



The Compound

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Chapter 1

The man was neither young nor old when the collapse happened. If a collapse is the correct word. Collapse means falls down or falls apart and that did happen but it was much worse than that. There was all the violence and that was the worst.

It took quite some time but the man finally made it back to the small town where he grew up. He was not surprised to find the place deserted and it looked like while people were still in residence there had been a whole lot of violence here too.

As long as the man was here he thoroughly searched all the standing buildings for any and all survival supplies. He knew that it had almost for sure been searched before but that fact did not deter him at all. And by the time he finished he had quite a load with what he had brought and the stuff he had found. Actually like he expected there were way more useful items left here than he could possibly take with him.

While he was searching, the tiny town received the first snow of the season. He was prepared and snow meant little to him with the only real downside being that even he could not help but leave tracks in the new-fallen snow. When done in the little town he left to his next destination.

He was on his way to a very small homestead that might still have someone he knew living there. The place had a working windmill for water and that was both rare and vital in this new world of chaos where now everyone lived.

It was a good day's travel now when such travel had to be done on foot. There was still some light when he saw the once little homestead in the distance. There had been

a whole lot of building there recently it appeared. The man backed off and used the available light to find a decent campsite about a half-mile from the homestead. He had decided to check it out before just leaving the area.

After camp was set up and he had his meager supper, he left now under the cover of darkness to check out what he had seen in the distance.

Approaching what could only be called a compound was no problem even though the half-moon made a lot of light reflecting off the fresh snow. There were dense trees up very close to the compound walls. There were two raised observation towers but they were located very close to each other instead of on opposite sides of compound. The man had no problem leaving the cover of the dense woods on the off-side of the compound from the towers and just walked directly to the compound wall.

There were human tracks everywhere in the snow so none inside would notice his tracks among all the others. The man walked alongside the wall constantly stopping to look through the many holes in the wall to see what was inside the compound. It appeared to be a random collection of poorly made and hastily constructed shacks with many containing smoking stovepipes.

Advancing he stopped when he came in view of the watchtower near him. The wall gave him good concealment to get very close to the tower. Actually, he was sure he could have walked under the tower without being spotted. He just watched and listened and was close enough to hear the snores from the guard posted up in the tower.

The man backtracked all the way back to where he started and then continued his inspection of the ramshackle wall. He just looked inside again as he made his way around the outside of the wall. The horses knew he was there but did not startle at his presence. Apparently they

were used to people coming and going on the outside of the poor wall.

The man realized the reason for all the tracks when he saw a woman leave compound through a small make-shift door between the watchtowers. At first, he was confused about why a lone woman would leave the compound at night then realized he had seen no outhouses located inside. Apparently everyone just left the compound whenever the need struck and went out alone whether it was day or night.

The man moved to a spot next to the woods where the woman entered. He just stood and waited there for the woman's return. When he heard the woman coming back it was no trouble at all to get behind her and grab her from behind with his hand clamped solidly over her mouth to stifle any noise she might make.

The woman hardly even put up a fight and the man felt how light-weight she was as he dragged her away. About a quarter-mile from the compound he released the woman then quickly grabbed her again when she started to fall. She made no noise and did not even squirm this time when he caught her. She was passed out.

He easily carried the skinny woman back to his camp. On the trip there the woman never came too and when he arrived he carried her into his tent only removing her shoes before he put her inside his sleeping bag. For himself, he used all three of his spare blankets and listened to her breathe as he went to sleep.

Chapter 2

Waking early he listened and could hear the woman's steady even breathing. He got up and after taking care of some personal business he started making a hot breakfast, mainly for the woman's benefit. When the food was almost ready he went inside the tent and woke the woman. She recoiled when she remembered what had transpired last night but the man just stepped back.

"I have no interest in hurting you. I would have never brought you here because I only wanted to ask you a few questions but you fainted so that is why you are here now. I have breakfast ready and your shoes are next to you. Please put your shoes on and come out for the meal."

Not waiting for any answer the man left the tent and returned to check the breakfast. It was just minutes later when the woman exited the tent. The man stood from the log where he had been seated and stepped away from that spot. He then pointed to his seat and spoke.

"Please have a seat and I will give you some breakfast. It's just oatmeal but I did cut up some dried apples to add to it."

Still not speaking the woman sat down in the man's just vacated spot. The man handed her the hot oatmeal complete with a spoon and then stepped well back again. He took the smaller portion of the oatmeal remaining in the small cooking pot for himself. Even though she had a much larger portion the woman finished way before the man. When they were both done they stared at each other for several moments. Then the man spoke.

"Sally Anderson?"

Startled the woman looked again at the man.

"How did you know my name?"

