to bring anyone back there, but..."

"But can you convince them otherwise? Maybe meet us somewhere not too far away?"

"Maybe. Probably we can. Something like this," Charlene said.

"What do you have to offer us for medical services?" Alejandro asked.

Mallory said, "I'm a chemistry professor, she's a math professor like she said, and there are a mechanical engineering professor, a botanist, an electrical engineering professor, a civil engineer, a psychology professor, and a couple lab techs. Carter was in the National Guard and rigged up the radio for us. Surely there is something we can do for you."

Charlene said, "We got Carter to agree to offering one of his Jersey heifers if that appeals to you. And we have been saving seeds of many kinds. We don't have a surplus of everything, but there is a lot to choose from. We know how to get some gold and silver. One of our group owned a big coin store."

Roscoe said, "Let's set up a meeting. Our community is fairly large, and we could sure use a lot of that knowledge."

He was privately thinking that if he let this opportunity pass by, Marta would beat him savagely when

she learned of it. They discussed some possibilities and quickly left. Two hours later they were talking to the rest of the group. They looked a bit worse for the wear of the past couple years, but they all seemed to be healthy and strong enough. Finally, the men decided to let Charlene, Mallory and two other women, the psychologist and a lab tech, follow them to the doctor's place. They would plan to spend the night and return the next day to confer with the others about future matters.

It didn't quite work out as planned, because the lab tech, a younger woman named Jocelyn, went into labor on the way out. The other women did return to their group the next day, having seen what the valley community had to offer and ready to sell their group on moving there. Jocelyn's baby, her first, arrived in due course very late that night, attended by the doctor and his wife.

They learned from Jocelyn over the next couple days that the group had mostly worked together at the University, and fled the city with the maintenance man to his farm. The pregnant women's husbands, and in Jocelyn's case, her boyfriend, had succumbed to the plague before they could find refuge. Their mates had been found at work, or at home already expired. That meant they could not get any of their personal goods without too great a risk and arrived with nothing. Subsequent salvaging had them pretty much equipped, but the first winter had been iffy and the next they only got by on salvaged food. Thereafter, the farm had kept them fed, but not the best. Jocelyn was amazed at the doctor having electricity, and even more so at the meals she was given.

\*\*\*\*\*

Carter Whelan was tired after the past two years. He had done everything right and was as prepared as anyone could expect to be for a disaster, but he didn't count on having to support so many people. His small farm was only 40 acres, and it was a stretch to feed them with only his stores and what they dared to scavenge initially. He looked a lot older than his 44 years, and felt it even more. But he couldn't turn away all those women who had nowhere else to go that was safe. The college professors were long on theoretical knowledge and very short on practical application of it. They were willing, but nearly useless for a while on the farm. His wife felt the same way, but she was worn out from all the labor and stresses involved, too. The new community sounded like heaven on earth to them.

Their move was a foregone conclusion once Carter saw the valley community and how well it was functioning, but it would not be accomplished easily. He and his wife would stay at his place and finish the Fall harvesting with two of the women to help. The rest moved to their new chosen properties stung out down the creek valley from the Amish families down toward Clay Hamilton's farm. The men of the group, under tutelage from some of the valley people, learned fast how to cut and store firewood, where to find what they needed otherwise, and how to go about getting it to their new homes.

The 9 women and 4 men set up properties to live in for the winter, with the 4 new mothers electing to stay together in one place. The Whelans had moved their livestock and other goods to a 160 acre farm nearby. Two other couples, the electrical engineer and his wife at one farm and the mechanical engineer and his wife and 36 year old Sybil Orliss, the botanist, next door. Willow Hastings, a lab tech who had worked closely on stress analysis with Marty Edelston, the civil engineer, had decided quickly to move in with him. Marty was 10 years older than her 29 years, but she never gave that a thought. they got along great and they had seen the best and worst of each other in the past couple years. Neither of them having any more than gardening experience, they chose a house with a few acres of gone-to-seed pasture behind it, just down the road from the Whelans.

Jim Crawford got the park community busy who moved goods, food, feed grains, and other necessities to the newcomers' places in record time. In turn, the men of the new group were given jobs a couple days a week working on construction of the new mill building. The beginning of the school year would

delayed by agreement. There was too much to do and not enough time. All the children were busy at something, helping with harvesting and canning, caring for livestock, moving goods, and some helping at the construction site.

There were enough people to feed that at least one cow was butchered each week to keep everyone fed. The Rojas family providing many of those from wild cattle they found roaming in the small valleys north and west of their farms. Vicente found that he had a full time job rounding up cattle with Mateo to help, now that he was healing up and could do some riding. Yearlings and pregnant cows, they herded toward the family farms if they could and somehow got most of them inside the pasture fences. They were paid like everyone else, with IOU's that were good for barter anywhere in the area. Sundays were often settlement days when IOU's were traded and cancelled out against receipts for goods or services rendered, usually at the behest of the parties involved, but not always. The IOU's were becoming money of a sort, and they were all denominated in old dollar amounts, with notations of the value of goods or services.

Everyone was working from daylight until dark and that wasn't enough to feel like they were catching up. Hard work and long hours made tempers short, but arguments and disagreements were soon quelled, often by the simple expedient of someone saying, "Winter's coming. We don't have time for this." There was no doubt in anyone's mind what that meant in this new life.

The women may have worked hardest of all, many of them having to do cooking over open fires outside and laundry the same way. They kept everyone fed and clothed and drafted the kids to help in any way they could to ease the drudgery of day to day living. When the first hard frost hit in late October, everyone gave their pantries a hard look and the woodpiles still didn't seem to be big enough.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 86

Frost was on the ground in shaded spots as people arrived for the Sunday meeting at the park. The crowd was so large that they had moved all the furniture out of the main room of the old restaurant, now their combination community building and schoolhouse. It was still standing room only inside. The new mothers were accorded the courtesy of some folding chairs along one wall where they could see and hear what was going on, and they took up the whole wall. The baby boom in the valley was in full swing.

Jim Crawford took his turn to say prayers and lead the group singing a couple old church songs, the words having been hand printed on the school chalkboards in front. Jim stood on a low stool so he could see over the crowd and hoped they could all hear him. After the short service, Jim asked the crowd to be patient while he gave some announcements.

"As most of you know, we have been joined by a group of people from Kentucky, whom most of you have already been helping get settled in the community. With school starting tomorrow, you should know that 7 of them were professors at the University of Louisville, and will be teaching in their respective fields in our school. Please be patient with them, since they have barely had time to find places to lay their heads, and no time at all to get ready to teach again."

"They will be providing new and some advanced classes 2 or 3 days a week in Math, Botany and General Science, Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Psychology, Civil Engineering, and

Chemistry. They will first give high school level classes in these subjects, but as time goes by and our children grow, there are tentative plans to offer college level classes to those who want them."

"Also, I will be hosting a meeting for all who are interested tonight on the subject of a currency for our community. We have been getting along with IOU's and that works for most things, but a currency would be very helpful for some kinds of business, particularly when the new mill begins operations. One of our new members from Louisville has access to a quantity of gold and silver coins, and thinks we can find more to make them available in quantity. We need to discuss the best way to introduce currency here. All are welcome to attend and we will begin the meeting a few hours from now to give everyone time to take care of other matters today."

"Last, I want to thank everyone who has worked on the new mill project. As you know, it is under roof and we will be able to continue to finish the inside even in inclement weather. Talk to the Flynn brothers who are acting as general contractors on this project. They will know what needs done and the work should be planned today so we can share rides to the site next week."

"The ladies tell me that food is ready, so I'll shut up and let you get to it. Thank you and enjoy your meals."

A general hubbub of conversation began, speculating on how the new currency might work, with some doubters and many enthusiasts, each with their opinions on the matter. In the midst of that, Marta found herself surrounded by the professors who would be the new teachers at the school.

Mallory Dorsey asked her, "How much can we earn at teaching? Will it be enough to pay people for what they have done for us? Can we live on what we earn there?"

"What about engineering? I doubt if there will be many students ready for college level classes," Marty Edelston said. "Can we even make enough to live on?"

Other questions flew fast and furiously until Marta held up her hand for quiet and said, "The answer is, we don't know those things yet, but we can assure you that you won't go hungry here if you are willing to work as needed. We'll work out the details later. For now, stick with the IOU system and do what work you can as it is available. Our little school has grown and there is room for several of you to teach lower level classes right away. So calm down and let this work itself out, okay?"

Outside, Jim Crawford was also surrounded by people asking questions about the new currency.

"What about our IOU's? Will they still be good, or not?"

"Who gets the gold and how will it work?"

"I have some old coins. Will they be good in the new system?"

"How do we set pay rates with this new money?"

Jim picked up a stick of firewood from the pile by the meeting house wall and banged it on a picnic table for attention. "Listen up folks! Be quiet for a minute!"

"Look, I don't know how this is going to work, or even if we can make it work. That's what the meeting will be about this afternoon. I will say one thing, though, that all of us must go into this meeting with the idea that we will honor our debts and make sure everyone is treated fairly. We have been getting

along just fine trusting each other so far, and we will continue to do that, or this community will come apart at the seams! Is that understood?"

"But how can we do that?" Jim Collier asked. "There are so many things to consider, I don't see how it will be possible."

Crawford grinned at him and said, "Be careful Jim, or you'll wind up getting appointed to figure it out like I was on the energy thing!"

That got a laugh from several people and the crowd began to relax somewhat.

Crawford continued, "Just come to the meeting and we'll talk about it. I don't think it is going to get settled today. There's too much to do. We just need to get started talking about it today."

\*\*\*\*\*

"Hello, and thank you to all of you that have been so generous helping our group get started here. I'm David Levinson. I'm an electrical engineer and I taught at U of L, but that is past and I am trying to make a living like all the rest of you here. It is not easy getting by now, so I would like to offer something back to all of you and that is why I asked Mr. Crawford to consider my ideas."

"I also inherited a large coin shop in Louisville. I say inherited because my father owned it and I found him dead inside. I haven't been back there and it was undisturbed the last I knew. There is a large vault there because the building was originally a bank. My father rented vault space to several other coin dealers in the city and also stored precious metals for customers, so I believe there is a large amount in that vault."

"What I propose to do is to SPEND those coins into the economy here. I don't have many useful skills for the way the world is now, but I do have these coins."

"What about our IOU's? What will they be worth?" Jim Collier asked.

