

# AR SURVIVAL DUDE



by: Culex Pipiens

# **AR Survival Dude**

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AR Survival Dude is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to real people or events is purely coincidental. Names, characters, places and incidents portrayed in this story are imagined or used fictitiously.

## **Part I**

*Yeah, I agree. Gold and silver have to be part of your preps. You can't eat it but when the SHTF you'll be able to preserve your wealth since the dollar will be worthless. Worst case you can always find a sucker to trade tangible goods for it.*

*-ARSurvivalDude*

Click and posted. “Hmm, what else looks good?” thought Dave. He scanned new topics on the survival forum, one of many he frequented, and saw an interesting posting from a new member promoting a different site called [www.militarysurvivalforum.com](http://www.militarysurvivalforum.com). It mentioned there are many members already, all knowledgeable in firearms, plus most are ex military and they're sharing some good survival tactics and techniques.

Dave opened a new window on his browser and spent at least a few hours going through the various topics on the site. He was quite impressed and picked up on the extensive knowledge since he too was adept at thinking on his feet, surviving off the land and could see the recommendations were accurate and spot on. The government/politics and religious forums along with one called the PrivateRoom were off limits to him unless he registered. So he did.

*Name: “John Doe”*

*Address: “Somewhere in the US”*

Dave continued filling out the required fields knowing that anyone with half a brain would put in bogus information as he was doing. Finally he got to his screen name and used the same one he used everywhere else. ARSurvivalDude. It wasn't too creative but he had a thing for the AR rifle so it fit him.

*Error: Screen name already in use. Please select a different one.*

What?!? Who's using my name? Aw, this sucks, he thought. Well, screw this. He was about to close the window but decided to bookmark it first so he could find it again and read more. He didn't need to sign up as he didn't really care about the religious or political stuff. Probably just a bunch of people pontificating on how they would fix the

government and more “vote the bums” out like everyone else says but seems to rarely do.

Looking at the clock Dave realized how late it was, shutdown and got ready for bed. He brushed his teeth, topped off the dog’s food and water dishes and crawled into bed next to Karen. He snuggled up hoping for more but realized she was already asleep. He turned over and soon fell asleep too.

The next morning the alarm went off waking Dave from a strange dream of black helicopters and gas masks. I really have to stop surfing all that apocalyptic fiction and SHTF advice right before I go to sleep, thought Dave. He dragged himself out of bed threw on some smelly sweats laying in the corner and leashed up Max. “Come on boy, time for our workout.” Dave had put in his time in the army. He was a pretty good shot and even did a short stint in special forces. They tried to talk him into re-upping but the military just wasn't in his long term plans. Even though it had been six years now that he was out, he still did his daily physical training including a five mile run. Max did his business while Dave warmed up and then they ran together for the five miles.

Arriving back home Dave noticed a white van parked down the block. Looks like the Anderson's were finally getting cable installed he thought. They'd been bugging Dave for months about cable or DSL or wireless or... Dave finally told them just go with cable and to shut them up he even offered to setup their computers once the cable was installed. “Great, me and my big mouth. Guess I know what I'm going to be stuck doing tonight,” he said to Max. Of course Max didn't really care and wandered off to water another tree.

He went in, took a shower and got dressed for work. Khaki's and a polo shirt, nothing fancy, then again the customers were paying for what he knew, not what he wore. Karen was in the shower when Dave was ready to leave. He popped his head in, gave a quick whistle, which got a wash cloth thrown at him. They exchanged ‘I love you’s and goodbyes and he headed out the door, grabbing his emergency bag on the way out the door.

It was nothing fancy, just a backpack with three days of MREs, an assortment of Cliff bars, medical gear, water, a few gold and silver coins, misc fire making tools and other small survival gear, including a .22LR pistol with a couple small boxes of ammo buried in the bottom. It wasn't illegal to carry his firearm this way, but if someone had

noticed it in his bag it would have made for an uncomfortable situation. He figured it was easier to just keep it out of sight.

Hopping into his F150 he tossed the bag behind the seats, started it up and plugged in his MP3 player with the latest survival related pod casts. He keyed up a new episode of 'We're Alive', a fictional zombie apocalypse story and started up the truck. He pulled out and headed for the expressway into the city. Living in a rural environment would really suit him, but as long as he and Karen had jobs in the city it made sense to live in the suburbs. Maybe one day they'd save enough to buy a bug out location or at least the land for one.