"We grew up together. I guess with a beard I likely look much different. I'm Ben Spencer."

"Ben? Is it really you?"

"Yes. Sorry I did not recognize you last night. Can you tell me what is with that compound where you are staying?"

"After the collapse, things kept getting worse and worse. Many people left our little town and none returned. Then one did come back and it was with very bad news. There was apparently a fair-sized group of raiders approaching and he had seen what they did to the people in the next town. He said we stood no chance if we stayed and tried to fight them.

We had a town meeting with everyone still in the town at the community center. Widow Jenkins happened to be in town and she said we could all come to her place. We were all welcome to camp there and she said she had plenty of clean water because of the windmill. For food she said we would have to bring our own.

There was little fuel left in town and many used the school bus for transportation to Jenkins' place. Some others drove their own vehicles. A trailer was pulled behind the school bus with all the building supplies that could be grabbed quickly. Over the next week or so shanties were built and then a wall was put up later to surround the area to keep us safer.

No one had hardly any food even before we made the move. A few people had horses and brought those with them. Widow Jenkins still had one horse at home and so she had a little hay on hand for it. With the additional horses that hay is about gone now along with what food was brought with everyone I think. We had all been on a starvation diet before even leaving town. That's about it I guess.

"What are you going to do now?"

"Well, first I will take you back to the compound. Then I'll probably just leave."

"Take me with you!"

"You would not like traveling now. Things are not very nice."

"I think everyone in the compound is going to die anyway."

"How come you are not eating the horses?"

"You can eat a horse?"

"Yes, you can eat a horse. You can eat most any animal. Do they only have the horses in the compound at night and let them graze outside during the day?"

"No, they just feed them hay and never let them outside the walls."

"There are deer in the woods have people been hunting them?"

"Many do have guns but I have not heard of any going hunting. The guns are just to protect the people there."

"I thought I saw some new temporary power lines in your camp. Do you run a generator?"

"There is one there that they did use mainly for running power tools to build the shanties. I have not heard it run for quite a while now."

"I did not see any outhouses. Why weren't any built?"

"By the time the shanty building was done everyone was used to using the woods I guess."

"There is a lake less than a mile away. How often do people go fishing there?"

"I have never heard of anyone fishing. We are not very good at taking care of ourselves are we?"

"Everyone has different abilities. It does appear that some of those abilities are not found within your group."

"If you won't take me with you, will you help us?"

"Maybe I could stay for a bit and give you all some pointers."

I packed up camp then and we walked together back to the compound. We walked right up to the doorway and no one challenged us. We went inside and a couple said hi to Sally but no one said anything about her being gone overnight or who was the strange man with her.

At my request, we made a quick walk around the inside of the compound. It was so small that it only took a few minutes. I did ask Sally a few questions about things I saw inside. Then we went to the leader's shanty. Sally went inside after she knocked and I stayed outside. A couple minutes later she came out and asked me to follow her back inside.

I understood a lot more when I recognized their leader. I remembered him from high school. He had been somewhat of a bully and a blowhard.

"Sally says you can maybe help us. I'm Jack Harrison, the mayor here."

"I remember you. I'm Ben Spencer."

"Ben Spencer. It's been a long time. So what can you help us with? I'm not sure we could take in any more people at this time."

"I have no interest in staying here. I can just give you a few pointers that might prove helpful to the group. Maybe if you had a get together I could address your group before I leave."

"Sure. Everyone would be happy to see a new face anyway. How about a couple of hours from now? It will be as warm as it is going to get and we have to meet outside because the houses are all too small for everyone to be in at the same time."

"That would be fine. I'll just wander around a bit until then."

While I was talking to him he had looked repeatedly at my rifle that was slung on my shoulder. I was happy to

exit his house because I had left my supplies outside and I just was not a very trusting person. But when I went out my stuff had not been disturbed. I walked around a little more and Sally came with me. She did introduce me to several other people and she told them there would be a meeting later.

I could see there was no kind of organization to anything inside the compound. I asked Sally some more questions as we walked. She said no one had any kind of jobs or positions other than the Mayor. The sentries were all volunteers and she did not think they had any kind of set schedules. She did say they had never been attacked or even had anyone stop here since they came.

We were still just talking when we heard a chime. It sounded like an old dinner bell maybe. Sally said that was their call for a meeting so I followed her to their meeting spot that was next to one of the watchtowers and close to the horse corral.

The Mayor was standing on a heavy wood box so he could be above the crowd. I did a quick headcount and there were twenty-six people total besides me. Sally did a quick look around and said she thought everyone was there. I asked about Mrs. Jenkins but Sally said she never came to any meetings.