"Whatever you say they are worth. The face value. You keep using them just as you always have. You mark on an IOU what the value is in old dollars, and that has been working. Keep doing it. If you can all agree on what my gold and silver is worth in the same old dollar amounts, I will spend it for what I need and and you can all use that as money as you see fit. I would suggest that you think about it like this. In ancient Rome, an ounce of gold would buy you a new outfit of clothing, sandals, robe, belt, undergarments and all. It was about the same in 1850 and 1925. So think about what it should be worth today. What you might remember of gold and silver prices from the past few years I don't think is necessarily what it should be today."

Pietro Muntii said, "Clothing is not worth much now, because there is so much of it for the taking. We should use another thing to compare. Maybe days of labor, or the value of something we all need, like food, or firewood. In Rome, a soldier was paid one silver denarius per day. That is about the same as a US silver dime. That might be a place to start."

David Levinson said, "That is fine with me. I will not be part of the discussion about what the value of the coins will be. The reason I think gold and silver would work for money here is that they have always been regarded as money, and even after they were put aside infavor of paper money, they still had value because they are scarce, they cannot be counterfeited, and they are durable. If we can agree what they are worth, I believe it will make life easier for doing business. Everyone is still free to charge what they want for work they do and goods they sell."



"That would make you a very rich man," William Simmons said.

"Yes, it would," David said. "And anyone who can go find more gold and silver coins can be rich as well. That would make prices rise on everything, so we all would soon be right back where we are starting now, at agreed upon values for what we do. I will do this to try and make this easier to start. I will donate half of what I find in the vault and distribute it equally to every person above age 18, which I think is about what you see as an adult now. But we have to agree first on what the coins will be worth."

Jim Crawford stood and said, "I move that we all think about this for a week and come back to it next Sunday. Is that agreeable to all? Let's hear ayes and nays."

The voice vote carried that suggestion and David followed that saying, "I will make an effort to collect the coins this week, and additionally, all the coins I can help others find other places on the same trip. We should have a total amount of what is available by then."

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 87

The baby boom had increased the demand for milk, because the doctor had advised all the new nursing mothers to drink plenty of it to avoid a calcium deficiency. Carter Whelan and his wife were used to hard work and long days. It was a natural thing for them to keep their 4 jersey cows milking and to make what butter and cheese they could from milk that wasn't sold outright. He had two heifer calves and two bull calves from the last breeding, and was determined to keep the best bull calf, even though Jersey bulls were known to be viciously mean. He had to have a bull for breeding to stay in business. The other one would become meat for the table when the weather got cold enough to butcher.

Jacob Knepp made his acquaintance within days and they made a handshake deal to trade breeding services for the dairy cattle. Jacob had cut his household use of milk trying to supply the community, and was glad to have another dairyman here. They discussed farming in the area and the need to wait on planting until the danger of Spring flooding was past, the bane of using rich bottom land for crops. Both men had wisely chosen properties with some hillside pastures that would not become too wet to use in the wet season, and also had dependable springs for a sanitary home water supply.

They found they had a lot in common and quickly came to respect each others opinions. Carter liked the down to earth Amish man for his common sense approach to things, and Jacob saw that the somewhat older Carter was astute and had experience in the modern world that would benefit him.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Four women in a house together just doesn't seem quite right to me. There's something a little off there," Betty Crawford said as she picked up her loaves of fresh baked bread.

Alena Muntii said, "It makes some kind of sense with them all having babies, or soon will have. They can share the care of them and have some time to themselves."

"I suppose that's right, but the babies are another thing I was thinking about. They all said they had husbands that died, but that was a long time ago. Their husbands had been long dead, so they surely

didn't get them pregnant. So who did? That must have been some affair at that farm they came from."

Alena ignored the sniff that followed Betty's remarks and said, "They are an interesting bunch, that's for sure. From what I've seen, college professors don't think like everybody else. They are all pretty independent."

Betty said, "Well. I'm just putting two and two together and it doesn't add up right, that's all. And that Sybil woman, living with the older couple, now why would she do that? Surely she could have found a man of her own."

Alena thought that was pretty caustic, knowing that the women had outnumbered men in the group, and they had only been here a little over a week. Betty left with her nose out of joint and Alena thought about what she'd said. It was almost a sure thing that the women had gotten pregnant by some of the men in their group, and while she didn't really care, it would be hard to accept for some of the more traditional thinking people in the community. She just hoped it didn't cause trouble. Alena knew that every woman in the valley would figure it out the same way as Betty.

\*\*\*\*\*

"I don't like it," Jim Collier said. "That guy David wants to bring his gold in here and just buy up whatever he wants that everybody worked so hard for. That ain't right and you'll never convince me it is. It amounts to stealing!"

Roscoe said, "I agree with that. He needs to figure out how to provide for himself like everybody else. Still, it would be real handy to have money again. Make things a lot simpler."

"It's not going to happen if I have anything to say about it!"

"Yes, we need a better way to get that started, but I can see the benefit of having money again," Roscoe said. "We need to think about this some more."

"What's that?" Marta asked, coming outside with an empty bucket.

"Oh, we're talking about the gold coin thing," Roscoe said. "Jim doesn't like it because the guy with all the gold basically gets something for nothing when he spends it."

"That's not right. I won't go for that either," she said.

"You got any idea how we could do it?" Roscoe asked.

"Why do we need to? What's wrong with what we're doing now?"

"Well, it's not very convenient for trading, and sometimes it takes forever to get paid for what you sell. You know that," Roscoe said. "We have to depend on people making good on their IOU's, too."

"We'd give most all of 'em credit anyway," Marta said.

"I know, but when we get the new mill running and people go there to get flour ground and machine work done, or whatever, it sure would be nice to be able to just pay with money and keep accounts that way. Think what a hassle it will be to pay out shares from the mill to the stockholders that helped build it! This is going to get out of hand fast."

Jim said, "We can just write it all down and it won't be that big a deal. We can pay people with paper receipts like we talked about to start with."

Marta said, "That will work for now, but someday we are going to run out of paper to write on and pencils to write with. We need to find some more soon for the school kids. We need to find a way to make paper it looks like, and we will need some kind of money, eventually."

Jim said, "Maybe so, but I'm not giving away anything to that professor with his gold coins."

\*\*\*\*\*

"The thing is, once you introduce money, the next thing you know, you have a banker popping up somewhere and we all know how much trouble that caused before. They ended up owning everything," Pietro said. "All the history I studied shows that and I saw it for myself."

Misti Felsen, a student of classical civilizations, said, "It ancient times, the kings took care of this, and later whatever government was there did it and the people had no say in the matter. It worked out, though."

"Yes, it worked out with the kings being rich and everybody else being poor! We don't need any government, and I won't stand by and let it happen again! They ruined everything! Kings are the ones who started wars to get rich stealing from other countries, and the poor people died for that. We must not go down that path again!" Pietro fumed. "Too much of my family in Europe died over these things."

Richard Dalton said, "Mary and I saw enough of what big corporations do when we worked for BP as co-op students. They ran roughshod over anything that got in their way. We don't need any super-rich dudes around now. I don't want this professor guy coming in here and taking over everything we've got going. I don't know him and already I don't like him."

\*\*\*\*\*

Blissfully unaware of the talk in the community, David Levinson and Marty Edelston set off for Louisville in the truck they had recently acquired. It was a new diesel model and drove smoothly. They were well aware there could be undesirable people around and other dangers, so they each had found some guns at a store in Clarksville to augment the pistols they'd borrowed from the park armory. The trip went without problems, however, and David produced his keys at the shop door. It still stunk inside, although he had ventilated the place as well as he could when he was there before. They kept the office door closed where he'd found his father's body and that helped some.

The vault yielded to David's memorized combination, and they were shocked at the sheer volume of coins inside. Most of it was silver, but there was a lot of gold, too. There were the heavy green "monster boxes" of one ounce silver Eagles, and many bags of pre-1964 "junk" silver coins. Gold coins of many nations were in drawers with customer's names on them. The tubes of brilliant gold coins reflected dully in the yellow glow of kerosene lamps they had brought to light their way.

Two hours of hard labor later, they still had more boxes to move. They took a break to eat a snack and drink some water then went back to work. The truck was heavily laden when they finished. David said, "I was going to check at the other big coin shop, but they have a vault, too. It wouldn't be easy to get into. We'll have to come back better equipped for that. Maybe that construction guy can get us into that

vault. Let's go back with this for now."

"Suits me. I'm tired and hungry," Marty said.

"We can eat on the way back. I want to get out of here. The city is spooky with nobody around," David said.

Two hours later they turned into David's new place and saw his wife pumping water from the hand pump behind the house. David thought that he would have to get some kind of better arrangement for water when he spent some of his gold. This place was far better than the past two years, but he expected things to improve even more dramatically for him soon. He and Marty began the long process of carrying the load of coins down to the cellar under his house. It was the most secure place he could think of here.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 88

"No," Jim Collier said at the outset of the meeting.

David Levinson looked at him, wondering, and asked, "What do you mean, no?"

"I mean NO, we ain't going for it. You keep your gold and we'll keep going like we have been. I'm not giving you anything I worked for without I get something like that in return. Gold ain't worth anything to me."

"You're entitled to your opinion, of course. Possibly others feel differently," David said.

Jacob Knepp stood and said, "I am thinking the same. We do just fine with no gold. My neighbor, he works on my farm and I give him what he needs. This works good for us. Things are not like they used to be."

Wayne Flynn said, "We used to deal in money all the time like everybody else. We had a construction business and money was the thing to have. It's what made the world go around. But we've lived without money long enough it makes me wonder how everybody got caught up in all that. I didn't think it was possible to live without money, but we have been for quite a while now, and we're in business again, contracting. It's working out just fine and for once, the damned banker doesn't get most of our profit on the job! I say don't let a banker get a foothold here. We don't need 'em and all they are is parasites!"

There was a chorus of like minded feelings from the big group, some far enough back they were having trouble hearing and being heard. It seemed like practically everyone had turned out for this meeting.

Jim Crawford called for order and said, "We can discuss this for a while if you want to, but let's keep it orderly."

Patrick Hughes stood up and said, "My wife and I found a big jar of old gold coins in our old house. She was tickled pink until I asked her where she could spend it. Nobody wants gold. They want a pig to make ham and bacon, or firewood to keep warm and do the cooking. Gold ain't any use to anybody."

David could not believe what he was hearing. He protested, "But everybody wants GOLD! It's always been money! It's the foundation of civilization! Gold is what makes business possible! Think about this. You can pay each other and have something in your pocket to show for it. You can save up money for old age. You can finance big projects like the mill you are building. The world works so much better with money! You really need to do this. If my idea doesn't appeal to you, then let someone else propose a way to do it. We can have a bank to loan money to those who need it, and we can have investments and all the rest of a civilized life if we use gold and silver!"