Traffic seemed lighter today than normal. Usually the first twenty minutes were all stop and go, but today he was holding a steady 30mph. He noticed a dark SUV weaving a bit in the lane next to him and slightly forward of him. It must be another idiot talking or texting while driving he thought. Suddenly the SUV swerved into his lane just barely clipping the front bumper.

"Son of a Bitch", Dave yelled... along with many more things relating to the driver, their lineage, IQ and sexual activity preferences. As he calmed down a bit he saw the idiot was pulling over and not fleeing. He too signaled and followed the SUV over to the shoulder. As soon as he was stopped he put the truck in park and called 911. Since there were no injuries they said they'd just send a car but it might be awhile. He also placed a quick call to his boss telling him he'd be late and why. He hung up and got out to check the damage.

As he was looking at his bumper and seeing the new dent he heard the door of the SUV. Turning around a guy in a dark suit wearing mirrored shades was coming towards him. "Dave Walker?"

"Yeah", answered Dave. Wait, how did he know my name, thought Dave? As he was about to ask everything suddenly went dark and got stuffy. "Ughgh!!", Dave tried to yell but a dark hood was over his head and a hand was over his mouth. Someone else had his arms pinned and he felt a prick in his arm. Within seconds everything went dark and Dave was limp. The guy in the dark suit turned around, flashed a badge at the motorists passing by who had stopped to watch. They quickly looked forward and drove on. Had anyone stuck around to watch they would have seen the unmarked and unremarkable white van pull up behind the truck and Dave's limp body dragged to the

side door and pretty much tossed in there.

If someone had been really interested and looked in the van they would have seen Dave's wrists cuffed and then shackled to a ring bolted to the floor of the van along with two guys, dressed all in black and heavily armed, both pointing their guns at Dave. The van quickly disappeared into traffic and after one more guy got out of the SUV it followed van into traffic. The last suit got into the truck, adjusted the mirrors, disconnected the iPod, changed the radio station and drove off merging into traffic.

Cold. Shivering cold.

Darkness.

Cold and thirsty.

Darkness.

Cold, thirsty and I really have to go to the bathroom.

Distant voices.

Slowly Dave was coming to. As awareness returned and he pieced together the last moments he remembered the hood and the needle. Now he felt what seemed to be cold steel under him. As he tried to rollover he found his wrists, ankles and neck were tightly bound to the metal with what felt like leather straps. He also could tell that the hood was still on his head.

The voices stopped and he heard booted footsteps approaching. It sounded as if they had stopped right next to him. A click followed by a warm feeling spreading over his exposed skin. Wait, was he naked? It felt like he was.

The hood was unceremoniously ripped off and he saw a blinding light shining on him.

“Dave Walker.” It wasn't a question. It was a statement.

“You will tell us what you know,” this too was a statement, no, it sounded like a demand.

“NOW!”

“I..i....,” Dave tried to clear his parched throat, “I don't know what you are talking about.”

“Wrong answer,” said one of the voices. A shadowy figure came forward. Dave could barely make out that he was dressed all in black including a ski mask. The figure's arm swung around from behind his back and slammed a baton into Dave's gut.

Dave gasped for breath. The pain was intense but finally he managed to get his lungs working again and sucked in the precious oxygen before blacking out.

“Once more, tell us what you know.”

“About what? I don't know what you are talking about,” he managed to gasp out.

“Wrong answer.”

Dave tensed his abdominal muscles in anticipation of the hit. The same figure again slammed him in the gut but did not get the same reaction from Dave. The shadowy figure gently set the baton on Dave's stomach and reached around with his other hand jamming a stun gun into Dave's side and let him have a full ten second ride.

As the muscle control finally returned Dave realized that his early bathroom need was no longer a problem.

“He pissed himself,” said another voice.

“Clean him up,” commanded the first voice.

The shadowy figure walked away and Dave heard a squeaky-squeaky-squeaky sound, shortly followed by a blast of freezing water. He was thoroughly hosed off for what seemed like minutes and when the water stopped he lay there shivering

uncontrollably.