The Mayor started talking, mainly just to hear himself talk I thought. After several minutes he said my name and asked me to come up and say my piece. So that is exactly what I did.

Chapter 3

“I am an outsider and will be leaving as soon as I am done talking. I grew up in the town in which you left to come here. Several of you might remember me. Anyway I noticed a few things about your little compound here and I thought I might pass along a few suggestions to all of you that might be improvements.

You are not safe behind these walls. I had no idea who was here and I came here last night. I walked around your compound and could have easily come in and killed most of you in your sleep. I did kidnap one of your women and carried her back to my camp and no one missed her.

We both walked inside your compound this morning and no one challenged us even though I was a stranger. The walls should have been much larger to give you way more space inside.”

I was interrupted then by a shout from the crowd.

“We ran completely out of building materials.”

“No, you didn’t. That school bus should have been stripped of the roof and sides. Then it should have been turned on its side and used for part of your wall. The roof section would have made another section of wall. The hood and sides could have made more of the wall. The seats should have been stripped out and used for seating or insulation or a few joined to make beds.

There are several cars here and again they should have been stripped and the chassis, hoods, and roofs used to increase the wall. Again the seats could have been used just like the bus seats.

Every day those horses should be taken outside and allowed to graze in this area while being watched over by one or two people. The horses should then be returned

and locked in every night. Those horses contain a huge amount of meat. That meat could be harvested and some eaten fresh and some jerked over a fire so it would keep awhile. I can see that all of you are skinny. A dozen horses is a lot of meat. I would save a couple horses if possible for use and more would be better but obviously all of you are going to die if you do not get food.

Why are hunters not sent out every day to hunt the surrounding area for wild game? There is a lot of meat-on-the-hoof in the area. You should be taking advantage of that meat.

I'm sure many of you know about the lake that is only about a mile away. People could fish that lake every couple of days to bring back even more meat. The fish would also supply each of you with needed fats.

Even though it is winter there are still edibles in the woods here. At least pine needles could be gathered for tea that would supply vitamin C that would help prevent scurvy. Every one of you needs that vitamin or you will suffer for it. Rose hips could also be gathered even now and supply more vitamin C.

One of those watchtowers should be moved to the opposite side of your compound. Also, they should be set inside the walls and not outside. Last night I could have easily climbed up into those towers and silently killed the sleeping guard in each without even getting inside your wall.

I could have come back here this morning and staying inside the woods out of sight, I could have shot through your walls and the bullets would have passed through the walls and through one or more of your shanties killing anyone those bullets hit. The walls only really give you a false sense of security and serve little real purpose.

I have seen no dogs and cats here so I assume those were already eaten. I sure hope you did not just turn them loose to fend for themselves. Those dogs and cats

would be eating many of the same game birds and animals that you could be eating. Things like rabbits, squirrels, game birds, and many of the larger songbirds. You should be sourcing every living bird and animal for food for each of you.

Apparently, you are burning a lot of wood. That should be obtained by cutting all the closer trees down around here to give you a much longer field-of-fire. Any attack would then be seen earlier and they would have to cross a much larger open space to attack you.

Your hunters that are out every day should always be watching for other people or sign that others are in the area. Not everyone would be your enemy but it would sure be best if you knew someone was in the area before they knew you were all here.

Any outsiders should be greeted without hostility but with a large measure of caution.

There are countless items left in town that would be immensely valuable to you if you are planning to remain here. A couple of men should be dispatched back to town to do an intense search for those items. Now with some snow on the ground a couple of car hoods would make excellent sleds to bring those items back here. No sense in taking any hoods from here when there are many sitting back in town. You could likely make several trips returning with full loads from town. A horse could be used to haul the sleds back or two sleds hooked one behind the other for an even larger load in one trip.

I assume you have all brought garden seeds so you can plant a huge garden or several gardens in spring. You also brought all the garden tools you would need too, right? And since you have been here you have looked over the windmill piping and have all the required pipes, fittings, and hoses to water your gardens in the spring, correct? The horse manure should be saved so that it can be incorporated into your garden plots too.

Why are there no outhouses here? I would think it should be a priority to dig and build at least two outhouses. I can still hardly believe you have not done so yet.

These are all just simple things that I happened to notice in the few hours that I have been here. Use some of my suggestions if you wish, or not. I will now be leaving and I wish you all the best.

Goodbye.”

I turned to leave and there was a lot of talking among the people. Some of it was quite loud. With all the talking we did since this morning when we got up, Sally has convinced me to allow her to come with me. I told her the truth that times on the road would be hard but she is determined to come with me. So be it. She is kind of nice to look at anyway.

She had left the group when I started talking. I see she is back now with a pack on her back. She seems ready and we waste no time leaving.