William Simmons stood and said, "Like I said before, you end up a very rich man in the deal at our expense. That is robbery, no matter what you say!"

A lot of people shouted agreement and Jim Crawford had to ask for quiet again. He finally got to speak and said, "Let's take a vote. Do we need to use paper ballots?"

"NO!" somebody yelled from the crowd.

"Very well, those in favor of adopting gold and silver as money, say Aye."

Nobody spoke.

"Those opposed?"

A loud chorus of NAYS left no doubt of the outcome.

David stood there with his mouth agape, staring at the crowd who stared back with unfriendly faces. He sat down at the table and took a couple deep breaths while Jim Crawford spoke to the crowd.

"I guess that concludes the business for today. Thank you all for coming."

The crowd began to disperse into smaller groups, still talking and giving David angry looks now and then as they left. This Sunday meeting broke up somewhat sooner than normally.

David left the community building still stunned at what he'd heard. He hadn't even had the opportunity to tell the people that each would get, by his valuation, over \$20,000 apiece in gold and silver. He passed one small group on his way to his truck and overheard someone say, "I say if it ain't broke, don't try to fix it!"

He drove somewhat aimlessly to his new home. He knew that an electrical engineer wasn't in high demand now with no electrical power. He wondered how he could possibly make a living.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 89

The millhouse was well enclosed, insulated, and warm inside when the first flakes of snow began to fall in late November. Ignacio was well pleased with the wood stove Chris and Eddie had built. Chris let Eddie do most of the welding with their gasoline powered Miller portable and Chris complimented him on his work. The building had a tight insulated ceiling that helped reflect the heat and allowed warm air convection currents to distribute the heat. While Chris and Eddie worked on building a

turbine housing, Ignacio worked on the mainshaft and a forming die to make turbine vanes.

Outside, more men were working furiously on installing the rest of a 16" diameter pipe onto its' foundation piers. The pipe led back to a natural dam in the spring cave that had been built higher with poured concrete. A flange bolted the pipe to the inlet through the concrete part of the dam. The temporary outlet and diversion coffer dam used during construction had been removed and water overflowed the raised dam now, awaiting opening the huge valve in the delivery pipe.

At the point where the water would enter the turbine downhill from the spring, it would have a total of 18 feet of "head", or elevation difference resulting in almost 8 PSI of pressure where it would enter the turbine. Richard Dalton had done the math and calculated the flow rate. He estimated that there was enough water flow and pressure to produce well over 30 horsepower. How much they actually got from the turbine depended on how efficient their design was. Richard was hoping for 25 horsepower. If less power was required, they could simply throttle back the flow rate until the turbine speed stabilized where they wanted it and save water in the process. Richard was delighted to be involved in his first real hydro power project.

They were using a very old turbine design that had been developed for water mills long ago. It had adjustable stator vanes that could be set to operate fairly efficiently at widely varying rates of water flow. Richard had chosen that over more efficient, but less versatile types, anticipating times of less water flow. He hoped fervently he had made a good choice. It was one used in many so-called 3rd world countries because it was not only pretty efficient, but fairly easy to build.

Eddie and Chris had searched to find enough stainless steel in the required sizes and shapes to build the turbine. The stainless steel pipe had been a real find, salvaged from a pharmaceutical company in Indianapolis, complete with flanges, gaskets and bolts. It had taken a week of hard work for an 8 man crew to get that apart, loaded and hauled over 100 miles to the mill site.

James Cooper had been bitten by a rat during the salvage operation and was terrified of what disease he might contract from that, but they had also taken all the bottled and bagged antibiotics they could find in the huge warehouse, packed and ready for shipment. They had to obtain a van body truck to haul it all and it took an extra day, but doctor was estatic at the haul. Doctor Anthony had dosed James with a combination of drugs and besides feeling poorly from the medicine, he was pronounced fine after 10 days.

Harvest had gone well this year, which the Flynn brothers counted as a great blessing because it left more workers available for moving all the heavy materials. The machine shop was still in town, being left until later since it was close by and moving the machinery was a less risky job if the weather turned bad on them. The brothers bemoaned the lack of cell phones to coordinate all this, but with careful planning it had gone with few problems.

The mill site was only half a mile from their farm, but there was no direct road across the steep ridge between their valley and Cave River Valley. That made it a 6 mile trip around through the back roads to get there. They soon learned to ride a couple of the older horses that the Rojas ranch offered them and simply cut across the ridge to save time and driving. Their trail was well worn when winter came.

An early snow covered the county roads and made the steep hills treacherous, so they did not risk moving anything with heavy trucks until it melted away a couple weeks later. That motivated everyone to get all the needed materials and equipment moved quickly so work could proceed in bad weather. More men and trucks were sent out in many directions to haul in everything they could think of they would need. Machinery, shafting, pulleys, bearings and much more were hauled in and left sitting in

trucks for storage. That was a good thing, because when winter came in earnest, the roads were impassable for weeks.

\*\*\*\*\*

The bad road conditions caused school to be shut down for a month. The new teachers were glad for a break.

"I don't know what it is about these students," Sybil Orless said. "They pay attention in class and they do the work. Some of the boys are really into plant genetics, even, but they just don't seem to like me."

Charlene was glad of Sybil coming to visit. She was getting cabin fever she thought. She agreed with Sybil and said, "I know. They act like we are from another planet or something. Well, the adults do it too. They laugh and joke at the Sunday meetings, but when we talk to them, or if we are just passing they get serious and the talk changes. It's like we have Leprosy or something."

Mallory Dorsey said, "I think it all came from that nonsense that David tried to pull on them. They hate him like nothing I've ever seen. I don't think much of him either, for that matter."

Her voice had a trace of bitterness in it and Charlene knew why. The other women guessed, but said nothing. They had seen David's attentions to her in the past and surmised what had happened. Mallory was a very attractive girl, and 10 years younger than David's somewhat plain wife. The winters at the Whelan farm had been long and lonely for them all. And Mallory's baby boy had curly hair like David.

Erika Gibbs, the Pyschiatry professor said, "That's it, of course. Now we will all have to prove ourselves worthy here. The good church women are all gossiping about us and who fathered our babies. Why can't they mind their own business? But no, that is to be expected here. They will adjust to it in time."

"Marty said he heard one of the old biddies say she thought we must all be bisexual to live together," Mallory said. She laughed and said, "They can't call us lesbian when we've all got babies, can they?"

The women all chuckled at that, but not happily.

"Marty's a good sort," Mallory said. "I wish I'd caught him before Willow did, but that's over."

"Do you suppose they will get married here?" Sybil asked her.

"Why not? That would make the locals happy," Erika said.

Sybil was silent, and Charlene knew why. There was no chance for a lesbian woman to find a partner in such a place as this, from what she had seen. Charlene guessed that some of the students had sensed Sybil's nature and that was why they treated her more coolly than the rest of them. She would like to help Sybil, but she had no idea how.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 90

The first concrete they had poured was the bed for the turbine which would be placed like a wheel laid

flat in the bottom of the excavated creek bed. That dictated where every other part of the mill would be located in relation to the turbine output shaft. The turbine itself was slightly off to the side of the natural stream bed and would be dry unless there was an unusual amount of water coming over the dam. The men figured they could place the turbine in winter as long as there was no accumulation of ice or snow in the concrete base. Part of the mill building overhung where the 4 foot diameter turbine would be placed and a heavy chain hoist was placed above it permanently so it could be removed for bearing replacement and repairs when they were needed.

The machinery would have the electric motors removed and be powered mechanically from the turbine shaft, but David Levinson had found short term employment at the mill when they decided to install a small generator for lights and other small needs. He had chosen a suitable size DC generator head and supervised the installation wiring of it's control panel. When the turbine was finally ready and installed the generator was the first thing it powered.

David had a voltmeter in the control panel to monitor the generator output. The operator could watch the voltmeter and govern the turbine RPM by regulating the valve manually. The supply of light bulbs would be the only thing limiting their ability to light the mill building. David explained that regular AC light bulbs would last much longer with DC power, because it did not have the 'flickering' effect of AC. He had done a good job and he knew it. The lights came on and he smiled at the crew amid the noisy machinery. They smiled back at him and gave him a thumbs up.

The long days had been worth it to David. He knew the men would treat him differently now that they had seen his work and he strutted a little as he walked over to the control panel to check the voltage. With his head held high, David didn't notice the open trap door over the turbine 20 feet below and stepped off the edge into air. He fell only a short distance before one foot hit a support beam and flipped him upside down, to fall headfirst onto the turbine below. He died before his body landed in the millrace of the turbine exhaust water, to be swept out and down stream a short way before his body lodged against the side of the stream bed.

Ignacio had seen him walk toward the opening in the floor and yelled loudly, too late to stop him. He ran outside and saw the body lodge on the stream bank below, calling for help.

\*\*\*\*\*

It was the first funeral in the small community, and their first widow. David's wife was inconsolable at first and depressed after that, not knowing what the future held for her. The traditional gifts of prepared food were given and the community tended to the burial at the small churchyard cemetery up the valley.

The day after the burial, Erika Gibbs walked down the road to Krystal Levinson's home and knocked on the door. There was no answer for a while so she knocked again, harder this time. She heard a shuffling inside, then the door opened and Krystal looked out at her without speaking.

"Can I come in? I thought you might need some company," Erika said.

"Coming to check on the crazy woman, I guess," Krystal said.

"I knew you were alone and I wanted to see how you were," Erika said as she went inside.

"There's not much to say. I loved him. At least I did until he started chasing you younger women. Did you sleep with him, too?"



"No. I wouldn't do that," Erika said firmly.

"Yes you would. You did. With him or somebody else, but you got pregnant. Maybe it was that nice pretty Marty Edelston. Or one of the older men. Who was it, if it wasn't David?"

Krystal's hair was stringy like it hadn't been combed in days. She still wore the dress she had on at the funeral, and she looked haggard. Her eyes had a bleak look that would accept no social niceties or dodging the issue.

Erika said, "It was Marty. I wouldn't sleep with a married man."

Krystal looked her dead in the eyes and finally said, "You might not, but David would go to bed with any sweet young thing that would have him. I gave up on him a long time ago."

"But you didn't leave him."

"No. I should have. But I was comfortable by then, and I didn't know how to get along without a man. I still don't, but I don't want another man. I'm through with men. I guess I'll starve here. I don't know how to live this way. But it doesn't matter."