“We'll leave you to think about your future answers and actions.”

The blinding, but at least warm, light was turned off and Dave was left in the dark. He had no idea how long he lay there as he drifted in and out of consciousness and had nothing with which to gauge the passage of time.

Eventually he heard a clang and voices once more approaching the table he now knew he was strapped to. The light snapped on.

“Dave Walker.”

“You will tell us the plan.”

Dave feigned unconsciousness hoping they would go away. FIRE!! His left foot felt as if it was on fire and his body tensed up again. Finally the burning stopped when the stun gun was removed from his foot.

“Good, you are awake now.”

“You will tell us the plan.”

“I don't know about any plan. Who's in charge? I want to talk to my lawyer.”

“Wrong answer.”

The hood was thrown over his face followed by a stream of water.

I'm being water boarded! The thought was shrieking through his head as he tried, to no avail, to breathe. He was drowning. Just before he passed out he thought of his wife and swore if he lived and found out these bastards had laid a finger on her he'd kill them all.

Hours later, or was it minutes? Or days? Dave woke up to a click and the blinding light. A figure approached the table.



“Dave, I'm not supposed to be here. If they catch me it'll be really bad for both of us. Geez, you look horrible. Here, drink a little. It's got some electrolytes in it. A bottle was held near his head and a straw was put in his mouth. He tentatively took a little suck and it tasted like Gatorade. Dave figured they weren't going to poison him as they could and have done much worse already. He started sucking as fast as he could.

“Whoa...,” said the voice as the straw was pulled away. “Not too fast or you'll just puke it all up.”

The straw was put back and Dave slowly sipped this time.

“You know, if you just tell them about the plan they'll go easy on you.”

“But I don't know what they're asking about. Really, I don't,” Dave said, almost whining now.

“Look they know you go by the handle ARSurvivalDude and they've seen your comments on [www.militarysurvivalforum.com](http://www.militarysurvivalforum.com) along with a number of other forums. They know you and the rest of your group are planning a multiple strike to take out many of the key people in our government. If you tell them the details they'll go easy on you. Just tell them what the plan is, who the targets are and the names of the rest of your terrorist group, although I'm sure you all refer to it as a constitutional militia.”

“No, no, no, you got it all wrong.”

“No, Dave, they have the logs. They traced your cable modem IP and MAC address to [www.militarysurvivalforum.com](http://www.militarysurvivalforum.com) and they found the log files on your home and office systems that link you to all of the other web sites. I'm trying to help. Make it easy on yourself. Just tell them.”

Voices were heard in the distance getting closer and the straw was quickly pulled from his mouth.

“Quick, they're coming back. Just tell me something and I'll try to get them to go easy on you. Anything.”

“I can't tell you something. I don't know anything about this. You got it all

wrong!” shouted Dave.

The voices stopped. He heard the person near him move and speak again. “You heard?”

“Yes said another voice from across the room.”

“Well I gave him a chance at the easy way. Do what you must,” said the voice retreating as the owner of the voice walked away.

“Dave Walker”

“Tell us the plan.”

Realizing he just fell for good cop, bad cop, Dave tried to plead his way out. “I don't know. I'm not the guy you're looking for. I do go by ARSurvivalDude on some forums but I just stumbled across that military forum for the first time last night. Or was it? What day is it?”

“Wrong answer.”

Uugggghhh! Grunted Dave as the baton hit him in the gut again.

“Tell us the plan.”

After Dave finally got his breath back he tried again. “Really, I've been to the other forums but I went to that military one for the first time, never posted and I've never said anything about shooting the president.”

A long quiet pause.

“Neither did we Dave. Tell us the plan,” said another voice.

Dave, remembered the voice had said ‘key people in the government’ and had just assumed he meant the president, realized he was really in trouble now.

After a silent pause, “Wrong answer.”

He tensed up expecting the blow to his gut, instead it slammed into his thigh yielding an instant muscle cramp.

“Tell us about the plan.”

“Screw you,” said Dave finally realizing he would probably die here.

“Wrong answer.”

The baton slammed his rib cage and everyone heard the crack as a rib, at the very least, fractured.

“Tell us about the plan.”

“Tell us about the plan.”

“Dave Walker.”

“Tell us about the plan.”