"I don't think you will starve unless you want to. The neighbors will provide for you. I will," Erika said.

"Why do you care?"

"You're a human being, and you used to be a friend. Are you still a friend of mine?"

"I guess so. I don't feel like a friend. I don't feel much of anything."

"That is your mind taking care of you while you sort things out," Erika told her.

"That's right, you're the head doctor, aren't you? You know all about these things."

"Yes, I do know about these things. I know you need to drink plenty of water and eat right. You need to have a hot bath, even if it's a lot of trouble to heat the water. And speaking of food, I bought some. It's just soup, but it's still hot. Go in there to the table and I'll get you some."

It took a while to find a clean bowl and a spoon, but Erika got her seated at the table and fed. Before she could object, Erika had the fire built up in the kitchen stove and was heating water on it.

She told Krystal, "The neighbors went to a lot of trouble to get these stoves for everyone. They had to drive to some big city to find them in antique shops. The least you can do is USE it to feed yourself. You owe them that much."

Krystal looked at her and said, "So I OWE them? They wouldn't even speak to me, not until David died and then they were all nice again when they were burying him."

"They didn't reject you, they were mad at him for trying to put one over on them with the gold thing, and you know it. You're feeling sorry for yourself."

"I've got a right to feel sorry for myself! Are you saying I shouldn't?"

"No, just telling you what I see is all. It's your choice how you choose to feel."

Krystal didn't answer that. The water was getting hot, so Erika poured some into the kitchen sink, added cold water from a bucket until it was reasonable for washing and said, "Time to wash up. Get your clothes off. It's plenty warm in here now."

Krystal obeyed and began to wash. Erika went to her bedroom, the only one obviously occupied, and dug for clean clothing. She found a nice dress she hadn't seen before and some clean underclothes that she took to the kitchen where she found Krystal towelling off. Privacy had not been available to any of their group for a couple of years, so it was not an issue. She handed Krystal the clothes and said, "When you get the underwear on, I'll help you wash your hair."

Erika dipped and poured the warm soapy water while Krystal scrubbed her hair and then gave her two quick rinses. When she'd wrung out her fairly long hair and wrapped it in a towel, she handed her the dress and sat the small kettle of soup she'd brought onto the back of the wood stove to stay warm.

"Promise me you'll eat some more for supper."

"Okay, I'll eat," Krystal said with a sigh.

They sat down at the table again while Krystal combed out her hair. Erika asked, "How are you doing now? Feel better?"

Krystal nodded, agreeing that she did.

"Okay. I have to go. It's time to feed the baby. My milk is getting too full. I'll send somebody over here in the morning, okay?"

"Yes, that's okay. I'll be here."

Erika handed her a paperback book she had found somewhere, an old Agatha Christie mystery. She said, "Here. Something to do tonight. I have to go. Bye."

Erika leaned over and gave Krystal a hug, kissed her on the cheek, and then bustled out the door. Krystal watched her go, thinking about the kindness of some women. It was so different from the men she'd known. David had not been kind at all. He'd always been too busy thinking about David, she reflected. She really didn't miss him all that much.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 91

"I know we need this thing, but MAN! This is a lot of work!" Zach said.

"Yeah, and being cold out doesn't make it any easier," Isaac said. "My fingers are frozen."

"Be careful. Truck rear ends this size must weigh half a ton."

"Not that much, probably several hundred pounds, though."

"I wish we could just torch off those u-bolts."

"Nope. Need 'em to mount it at the mill," Isaac said.

"There. One more nut is off. So, how is this gonna work?"

"This gets mounted above the turbine, because the turbine shaft comes straight up and all the machinery will have horizontal shafts. The driveshaft on this goes to the turbine, and the axles will be hooked to the overhead line shafts. Then we'll put pulleys on the lineshaft to run each machine."

"Okay. This end it loose," Zach said.

"Mine too. Let's get that loader started and lift the truck frame, then we can roll this thing out from under the truck."

The old loader at the junkyard started easily enough. It had been used a lot lately to help salvage parts. Zach drove it and loaded the heavy rear differential onto Eddie's service truck and they were on their way to the mill.

"How do we get it off the truck?" Zach asked.

"It'll FALL off the truck. The problem will be getting it inside the mill and up near the ceiling to mount it. We can back it in the big door and roll it off onto the floor, then roll it over where we can hoist it up."

"Who's that guy?" Zach asked as they drove into the mill yard.

"I dunno. Haven't seen him before."

They were both excited about meeting someone new, wondering where he came from and all about him. Curiosity would have to wait. Isaac had to park the truck at the mill dock where it could be unloaded and rolled downhill to start it again, the battery being on it's last legs. Zach got out to direct him as he backed up to the dock, so by the time Isaac got inside, Zach had gone to talk to the newcomer.

Isaac heard someone say, "Where'd you find him?"

"At the steel place in Louisville. His buddy went back to their community down by Elizabethtown, and he came with me. They want to do some trading."

Isaac saw the speaker was Walter Rankin. He had been on a run to get more steel with 3 other men. Ignacio Rojas was asking the questions and addressed the new man.

"Your name sir?"

"I'm Jesse Sparks."

"My name is Ignacio Rojas. I am pleased to see more people! You want to trade something?"

"We're hoping to find somebody that has harness for horses. Our mechanic says the gas isn't very good now, and the diesel will get bad before long. We have to raise food to live."

"There is a harnessmaker here, but tanning leather is very slow. What do you have to trade?"

"We ran onto a truckload of sugar, and we found some spices, too. And there's a train we found that has coal for the power company, good hard Eastern Kentucky coal. If you have a blacksmith, he'll be wanting some coal."

Ignacio knew that if they searched long enough, they could probably find these things, but it make take a long time, and time they did not have in the race to prepare for living without fuels and trucks. He said, "We would be interested in these things. How would you want to trade?"

Jesse said, "What we really want is to learn how to tan leather and make harness ourselves. We got a good blacksmith and a guy who is tanning leather, but we want a couple sets of harness to get started farming that way before our tractors quit working. And we need a man to learn how to make the stuff. We'd really like to get somebody trained to do that."

"I see. Maybe there is a way to do this. It will take time to arrange things, to talk back and forth."

"Do you have radios? We have HAM radio and can probably reach you on that if you have an antenna up high somewhere," Jesse said.

"We have only the military radio. My brother knows how to work that one, but we have no others."

"OH! We have a couple radio guys that can set you up if you want! Then you could listen to the rest of the country, too. There are people who survived all over, but they are all small groups. If we could all communicate, it would help. Maybe we could trade training on radios for training on harnessmaking?"

Ignacio said, "Yes, that might work out. We have a meeting each Sunday to talk about things. We will discuss this. You will go home soon?"

"Mr. Rankin said they would be going back to Louisville tomorrow, so I will ride back with him. My brother will meet me at the steel yard. We needed some things there, too."

"So, I should have thought sooner. How many people are in your group?" Ignacio asked.

"Uh, well, there's 7 families, and if you count the kids--some of 'em are pretty well grown up--there's 32 of us. But half a dozen are little kids, and there's grandma who is pretty old."

"I see. We are more than that, but I can't say just how many. We have a lot of people who can teach things. There may be more teaching we can trade. We will see later. Do you have a place to stay tonight?"

"Walter said I could stay with him. Say, are you interested in salt? We found a lot of it in a train car, but it's a bulk hopper. Have to have your own things to put it in."

Ignacio was thinking fast and said, "Si, we need salt. What would you want to trade for it?"

"We don't need much else, how about gold, if you have some? We heard on the HAM radio that there's

people on south of us that are trading for gold and silver. Looks like that's going to be the new money."

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 92

"What the devil is THAT thing?" Erika Gibbs asked.

"It's a pressure canner," Jocelyn said.

"We don't know anything about canning food. You should take it to the people over at the park by the lake. They do all the canning over there," Erika said.

"I'm not going to can food in it. Well, I might sometime, but I got it because I need an autoclave," Jocelyn said. "I'm a dental tech, remember? I saw a little Amish girl last Sunday that had a toothache. That was just a permanent tooth coming in, so she'll be fine, but it got me to thinking. There has to be a lot of cavities around here and somebody needs to be ready to deal with them. So, I'm going to get ready."

"Your going to be a dentist, just like that?"

"No, but I'm the best they've got. I've pulled teeth before, and I've made fillings at the dental school. I was pretty good at it. I've even made silver and gold amalgams with mercury for fillings. They still taught that, even though everybody had gone to plastic fillings. The heck of it is, we don't have what we need to do the work. We'll have to raid a dentist's office."

"Isn't mercury illegal now? It's poisonous," Mallory said.

"People got by with it for ages. So it's going to leach a little mercury into your system. So what? You'd rather die of an abscessed tooth, maybe?" Jocelyn said.

"And this has what to do with a pressure canner?"

"It's the only way I could think of to sterilize instruments. We'll run out of disinfectants. Even bleach doesn't last forever. It goes bad. I can cook anything in here at 15 pounds of pressure and get them hot enough to kill about anything. If I can souse things in alcohol, then pressure cook them, they will be as sterile as we can make them," Jocelyn said. "It's a way to make a living, right?"

"Where do you get the alcohol?" Erika asked.

"The young men at the park are already making wine. We just need somebody to make a still and we can have alcohol. Another big pressure canner will make a still. They were thinking about it because the herb woman, I think her name is Anita Harris, she wants some alcohol to make herb concoctions. They were talking about making corn liquor to do that for her."

Mallory said, "We could probably make some things you'd need if we had a lab of some sort. I'd have to do some digging in the old textbooks I brought, but we could probably make bleach if we had salt and some other things, but it will take me a while to figure it out."

"Can you make an anaesthetic of some kind?" Jocelyn asked.

"That would be tough. The chemistry is complicated to synthesize those."

"Is there a dooper around the community? Somebody who sold illegal drugs, or made them? Or maybe the herb woman knows how to make something," Charlene said.

"I don't know," Jocelyn said. "I'll ask around. Maybe somebody has poppies and knows how to make opium. For now, the patients are just going to have to tough it out, until we can do better. What I need is an old fashioned dentist's office so I can find a drill that doesn't need electricity. The college boys over at the park said the gasoline is going to go bad before too long, so a generator is out of the question, unless they can get some homemade fuel going."

Erika said, "I know! I heard somebody talking about a museum in town somewhere. The woodworking guy with the beautiful curly hair. He's a foreigner of some kind. Peter somebody."

"That's Pietro Muntii," Jocelyn said. "He's from Romania, and he's taken, so hands off of him. He's married to the Greek girl who does the baking in that big mud thing."

"Yeah, well, he said something about getting wood working tools at the museum in town. They might have some old dental stuff, you think?"

"Well, there is bound to be a dentist's office around even a small town like this. We can raid them all," Charlene said. She was thinking about how bad it would be to have a toothache and no way to fix it. Then she said, "There's plenty of room here. We could set you up an office in that old parlor room in the front. Hang out a shingle and you're in business!"

"It's going to take more than that," Jocelyn said. "I'll need so much stuff. And we'll need running water in there somehow. Gotta be able to wash out their mouth, and all that. We're going to need a plumber."

"Why not just set a tank upstairs?" Mallory asked. "We could run a hose or something down here and fill the tank with buckets from the well."

Jocelyn asked, "Mallory, how come you are so enthusiastic about this?"

"Because I don't want to have to live like Daniel Boone, that's why! If we can get a business going here, we can trade for what we need to eat. I'm not into digging in the dirt. We did enough of that at the Whelan's to last me a lifetime. I'll be glad to be your dental assistant and let somebody else feed the pigs. I saw what's going on at Doctor Van Derver's. HE doesn't grow anything! People bring him stuff all the time. That's what I'm wanting. And I never wanted to have to depend on some man to support me, either. I made my own money when I was married and I've had enough of begging."

\*\*\*\*\*

"How are you fixed for diesel fuel now?" Jim Collier asked Roscoe.

"Got my 300 gallon tank filled again from that tanker truck down at the park. I ran it into the portable tank on my truck and then used the 12 volt pump to put it into the farm tank. It took 5 trips, though."

"Yeah, that's what I did. I wonder what's left in the tanker?"

"It was about half full when we checked it with a stick. Probably about 1,500 gallons in there," Roscoe said.

"Hmm. We need to find some more. Those folks are using it faster than I thought. Lots of running around to get stuff, I guess. There wasn't any more at that truck stop in Seymour, either, unless we could get it pumped out of the tanks in the ground somehow," Jim said.

"We could get more 12 volt pumps at the farm stores and rig that up. Anybody check the tanks in the ground there?"

"Don't think so. But we'd better look into this. My truck is running a little rough now. I found some additive and put in it, so it still starts okay, but we might have a problem before too long. That worries me a lot. We could be back to horse farming before we know it."

\*\*\*\*\*

"We need a new battery in the service truck," Eddie said.

"I know, but Clay said there wasn't any more that size at the battery place in Louisville. Maybe we can get somebody to find some in another city."

"Sounds like another long trip coming up. I can steal the battery from the track hoe for now, but we need one soon. It ain't so good, either."

\*\*\*\*\*

The college boys, as everyone called them, were having one of their gabfests, being well lubricated by some homemade wine and a good meal. For a November night, it wasn't too cold out, so they had built a campfire and said they were fishing, but the poles didn't get much attention.

Isaac said, "We need that mill running for a lot of reasons. And it had better run for a LONG time."

Richard Dalton knew all the reasons. They had to have ways to power all kinds of equipment, especially for grinding grain to keep them fed without hours of drudgery cranking hand mills. People were needed for too many other kinds of work. But the biggest reason was their need for the machine shop that would keep other machines repaired and running to make what they needed. It could run the bellows and a trip hammer, too, for blacksmithing bigger parts. Ignacio was talking about finding a medium size punch press to make things in quantity. If they couldn't set up now to make things, they would run out some day and there would be only hand methods. It would be like going back in time over 200 years.

What he said was, "It won't be enough. It's just one little mill. We can make some things, but we can't make EVERYTHING. We will be going back to cottage industries to make things like buttons and needles, and thread. I don't see any way that we can make glass, or steel, or even wire. Those are pretty basic industries. Our kids are going to have to learn to make paper and ink and quill pens, because those were heavy industries that took massive amounts of power."

James Cooper said, "We are just staving off the inevitable with solar power, and the water mill with modern bearings and steel parts. In another 30 years, those things will all quit working and there won't be any way to get new parts for them. Nobody can make ball bearings now. God only knows if there

will ever be another steel mill running."

Zach nodded and said, "We took a lot for granted before."

Paul Dickenson said, "We can still do a lot. Ruth is making some fine glazed pottery. Between Isaac and Ignacio, they can make about anything out of metal. Esther is doing good with the flax we raised for her this year. The linen she weaves out of that is tougher than most modern fabrics were. It won't be going back to the Stone Age."

Richard said, "No, but all those processes are so SLOW, that we'll never get ahead, really. And even if we go back as far as using copper and lead alloys for bearings, where do we get the tin, antimony, or arsenic to harden them? Nobody is going to Bolivia, or Cornwall for tin anytime soon. We'll have to mine old things for a lot of metals. How long can we keep our kids educated to all those old technologies so they even know where to look for the right metals? Two generations? Maybe three? Then we'll be right back to exploring for lead mines, and all that sort of thing. If someone did not survive where the mines were, we're sunk."

Pietro started to say something, but he heard Mary call Richard to the house.

"There's somebody on the radio," she yelled at him.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 93

Krystal Levinson realized that she was looking forward to having company the next morning as she looked out the kitchen window at the road. The growing brush along the sides made it harder to see very far, except farther down the hill where the road curved. She was drying her few dishes when she saw Sybil Orless walking toward her house. Krystal was glad it was Sybil who was coming. She was easy to talk to and had been a good friend for years. She had time to finish in the kitchen and with a glance at the hallway mirror, got her hair combed and straightened her clothes when she heard the knock on the door.

"We cooked a wild turkey that one of the kids at the park gave us. I brought some along, since Thanksgiving is tomorrow, if our calendar is right," Sybil said.

"I had forgotten all about holidays. Being by myself I just go from day to day," Krystal said.

Sybil put her container on the table and took off her coat, hanging it on a chair. "I was going to ask you about that. Living alone, I mean. I'm getting tired of being around babies all the time and wondered if you'd consider me living here for company? It's not as easy as it used to be doing daily chores and I thought you could use the help."

"Well. I hadn't thought about that. It is lonely. I was looking forward to you coming today. I don't really want another man. David wasn't really that much company when he was here. And women are so much better when you need to talk to someone," Krystal said, thinking out loud. "It does sound like a good idea."

"We could try it for a while and if it doesn't work out, I can go back to live with the other girls. They can use some help, too. I thought maybe I could go over there during the day to lend a hand on days when



I'm not teaching."

"You're teaching now?"

Sybil said, "Just two days a week, biology and botany to the older kids. They don't like me much, but they do the work and I get paid for it in food. It's a job."

"Why wouldn't they like you? You're nice to everyone." Krystal said.

"I think they sense I'm different. The boys, especially. They treat me like I'm an ugly old woman. Most boys have fantasies about young women teachers like Jocelyn. I can see in their faces. They know."

Krystal nodded. She had known about Sybil's sexual preferences for years, so they were comfortable talking about it. She said, "That could make it difficult."

"Not really difficult. I'm used to being treated like an outsider. It's always been that way."

"It has to be lonely, though."

"Yeah, it is. I just got used to it and take my friends where I find them."

Krystal had made up her mind. "Yes, I want you to stay here, if you will. I think it would be a good thing for both of us. We can work out how we want to do things and I'd feel better having someone else around. Life isn't as secure as it used to be. When would you want to move in? My car still goes, so I can haul your things."

"I suppose any time. I told the girls I was going to ask you, so it doesn't matter when we do it."

"You brought fresh food, so let's get it over with today when we don't have to cook," Krystal said. She relished the freedom she felt at being able to make that decision.

\*\*\*\*\*

Richard Dalton sat down and put the headphones on. The scratchy transmission cleared up as he adjusted knobs like he'd been taught by the man from Elizabethtown.

"This is Rich Dalton, do you copy?"

"Copy loud and clear. This is Jesse Sparks. Are you folks ready to do some trading again?"

"Yes sir. Coal, salt and sugar. Have you set prices?"

"We need old US silver coins or well known gold coins in trade. We are making prices in old dollar amounts and valuing silver coins at 32 times face value and gold at \$2,400 a Troy ounce. That's about what they were when the markets shut down. We want \$1.10 a pound for sugar, \$160 a ton for good hard coal, and iodized salt is still \$15.00 for a 25 pound bag. How much do you want?"

"I'll have to wait until after next Sunday's meeting to tell you. Get back to me next Monday evening about an hour after full dark, okay?"

"I'll do that. Meet the same place for delivery okay with you?"

"That's fine."

"Good! I'll get back to you Monday to set up the deal. Talk to you then. Bye, Richard."

"Bye, Jesse."

\*\*\*\*\*

Krystal knew she was in a strong position with the gold and silver her husband had left her. She wasn't a vindictive woman, but she still felt like she was due the humility that people offered when they'd approached her about financing the trading with the E-town community, as they called the other group.

Sybil, ever practical, told her, "It's your chance to get some real good out of all that gold and silver. Think what people will trade for real table salt and sugar! And you've got that good steel building to store it in, too. All you need are some containers."

Krystal said, "I think maybe Clay Whitaker down the road could find some containers. He finds everything else we need. I'll go talk to him."

The meeting at the park was a bit chaotic with a lot of plans and deals being made. Krystal found Clay deep in a discussion about what trucks to take to Louisville for the trading. She got his attention and asked him, "Can you find me some containers? Like 5 gallon buckets and barrels? They need to be plastic so they don't rust and spoil the salt and sugar. I'll pay you in silver, or goods if you want."

"I know where to find buckets, but the barrels may be harder to get," he said. "I'll look when we go to Seymour tomorrow. Might have to go to Columbus to find barrels. I dunno."

"I want some, too," Patrick Hughes said. "I'll pay you in gold. We have decided to buy some supplies, too. Dad arranged with Ignacio to store it at the mill, so we won't be trying to take your business, Missus Levinson."

Clay said, "I'll get back to you in a couple days, depending on what I can find. Sounds like something we ought to have around anyway. It'll take a big truck to make it worth the trip, though. Need a couple guys to go along, too. Maybe we can find some other things to make the trip pay better. The roads are getting rough, so we need to make every trip count."

The discussions went on until it was time to leave, but plans were under way the next morning. Clay, Eddie, and Chris were back well before dark with a flatbed semi trailer loaded with barrels and buckets stacked inside them. Amounts were hurriedly discussed and settled in time for the radio call that night. Two days later, three trucks made the trip to the steel yard where they had met before.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Thank you Sybil. I don't know if I would have had the courage to do business without you," Krystal said.