“I .....,” Dave, between labored gasps, tried to say, “...know..... nothing.”

“Wrong answer.”

He heard footsteps recede and then return. Boiling water was poured on his crotch.

Dave writhed in pain and screamed, which irritated his cracked rib and caused further screams of pain.

“Oh shut him up,” said the second voice.

The shadowy figure in the ski mask appeared and pulled out a roll of duct tape. A piece was put over his mouth reducing his screams to muffled moans and eventually his brain adjusted to the pain as being a part of him now and he quieted down.

“Tell us about the plan.”

Dave's mind raced. How could he talk. He knew nothing and his mouth was taped shut. What did they want? Why were they doing this to him? The intense pain in his leg, crotch and side wasn't helping his thoughts.

“Nod yes if you are ready to tell us about the plan.”

He had no idea what to do. Should he stick to his story, it was the truth after all? Or should he just make something up? Would they know. If they really knew then why would they be doing this. Yeah. He could just lie and then later when they let him go he could talk to a lawyer and sue the bastards. Jake nodded.

“Correct answer.”

The tape was ripped from his mouth.

“Tell us about the plan.”

Dave started, slowly and with a gasp of pain as he took each breath. “We're sick of the direction this government is going. Me, SpiderGuy, SniperChick, GeneralHawkstone and LadyJaybird are planning to....”

“Wrong answer.”

This time not only was a new piece of tape put over his mouth but the hood was placed on his face. For several hours he was waterboarded, beaten, shocked, burned, and endured countless other tortures. Even unconsciousness was no relief as they used ammonia capsules to immediately wake him back up. No more questions. No voices. Just the physical torture. The mental torture was even worse as the hood was left over his face so he couldn't see what was going to happen next, nor could he see where. A sharp strike to his arm might be followed by a toenail being pulled out. He just had no idea when, what or where the next attack would occur.

Finally he heard a voice again.

“Dave Walker”

Followed by the expected

“Tell us about the plan.”

The hood and tape were removed and Dave resigned himself to death and mentally started to make peace per his beliefs. Out loud he started to pray.

“Wrong answer.”

He was hosed down for a good 5 minutes again and then the light was turned off and the people left.

The next few days... or was it hours? Or weeks? Dave had no idea. He just knew that he was getting weaker and weaker. If it wasn't for the occasional hosing and waterboarding he would have probably died of dehydration already but lack of food was really starting to show. He did have a few extra pounds to begin with but wasn't obese and now he was definitely thin.

One day the voices sounded in the distance, like they had so many other times. The light came on and the figures approached.

“Dave Walker”

“Tell us about the plan”

As he had many times recently he just lay there silently awaiting the latest torture they wanted to inflict on him while on the inside he was praying for release.

“Wrong answer.”

A large weight was slammed down on his abdomen. This feels new, thought Dave through the pain. While the strap on his neck prevented him from lifting his head he could at least peer down his nose and thought the item sitting on him looked an awful lot like his backpack.

The dark cloaked figure in the room laid Dave's iPod on his chest and another

voice read off all of the various survival and gun pod casts he had on there. The inflection of the reading was accusatory as if simply listening to a pod cast that reviews new guns and talks about gun safety was somehow evil and a threat. When the reading was finished the first item was taken out of the pack and placed on his chest next to the iPod. Again the details of that item were stated. This proceed through the harmless items, like the MREs and the water bottles but also with other items like his multi tool, knives, lighter, vaseline impregnated cotton balls. Each one was essentially inventoried but also presented as if it was a terrorist weapon.

“..... 5 cotton balls coated with combustible jellylike substance. Useful for arson attacks, wiping on string to make a fuse and stuffing in bottles to create Molotov cocktails. One pack of strike anywhere matches, shaving off the head produces a gun powder type of....”

Dave drifted in and out as they continued knowing this was all circumstantial and fabricated BS and that he would die knowing that he did nothing wrong.

“One Walter P22 semi auto firearm, 3 magazines and 200 rounds of 22lr ammunition. Used for assassination, killing police and government employees and sniper operations against politicians.”

If he hadn't been in so much pain and so weak Dave would have laughed at the thought of using a 22 pistol for sniping. He wanted to yell at them, to somehow get back at and punish these people but he still had no idea who these people even were.

They tossed the empty bag away but left the contents laying on top of him. Finally they placed his wallet on his chest.

“Dave Walker”

“Tell us the plan.”

Silence

“Wrong answer.”

They picked up the wallet and went through it item by item. Drivers license #,

followed by his entire driving history. Every accident. Every ticket. Visa card and his entire credit history including major credit card purchases over the years. Medical card, fire arm owners card and on and on.

Finally they took the last item out of it. "Picture of Karen Walker. Maiden name, Smithson, twenty seven. Dyed blonde hair, light brown natural color. Brown eyes." he continued listing her clothing sizes, childhood history, work place, hobbies and activities. As the voice ended the man holding the picture placed it down on Dave's hand as the rest of him was covered with the GHB contents.

"Dave Walker"

"Tell us the plan."

Silence

"Or perhaps we should find Karen and ask her."

This time they got a response. Dave cursed them with every word in the book and a few that weren't. He pleaded with them that they had the wrong guy. That he knew nothing. He cried. He begged. When he finally ran out of things to say and was quiet he heard.

"Wrong answer."

Moments later he got another hosing with freezing water. The items stacked all over him went flying from the powerful blasts of water. The water ended, the light went off and the voices retreated. For the first time in awhile Dave was scared again. Not for himself but for Karen. As the tears flowed the exhaustion overtook him and he drifted into unconsciousness again.

Dave came to and thought about the threat they made to go after his wife. He meant every word of his threat to kill them all if they touched her, he just had no idea how to carry out the threat. He tested his restraints once again. They were made of a thick leather and he had no way to reach the buckles. Flexing his hands and arms the little bit that he could his hand bumped into something hard and metal. Dave froze. If it was what he hoped the last thing he wanted to do was knock it off the table. Very

carefully he felt with his fingers and was able to get a grip on his multi tool.

Working slowly and carefully he, with one hand, managed to get it open and finally get a knife blade out. Ever so gently he worked on his restraints. He knew the knife was very sharp and one slip could easily cut his wrist. In his weakened state he didn't think he could survive a substantial blood loss. Slowly he cut and cut. Once he thought he heard voices but as quickly they faded away. He continued cutting and could feel the leather was nearly cut through. Voices again! Not certain he could cut the rest of the restraints and be in any condition to fight he folded the knife up and pushed it under his thigh out of sight.

The voices came close, in fact they sounded like they were right outside his room, but then slowly went away as if they had simply walked passed. He got out his knife and finished cutting the restraint. Next he reached over and worked the other wrist free. Having full movement made it go quicker. Reaching up he worked on the neck strap. Again he had to be careful as a slice to the neck could have ended things quite quickly too. With his head finally free he was able to sit up so he could reach his ankle restraints.

Big mistake. Even in total darkness the room started spinning and he nearly blacked out. When his senses returned he realized just how weak he was and slowly this time he went to work on his ankle restraints. Minutes later both were cut and he was free! Well, free from the table at least. He swung his feet around so he was sitting up with his legs dangling. Tentatively he slid down until his feet touched the floor. He pushed off the table and collapsed. The weeks, or was it months or just days, had taken their toll. His muscle tone was gone from lying in one position for so long. Staying on the floor he flexed each limb and each muscle trying to massage some life back into them.

Dave was able to barely crawl along the floor and almost immediately came in contact with something. It was a box of ammo. Dave came to the conclusion that all of his GHB contents were probably still here scattered on the floor. Crawling around as fast as his weakened condition allowed, and still in the dark he found the bag and many of the items including his other knives, P22, the second box of ammo, all the magazines and most of the other supplies. A few were wet and pretty much useless now but the rest were still usable. He also found most of wallet's contents and the remainder of the roll of duct tape from their earlier attempts at silencing him.



His mind was still semi shut down from the experience making it difficult to remember if he had collected everything, in addition he was doing it in the dark so it was all by feel. He did find his flashlight but was worried that the light might give him away. Opening one of his MREs he ate it and part of a second one too, being careful to pace himself and not wolf them down. He followed them with two of his bottles of water. The food hitting his system made him feel sick but he kept it down knowing he needed the energy.

Taking the duct tape he wrapped his side as best he could as the fractured rib was still very painful. He didn't know if that meant he had just been here a short time or if it still really hurt due to the repeated torture preventing it from healing properly.