"You've got what it takes. You just needed some encouragement."

"I needed the moral support. You're just what I needed. Thank you." Krystal smiled at her and gave her a hug. Sybil returned the hug gently, hoping she didn't show too much about her feelings for this

woman. Sybil's inner strength was what Krystal needed, so that's what she would give her. Maybe more would come later.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 94

Along with the barrels and buckets, Clay Whitaker brought back a roll of flat belting and the tools and splicing supplies for it. Those he traded to Ignacio for later credit at the mill. The belting was made for use in round hay balers, but it would work for light power transmission as well to drive machinery in the mill.

"AH! That is good Clay! This will last a long time. We can use leather when this runs out, but it will slip more. Now we can make the machines run. First, we will do the big lathe. I will use it to make some wood pulleys for the other machines. I did find some glue for making the wood pulleys that is still good."

"What are you gonna do for glue when the old stuff goes bad?"

"This should be good for a long time yet. But we can boil hide scraps and make hot glue like my Padre in Mexico did. It will be okay. The leather belts we will lace together and glue them as well. I have done this as a child."

"After all this work I'd hate to see the mill shut down because we can't make pulleys and belts."

Ignacio smiled and said, "I have been thinking on this. We plan everything to keep it going a long time. I will train young people for when I am too old. There is much to know about machines and how to keep them running. The Flynn boy, David, he likes this work. There are no girls his age here, so he pays more attention."

Clay chuckled at that and said, "Won't be long till he finds one. There's a buncha Amish girls that don't have fellas yet."

"Oh, he has a girl. The young one that works for the doctor. But she is far away so he isn't always thinking about seeing her each night."

"The boy is not my worry. We need to find and store a lot of the cutting tools. We have a grinder to sharpen them, but they wear out. The steel for cutting tools is not easy to make. It has Cobalt, and Chrome and other metals from other countries. Someday that will be a problem. We can make carbon steel, but it can only cut slowly, or it is damaged. I will show you what we need. Maybe you can find more of them, eh? Then we find a way to keep them for many years, maybe store them in lard to prevent rust."

Clay looked around the mill at all the things stored inside and said, "You will need more room to store things pretty soon if you keep bringing things in here."

"That is true. There is a farm down the road that has a new barn with a good floor. I am thinking of using that. We must take the best care of things for when there are no more. I come from a poor country. I know what it is to have little. We must work very hard to keep what we have."

\*\*\*\*\*

Clay kept some barrels and buckets for himself. He planned to buy enough iodized salt and sugar to last his family for at least another generation or two. Benjamin and Gina were more of a couple than he would have liked to see at their age, but there was no stopping that sort of thing. At 14 and 15 years old, they were talking about a place of their own and Benjamin already owned a horse he'd caught and gentled himself. Benjamin was turning into a pretty good carpenter, and Gina had applied herself to learning how Amy did things with food and clothing. She was always talking about the Biology teacher and how plants and animals grow. They were good kids, but they were very close, too close for his comfort.

Amy knew their adopted children were well on the way to being mates. It seemed like that was decided before they came here. Amy was pregnant again, so she took it upon herself to explain things to Gina. At first the girl was too embarrassed to talk about it, but soon her curiosity overcame that and she wanted to know everything. Gina was mystified, amazed, delighted, and terrified by turns.

It was in December when their cow decided to have her calf, so Amy and Clay made sure everyone was there to see it happen. The two youngsters got to see the messy process all first hand with sober faces. That turned to delight once the new calf was on its' wobbly legs and nursing, twitching its' tiny tail.

Gina found her chance the next day when she and Benjamin were doing chores.

"I don't think I'm big enough to have a baby yet."

Benjamin groped for an answer to that. He stared at her and swallowed hard. Finally he found his tongue and said, "Uh, yeah. I mean no. You shouldn't have babies until you're ready. It's pretty scary to watch."

Gina said, "You know what that means, right?"

"Uh, yeah, I guess I do. We can't take any chances."

Gina smiled at him and gave him a hug. "It won't be that long. Another year or two maybe, Amy said. I'm pretty big for my age."

"That's still a long time."

"Yeah. I was thinking the same thing."

\*\*\*\*\*

Snow began to fall in late December, softly at first, then larger flakes came down thicker and faster one evening. The roads were covered deep enough to make travel a problem, so school was let out until it cleared. Rich Dalton was about ready to turn off the radio and go to bed when it squawked and he heard Jesse Sparks say, "Come in Richard. Richard are you there? This is Jesse. Come in Richard."

He clicked the transmit button and said, "I'm here Jesse. What's up?"

"We got company here down south of you."

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 95

Less snow in the Cave River Valley settlement allowed some travel, so Ignacio and his brothers took advantage of that. A couple trips with tractors and wagons and trucks had most of the excess materials moved from the mill building down the road 3/4 of a mile to a tight pole barn with a concrete floor. This barn was huge and looked to be unused. Half the morning was past when they had the truck loads moved into the barn.

"The snow will blow under the doors and could get things wet," Alejandro said. "Maybe we can find some straw bales or something to stop that."

Miguel said, "We got straw to put around mi casa from the barn out in the valley. But there is mud by the creek. The trucks would not go there now."

Mateo said, "We can use the tractor and wagon. It will go in the mud. Come on Miguel. We go now." Mateo hastened to his unloaded rig and Miguel followed. The other three drove trucks back to the mill to get the last of the materials, mostly lumber and hardware.

By evening the mill building was cleaned out of excess materials except for things they would use on projects they were working on.

\*\*\*\*\*

Roscoe told his wife, "Rich Dalton just told me his friends in Kentucky were visited by a some military folks from Fort Knox."

She looked sharply at him and asked, "What's that all about?"

"It seems they are trying to locate pockets of survivors and heard some of their radio talk. The Army still has some functional bases around the country, the ones where the commanders had the good sense to lock the bases down and quarantine them. They caught hell for that from DC at first, but before long there wasn't anyone left in DC to gripe about it. Now, they are working with local people to trade what they have for the food they need to keep the troops fed."

"What are they trading? We don't need military weapons where the outlaws can get them."

"Oh no, they aren't doing that. They have a lot of preserved fuel and some heavy equipment they are using to get some roadways cleared and things like that. Rich was told there are some bases down in Texas that are trying to find enough people to get a refinery running again, too. There isn't any oil coming in from overseas, of course, but there are still quite a lot of wells in Texas and Louisiana, so they hope to get some fuel going again. I guess there are some nuclear plants that are still up and going down there so they have power. Finding the right people is the big problem."

Marta said, "I hope they get it done. This country won't ever get going again without fuel."

Roscoe said, "That's a fact. Well, it doesn't look too good at this time. Most of the refinery people are

dead. The Army guys were pretty friendly they said. It seems there is practically no government left, so they are pretty much on their own. They have been eliminating the bandit types as they run into them, Rich said, but most of those run when they see the army coming. Some are going to stay and help those folks in Kentucky with working the farms there, so it seems like a good deal for everyone."

"I hope so. It's nice to hear some good news for a change," Marta said.

"It wasn't all good news. The east coast and the west coast of the US had so many meltdowns that they won't be having electrical power or anything else for a very long time," Roscoe said. "There is practically nobody left alive from New York City to somewhere in Virginia, according to the best reports the Army could get. And New Orleans is flooded again. They lost power long enough that some heavy rains and the lack of pumping capacity made the whole area a big lake again. I guess Saint Louis still has a port, but the Gulf Coast suffered a lot for lack of anyone to keep things going after the dieoff. There is some sort of government trying to get started again in Denver, but they don't have much in the way of either communications or transportation. They are living in some big government facility out there and some more are holed up some place in West Virginia."

"Hmmp. Well, what good did the government do in the past?" Marta asked.

"Not a heck of a lot, from what I could tell, but maybe they can get their act together now."

\*\*\*\*\*

As late winter began to loosen it's grip on the weather, more news came in with later reports from the Kentucky community that was now up to several dozen people and had taken over farming a number of old farms there. This year they were growing sorghum for molasses and tobacco for trade both up and down the Ohio River. It seems that the old idea of river shipping was starting to be a bigger business again for certain items, notably coal from West Virginia and eastern Kentucky, some salt and beet sugar coming up from the South where natural gas and electricity was still available for processing them.

Krystal Levinson's gold and silver became invaluable to her and the community as this trade expanded, and she also found ways to profit from trading local goods for the ones that came in by river. The radio communication with Kentucky group who had supplied us with radio expertise, and with a group upriver near Cincinnati proved a boon to the river trade as well.

Jesse Sparks called Rich Dalton one evening on the HAM radio and said he had bad news.

"What kind of news?" Rich asked.

"The refinery they were trying to start up caught fire when some leaks went undetected and burned to the ground. They lost a couple people and the rest barely got away from it. It looks bad for trying to get any oil products going any time soon. The Army is really upset about this. They are still trying to find anyone who ever worked around a refinery to get enough help together to try again, but it doesn't look good now. The people are telling the Army that the refineries are all old and need a lot of work to be reliable."

\*\*\*\*\*

It wouldn't be long until Spring so people were taking advantage of the warmer weather before planting season came around. Isaac Kelley and Zach Felsen had gone to the water mill to see Ignacio about fixing up a couple more windmills they had found. Isaac told the news about the refinery failure.

Zach said, "That's the worst news we've heard for a while. We were all hoping to get the petroleum business going again so it would be possible to restart the petrochemical plants. Without all that, there won't be any synthetic rubber or plastic in the future."

"That is bad news indeed," Ignacio said. "Machinery needs a lot of rubber parts. We need molded rubber parts for oil and grease seals, gaskets and many things. Maybe there are other ways."

He looked off into the distance, thinking, while the two younger men carried in the windmill parts. As he looked over the gearboxes and their old fashioned leather seals his face brightened up. He asked them if they had been inside the old auto parts plant in town?

"No, only outside it a couple times when we went there to salvage some barrels of solvents and stuff. Roscoe knows all about it. He used to work there."

"Did he say anything about them having presses in the factory?"

"Yeah. He said he used to work on a press there, but gave it up to farm full time years ago," Isaac told him.

"Aaah! That is good. We must go see this factory. If they have a small or medium sized punch press, we can make many things with that. I can make the dies for them."

Zach asked him, "But how would you power it? Those things all run on electricity don't they?"

"Si, they do. But they can be powered by a belt from a water wheel, too, like the very first ones long ago. Or, a steam engine could run one. That came next."

"Somebody told us that there was an old steam engine in the old furniture factory in town. They burned their scrap wood in it to power part of their machinery," Isaac said.

Ignacio began to make tentative plans that would depend on what they found in the two old factories.

\*\*\*\*\*

Typical for March weather in Indiana, one last snowstorm had to make travel a problem for a few days, but it melted away fast when the sun popped out and a wind from the south brought warmth. Daniel Schmidt was busy sacking up garden seeds for his neighbors and trade was brisk for him. The Amish community already had cold weather vegetable plants started and Amos Schwartz was no exception. He and his wife had moved to the old cabin in Clay had found in the woods atop the ridge during the winter, leaving most of his livestock in the care of his neighbor Jacob Knepp.

Amos had come to a decision to concentrate on using the fine shop that had been deserted so long ago. He had heard the news that the oil refinery had burned, so petroleum fuels may not be available for a long time, if ever again. He understood that meant that the Amish way of life was going to be the future of what civilization was left. If people had to continue living with little or no modern fuels or electricity, Amos would have no competition from modern manufacturing. He could rely on local

business and he meant to make the most of it.

He had traded a nice heifer calf to Krystal Levinson for a ton of good hard coal that came downriver. It was too muddy to move it by wagon through the lane in the woods to his shop, but he took enough on a simple wood farm sled to get him started. Many trips with the sled had his family moved into the old place and they found it much easier living in the smaller, but very well built cabin there. His wife Delilah loved the place. While the ground was still frozen hard in winter, Amos had moved in enough baled hay and grain to feed his team of horses, a cow and some chickens they took long. He and the kids had cleared off the small brush from a large area for pasture and he had it fenced for pasture and a large garden area. After those necessities and cutting some firewood, he was ready to do some shop work.

He bought some lumber from Jim Collier and had him rough plane it at his mill. That was stored in the shop building and Amos began to take orders for wood items and some decorative blacksmith work. He began to dig through more of the tools and crates stored in the shop. He had opened wooden crates and briefly looked through them before, but began to take more time with that, inspecting the contents of each more closely. Several were filled with plain steel stock, both round and flat bars of many sizes, each marked what is contained--in German, of course.

One crate, about 4 feet long puzzled him because it was filled with octagon bars, dozens, maybe a hundred of them, and they were all the same size, not quite an inch thick. They were very greasy and wrapped in dark colored paper. Amos unwrapped one and got his hands covered with the sticky grease. The bar had a hole in the end and was stamped with some letters and figures. Carrying it to the window for a better look, he read, ".45 caliber". He realized what he had then and instantly knew what the long machine was above that crate. It had puzzled him since he first saw it. The crate was full of drilled rifle barrel blanks, and the machine was for cutting the rifling in them.

Amos quickly understood that the long box atop the machine had the rifling rods and cutter heads, and the odd looking rods with spirals on the outside were the templates to guide the rifling cutters. He left the crate of barrel blanks and dug deeper under the bench. More handmade wood crates were filled with percussion and flint locks, and trigger assemblies, some finished, some still as they came from the forge. He then realized that the old man had MADE that beautiful percussion muzzleloading rifle that he'd found in the bedroom cabinet.

He sat back on his stool and gazed around the shop, beginning to appreciate just what he had there. Overhead, stacked in the heavy ceiling beams were 2" X 8" pieces of assorted kinds of wood, about 5 feet long. He wiped his hands clean of grease and took one of them down to inspect. This one was maple, and very heavy. A stroke with his pocket knife proved it to be highly figured curly grained maple, a beautiful piece. Excited at his finds, Amos went to the foot-powered "frame saw", a man powered version of a bandsaw. Sure enough, on the back side of the vertical wood frame hung an assortment of stock patterns cut from thin poplar. It would take a lot of work to saw out a stock from the blanks, but time was less valuable now.

One crate was too heavy to move, like the one filled with barrel blanks, but this one was larger. Inside was a lever operated press with small dies in it. The book was in old High German, but he could read enough to learn it was for making percussion caps. Many small jars of powdered chemicals were packed in another box, cushioned by wood shavings, once called 'excelsior'. Each was labelled in German, and a small leather covered book was in its' own compartment.

There was a crate of tong style bullet molds, for both round balls and elongated conical bullets. Amos closed the lids on it all and went inside for lunch. Delilah had the meal on the table and said, "I didn't



hear any noise out there. Have you not been working?"

Amos grinned and said, "No, I have been digging up treasure! We all thought the old man must have had a lot of money but we never found any here. But he didn't save money, he had bought tools and things. I found enough out there to build at least a hundred rifles like my muzzleloader in the bedroom!"

Delilah's mouth hung open in surprise. "Why would he do that?"

"Well, he was getting older and making rifles is less hard work than making furniture. It would pay better, too. I wondered why he had so many bars of lead stacked out there. Now I know why, but I'm wondering where he put the gunpowder? He had everything else, even tools and chemicals to make the primer caps. This was his retirement savings."

Amos found the gunpowder when he began to plow the garden. The team stopped when the plow hit the big flat stone, only barely covered with dirt. It was not a stone, but concrete. It covered a section of huge brown glazed round tile, as used 50 years ago for large drains in cities. This was the first of 8 of them. Each tile was 2 feet in diameter by 3 feet long and set in concrete deep in the ground. The concrete lid was sealed with asphalt to the tile and it was only luck that the plow point had hit the joint and dislodged the lid, breaking the tight waterproof seal made by the asphalt. Each of the tiles he eventually discovered had 120 pounds of gunpowder in each one, in 5 pound cannisters. The cannisters were wrapped with the greasy brown paper and coated with grease to prevent rusting. Amos saw quickly that the old man had put the gunpowder far from the house and buildings because he did not want half a ton of gunpowder anywhere close to the house!

Amos removed one cannister and smeared some of the grease from it around the edge of the tile so he could seal it back up again, keeping moisture out. Lifting the heavy lid was all he could do, but it had cast-in grooves to lift it with, so one man could do it. The garden would have to move over a short distance. Amos felt wealthy. He would have to work to collect on his fortune, but it was there for the earning. With no new guns or ammunition being made, eventually what was on the shelves in stores would run out and there would be a market for his muzzleloaders. He might be able to build only one rifle a month, or it might take him 2 or 3 months, depending on how nicely finished he made them, but he would have a steady income as long as he wanted to work at it. And there was always furniture to build, too.

\*\*\*\*\*

Isaac began to work on getting the old steam engines they had retrieved from the Elnora display. He knew now that they would be used as long as they could keep them running. He was thankful for Ignacio's abilities as a machinist and spent some time talking with him about the possibility of casting aluminum to make repair parts when needed.

Zach spent some time with Rich Dalton and Pietro Muntii talking about the water powered grist mill south of town. It was a long way to get there, about 10 miles, but the mill had been restored not many years ago as an antique site. It offered some possibilities for grinding grain and doing other work, and it wasn't that much farther away than going to their new mill site.

Rich had heard more news from Jesse Sparks down in Elizabethtown, Kentucky. The military men were helping out a lot, but there were a lot of problems with them trying to set up a 'chain of command'. The locals didn't like that at all and were ready to tell them all to leave. Jesse said they needed the help, but he was worried the arguments might come to blows, or worse.

Pietro told him, "It happens every time the military gets involved. I saw it in my country when they took over the government. No good will come of this. Nobody has to be boss over a whole community, we only need leaders to do what needs done. If the military comes here we should send them away."

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 97

Jesse Sparks had more news from time to time, most importantly that the military had decided they had to assert their authority and take over the Elizabethtown community "in the name of National Security". That lasted about a week, until they figured out they didn't have anyone who knew how to manage a farm, let alone preserve food, care for livestock, or the other hundreds of things necessary to keeping food production going. Farmers are an independent lot by nature and collectively decided to simply hand over the whole works to the Army. The Army managed to lose several new calves and eat most of the available chickens before they figured out where eggs came from. It was planting time and nobody in the Army had a clue how to go about it or where to plant what, let alone how to do it.

A bargaining session was held and the Army decided that being polite had worked out much better for them than being hardasses. A new agreement was reached, whereby the Army would supply what fuel and other assets they could provide in exchange for enough to eat, and otherwise leave the community alone. Jesse said this was not arrived at easily, but after the Army learned they would soon starve otherwise, a begrudging accord was established.

Two other communities in Kentucky and one just across the state line in Tennessee made it known that anyone in uniform would be shot on sight. The Army didn't believe that until they tried it and got convinced because whenever a soldier got out of his Hummer to pee, he dropped dead of long range lead poisoning. The shooters were never found, despite all manner of high technology at the Army's disposal. The Army's numbers were not that great to begin with, and they lost about 20% of their troops before they learned their lessons the hard way.

Apparently, Fort Knox was the only base in the Midwest that had survived with any significant number of troops. Large Air bases and other installations, some of them hardened to a great degree, were infected and most of them died to the last man. Government offices fared even worse. Less than 1% of the original government personnel survived and those were all ones who were off duty for one reason or another.

Nobody seemed to mind very much. Government all became local from the beginning of the die-off. The communities of survivors remaining after the 3rd year were all small and very compact, having been friends, families, and close neighbors who figured out fast how to cope. A small group in the Smoky Mountain National Park settled in Cades Cove, a restored pioneer settlement above Gatlinburg and was doing well with a water mill and pre-industrial level technology. Similar settlements became stops on new trade routes being established mostly along the major rivers. These were located first by radio, then word-of-mouth.

The population had continued to drop even in the 3rd year until some stability returned and people figured out how to live and get what they needed. One of the most important needs and the hardest to find was good medical care. Doctor Anthony Van Derver found himself overloaded with patients and had trained Melanie Draper in medicine as fast as her young mind would absorb it. She studied late

nights in his medical texts and spent long days assisting him treating patients from as far away as Cincinnati, Ohio and some from near Evansville, Indiana. They came by every means of conveyance, from pre-electronic diesel trucks to horse drawn carriages and river boats. Even some troops from Fort Knox made their way to his expanded clinic, but they were careful to wear civilian clothing and drove civilian vehicles.

"We need to get more alcohol from the boys down at the park," Michelle told the doctor.

Tony said, "See what they want to trade for it. Our little barn is getting very full of trade goods and we need other things from them, too."

"Yeah, I'm going down there tomorrow to see two pregnant women for their check ups. I'll ask about some more of those nice glazed pottery jars, too, and some beeswax to seal them." Michelle asked Destiny Alexander, their new office girl, "Would you make a note of that for me and see what Melanie might want there, too, okay?"