All three magazines were loaded and the P22 never left his hand. Being naked made it difficult, well, make that impossible, to put the magazine in a pocket or tuck the gun in a belt so he just clutched it synonymous to a drowning man grabbing a life preserver.

He finally decided the risk of a quick look around with the light was critical to escaping. Turning the flashlight on, he was happy to see that waterproof claim was true and it survived the hosing, he quickly shown it around the room. For the first time he saw it was about 40 x 40 with a 20 foot ceiling. The walls were cinder block and the ceiling was open truss metal work supporting corrugated metal panels. The floor had a drain and a hose was loosely coiled up on a reel against one wall. Otherwise the room was devoid of furnishings not counting the metal table he just escaped from. Hanging down from the trusses was a single large bulb and shade. No windows and two doors. One that was nondescript and one that had the emergency bar and the statement that the alarm would sound if pushed. Just like what he had seen in dozens if not hundreds of businesses.

All this time Dave thought he was at some secret government facility but perhaps his assumption was wrong. Could he just be in an industrial or even commercial space? Would the alarm go off? Would he be able to escape or would he be recaptured? Maybe this was just a setup so they could shoot him as he ran out... they were probably just waiting for him outside the door.

“No, no, NO! I've got to keep my wits. Stop second guessing. You know how to survive. These bastards have been trying to break me. Get me to admit to something I

don't even know about. I've got to keep thinking straight. Got to get to Karen. Got to get free," Dave said to himself. He continued quietly to himself, "Self check. I've got my bag. I'm armed. Although I'm naked too. And I'm wrapped in duct tape. Yeah, this wouldn't look good. A naked guy wrapped in tape running down the street brandishing a weapon."

He crawled back over to the table and used it to help stand up. This time he was able to remain standing. His muscles still felt atrophied but the food and water had helped a lot. He did a number of slow stumbling laps around the table using it for support until he felt confident enough to try letting go and heading for a wall. He made it although knew he wouldn't win any races.

Time to get out. He went over to the door with the alarm bar. It was a simple circuit. Open the door and the magnetic sensors separate and the alarm goes off. Examining the arm and box it connected to he saw some screws and used his multi tool to remove them. Sliding the metal cover off, the simple circuitry, small backup battery and a speaker were all on display. Switching to the pliers with wire cutter part of his multi tool he snipped the wires to the speaker. For extra measure he pulled the battery out too. Packing his tool away and putting on his backpack he grabbed the magazines in one hand and his P22 in the other.

Ever so slowly he pushed the bar and the door opened without any audible sirens or alarms. It was dark out and it was indeed the outside. Dave slipped through and gently closed the door behind him. He was in what appeared to be an industrial park. Across the way about 30 feet was another building. Looking left and right he saw no one and decided on left. As he reached the end of the building he saw a white van, a number of dark SUVs and surprise, his truck! Looking around he saw no one and dashed (as best as he could in his condition) to his truck. Reaching under the rear bumper he felt around for a small box and pulled it out getting his spare key. He crept around to the door, found it unlocked and got in. He went to put the key in the ignition and found his normal set of keys still sitting in it. Grabbing those and putting them in his pack he put his spare key in and turned the key partially in order to release the steering. Shifting into neutral he got out and tried to push the truck backwards but was too weak to do so. Collapsing down to the ground he just sat there trying to catch his breath.

Dave didn't want to start the truck drawing attention to him but instead wanted to just get it rolling away and start it further down the road but how he didn't think he had

the energy to do so.

Blart! Blart! Blart! Blart! An alarm went off and lights started flicking on all over.

“Guess they know I'm gone... doesn't matter now,” Dave said out loud and dragged himself back up into the truck. He turned the key the rest of the way and the engine slowly started grinding. Releasing and trying again it finally started and, leaving the lights off, put it in reverse, backed out, slammed it into drive and floored it, all without ever touching the brake.

He had no idea where he was but just kept driving. It must have been quite late as the roads were all but deserted. Finally he saw a sign on a cross street that he recognized. Now, left or right? Which way back to home and Karen? Well left worked last time, let's try it again. He turned and had gone about a mile when a set of red and blues flashed him from behind. He started to pull over then remembered he still had the gun and even if he could hide it he was still naked. Run! No wait. That would just make it worse.