Destiny nodded and said, "I know she wants some of those slings and the good wool blankets that Esther Kelley has been making. They are so much warmer than the synthetic stuff and she needs more for the new rooms we added."

Michelle was happy. She not only had the man she wanted, she really loved her work and Tony had declared her to officially be a Registered Nurse just last week. He had gone to a lot of trouble to have Alena Muntii make a lovely certificate in beautiful calligraphy. Her husband Pietro had made a nice frame for it out of cherry wood. It hung above her desk along with her diploma from Indiana University. Michelle felt like she had some real security at last. There was no shortage of work for them, that was certain.

They had added on four new rooms to the back of the house that looked more like a hospital than a home. Clay Whitaker, resourceful as always, had located and moved hospital beds and much more equipment to outfit the new rooms that Eddie and his crew had built during the mild winter. Two of those rooms were occupied now by new mothers. The older manually operated hospital beds made it look like a hospital from 50 years ago, but it was state-of-the-art now. Clay had also come up with industrial sized stainless steel laundry facilities, now all converted to mechanical operation and powered by a small steam engine, and the boiler provided steam to sterilize everything they washed. One of the younger boys from the park came down every Saturday to tend the boiler and operated the laundry for them.

Clay had been busy finding equipment for the new dental clinic down the valley, too. He and Eddie Grimes had built a room addition to the farmhouse where Joceyln worked as a dentist aided by the other women that lived there. Sylvia Collier had gotten some opium poppies to grow finally last year and with the help of her daughter in law, the chemist, they had produced some very acceptable and badly needed anaesthetics and pain medications, much to the relief of her patients.

Rich Dalton had learned from Roscoe Bam that there was a capped natural gas well, drilled some 40 years ago, and located in the hollow behind Jacob Knepp's farm. Rich and Isaac Kelley had been researching all they could learn about how to put that well in service. Jesse Sparks had a friend in the E-town community that had done work on gas wells and offered help. Together they were hatching a plan to tap this well and build a glass making facility. The well head was still in good condition and had valves in place to operate, but the well had been too far away from existing pipelines to commercialize it when it was drilled. It had been left for future reserves along with several others in the surrounding 6 counties.

Marty Edelston assured the men he could design a suitable furnace for them and had Clay searching for materials. A man from the Evansville area who brought his wife to the clinic for treatment had experience doing glassblowing, but had given it up for better paying construction work in the past. Now he planned to move to the valley when they got a furnace and building put together. High quality silica sand for glassmaking was available near Mauckport on the Ohio River, some 40 miles to the south, but there was enough scrap glass around that he thought they could work with it for many years before they would have to start from scratch making new glass.

Andrea Collier, Kevin's wife, was setting up a chemistry lab in an empty home next door to Jim and Sylvia Collier's farm. She kept Clay looking for obscure chemicals and equipment she would need to do analytical chemistry so she could assist Albert Harris' wife, Anita, in compounding standardized herbal extracts. Ignacio assured the women that he could build a tiny press to make pills, having made some dies for that in the past. Andrea had worked closely with Doctor Tony on what he needed for future medical needs and was doing research on how to make the various drugs. She was being paid by the doctor who had more trade goods than he knew what to do with. Nobody understood better how much their community and others depended on Doctor Tony than he did. He was teaching Melanie as fast as he could as his replacement, but he worried over what he did not know of medical specialties and also realized in this less secure new world the risks to human life were many and varied, his life included.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 98

It had been a long journey over 2 difficult winters, but Keith was nearly home. The sight of the old Kennedy bridge across the Ohio river was welcome, indeed. His biggest problem had been finding shoes as he wore them out, since he was a big man and he wore out shoes pretty fast travelling. It was easy enough to find food for the first year, there being leftovers everywhere, and likewise with camping and hiking equipment.

He had given up on driving as being too risky after twice being shot at on the road and hit once in the leg by a mangled bullet that barely made it through his truck door. He had to treat that wound himself and considered himself lucky to find what he needed at pharmacies along the way. The long periods of watching and waiting around cities and small towns had extended his journey time by months, but the risks to travellers were many. He had determined that the plague had burned itself out after almost a year camping in the the mountain hunting retreat, but it took more time to plan a route and find what he needed to start his trip.

Keith heard the trucks coming from far away and dived for cover back into the car he had slept in the night before. From his vantage point in the restaurant parking lot he could see the trucks headed south over the bridge he'd crossed last night. There were 5 big trucks in the convoy, all running slow and keeping an interval between them, clearly with some destination in mind. Once they were gone and the sound had faded, he listened again for half an hour, but heard nothing but nature's sounds. he gathered his pack and the game trailer he pulled and set off northwest again.

That evening he heard the trucks returning back the same highway he was following. He wondered where they were going. Surely, if anyone could have survived this long it would be people in the sort of community where he had grown up. The closer he got to his childhood home, the more he wondered about the fate of his family and friends. If they had not survived, he wanted to be in this area anyway.

He understood it and knew how to live there much better than he did 1,000 miles to the south where he'd been. He longed to see his parents again, but tried hard to keep that from becoming an obsession that was more than likely unrealistic. Still, he knew it was impossible to not hold out hope that they were still alive.

By noon the next day he was 15 miles north of the river and out into farm country again, although now it was overgrown like the rest of the country he had travelled through. He kept to the state highway now, making for easier travel pulling his game cart. He was hauling about 100 pounds of food, water and supplies so he didn't have to stop and scrounge for things so often. The trailer was attached to a military web belt around his waist. That kept his hands free and the quick snap release on the belt meant he could unhook from the cart in an instant and dive for cover if necessary with just his rifle and backpack. He'd had to do that once when a gang of ruffians near a city had attacked him, probably just for what he carried. He'd shot two of them and ran for it leaving his baggage behind. It had taken him a week to replace his stuff, but that was better to leave it than to die so some idiot could steal what he had.

The winter had finally given up and would persecute him no more. There were swelling buds on the trees and lots of wildlife everywhere. He preferred to trap game to eat, but it made for slow going. The noise of even his .22 rifle was enough to draw people from who knew how far away. That evening he set out a series of 6 wire snares and his two steel traps along a small creek where game trails ran to it. In the morning he was rewarded with a fat rabbit in one snare and grilled it on a green stick for breakfast and made some pan bread with corn flour he had pounded out himself with a couple big rocks. Any commercial flour he found now was all past being usable, but there was corn in many granaries along the way, and wheat, too. Keith preferred the corn for more energy and he liked the flavor. He had seasonings and some lard he had made from a wild pig he'd shot. The lard would keep for a long time so he had taken the time to find a big skillet and fry out a lot of it that he poured into a big plastic jar he'd emptied of commercial salad dressing. Wild game had little if any fat, and he needed fat for the energy and the nutrition.

The rabbit was tasty and he liked the corn cakes, too. He treated himself to some dessert, putting a big dollop of strawberry preserves on the last corn cake. The preserves were long out of date and tasted stale, but there was enough sugar in them to make them keep forever, he thought. He dearly hoped his mother had survived, not only because he loved her, but also because she made the best strawberry preserves he'd ever tasted. He cleaned his eating utensils in the creek and dried them hot over his tiny campfire to sterilize them, then got on the road again.

\*\*\*\*\*

The radio spit a noise and Austin Mills' voice said, "We got company coming down the road. One man. Seems like he's just passing through, but why out here? You copy?"

"Copy, Lookout. I'll send some help to come in the trail behind you," Dylan said. He called to Roscoe who relayed the message on another channel to Eddie Grimes who was on reserve duty that day. Eddie took off at a loping run through the trees and over the ridge to the guard lookout position. He remembered that this was the same spot where he'd been caught by Melanie what it seemed like a lifetime ago. It was only about 300 yards from his place, so he got there in just a few minutes. When he came up on the lookout post he slid into place and asked Jack Alexander, "What's up?"

"That guy down there. He stopped to rest for a bit , but he's moving again, staying on the road."

"Okay. You know the drill. Let me get in position and I'll wave at you, then you can call to him."

"Gotcha."

A minute later, Austin called out, "Hello there! You lookin' for somebody, or just passin' through?"

The bearded man looked up in the direction of the voice, not seeing anyone and said, "I came to check on my folks. I grew up here."

After some conversation, the 3 young men walked toward Roscoe Beam's farm. They had radioed ahead that the man was no threat and walked up the lane. Eddie yelled at the house, "ROSCOE! You want to come see this guy?"

Roscoe looked out the window and didn't recognize the man in the faded jacket and floppy hat and beard. There was something familiar about his walk, though. He took his time going down the lane to meet the three young men. When he got within a few steps of them the new man stopped and said, unbelieving, "DAD?"

Roscoe's heart fluttered and he couldn't move a step. He looked hard at the face and said, "KEITH?"

The grin was unmistakable. The two men grabbed each other in a bear hug and cried for a long time.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter 99

"No, sis didn't make it," Keith said. "She had just called me from the hospital where she worked right before Atlanta burned. There was nothing left of the hospital. I was up in the mountains at a hunting lodge my friend's dad owned, 200 miles north. He was in town getting supplies and never made it back. I had a battery powered TV and radio and figured out after a week that I had better stay put. I was there for almost a year before I dared to leave. This guy's dad had a lot of freeze dried food and stuff stashed up there. It was a retreat for his family and had all the comforts of home, but they never got there."

Marta's eyes were still dripping tears. She couldn't speak as she bit her lip, but just sat beside her son and hugged him tightly.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Doc, I'd like to introduce my son, Doctor Keith Beam," Roscoe said. "I was hoping you could find a place for him to work here."

Anthony gaped and stared at the young man. "He's a DOCTOR?"

"That's right sir. Served my residency in Atlanta. I specialized in internal medicine and surgery at the hospital there in the critical care unit. Call me Keith."

The men shook hands and the smile on Tony's face was exuberant. "This is so great! We need you so badly! Come, sit down. This is my wife and nurse, Michelle, and this is our P. A., Melanie Draper. You are SO welcome here!"

\*\*\*\*\*

As years passed and the community grew, the tiny school slowly turned into a small town college, teaching medicine, chemistry, physics, botany and civil engineering. A productive pharmaceutical facility produced medicines, mostly plant based, and the small clinic grew to be a hospital, bringing much trade and more residents to the community. A government consisting of 5 county councilmen provided a framework for the future. There were slow advances toward some use of natural gas and oil, but would continue to work on power from water, steam, and animals as the country began to slowly lift itself out of what had come very close to being a new dark age.

\*\*\*\*\*

THE END