Dave pulled over and sat patiently. The cop came up to the car and shined his light in the car.

“Sir, can I ask why you are naked?”

“I've been kidnapped and just got away. They were torturing me and accusing me of stuff I didn't do. You've got to help me. They threatened my wife. I just barely got away. You have to help! I'm Dave Walker and my wife is Karen. They said they were going to kidnap her too. Please! Help me!”

Just then the cops shoulder radio went off and he cocked his head as he listened “All units, alert. Report of escaped mental patient. Goes by name of Dave Walker, consider armed and extremely dangerous.” As his head snapped back to Dave he saw the 22 pointed at his face.

“Don't even think of going for your side arm. Both arms up where I can see them. Now turn around and take 3 steps. One twitch and I will shoot.”

Dave got out of the truck, reached forward and removed the side arm. He had the

cop lay face down and checked both legs removing the backup he had there too. He took the magazines and ordered the cop to strip down to his underwear. Keeping him covered he reached into the truck and got out his bag.

Motioning with the P22 he said, now get in the truck and cuff yourself through the steering wheel. The cop did so. Putting all of his stuff in the cop car he came back with a piece of duct tape and put it over his mouth.

“I'm sorry, really I am. Everything they are saying are lies. I am not a mental patient. I have not harmed anyone. Just look at me. Look at the bruises. Look at the injuries. See the marks on my wrists and ankles where I was chained to a table while they tortured me? Once I get a few blocks away I'll call and let 911 know you're here.”

Dave took his clothes and put them on and walked back to the cruiser. Getting in, it took him a minute to figure out the light controls but he did manage to get them turned off. He made a U-turn and headed back the way he came from, then after a few blocks turned into a gas station. He was going to use a pay phone when he noticed the cell phone in the center console.

Taking it out he opened it, dialed 911, reported the cop in the pickup and then hung up. He tossed it in the bushes as he drove out. He went down a few blocks and started heading back in his original direction paralleling the road he recognized. Moments later sirens were heard converging from all directions and figured the cop would soon be free and not real happy. He drove on and a few miles later cut back to the road he wanted. The further he got the more he recognized the area and finally knew where he was at. From here he could get home easily. According to the clock on the dash it would be dawn soon.

He ditched the police cruiser a few blocks from home and walked in the pre dawn light to his house. Everything looked normal. He was about to approach the house when he saw that plain white van down the block again.

Something felt wrong.

He turned and headed the other way taking cover in some nearby shrubs. Hiding in the bushes he felt like a criminal yet he had done nothing wrong. Not much later he found his suspicions were correct. A dark SUV pulled up next to the van and they

appeared to be talking. The SUV pulled away and he could see, in the increasing light, the occupants scanning with binoculars as they drove past. He hoped they weren't infrared capable and wormed deeper into the bushes. It drove by without stopping.

Dave sat thinking for a minute when he saw Jacob, his neighbor, leave the house with his dog. Waiting until he had passed down almost a block Dave came out and quickly followed. As he got within calling distance he called, "Jacob".

Jacob turned around and said, "Yes Officer?"

Remembering the uniform he had acquired he continued approaching. "Jacob, it's me, Dave. Dave Walker."

"Dave? No, it can't be," said Jacob going white and looking like he had seen a ghost.

"Really it is." He squatted down and ruffled the fur as he greeted Bowser too.

"It really is you. What are you doing in that uniform? No, wait. How are you still alive?"

"What do you mean?"

"It was reported, let's see, I think a few weeks ago that you had been in a fiery crash on the expressway and they had been unable to get you out. You were burned to nothing but ashes."

"Lies."

"I can see that."

"How's Karen?"

"I guess you don't know then. She took it really hard. After your funeral she just packed up and left. Something about her sister or mother. She wasn't real specific and I didn't push. She said the house was going on the market soon if I knew anyone who wanted it and I think she gave your dog to the Johnson's. You know how their kids

always liked to play with it. What's your story?"

"They, government maybe, I don't know, confused me with someone else and have been holding and torturing me for, I guess now, the last few weeks. I just literally escaped a few hours ago. I need to get something less conspicuous to wear. Can you help?"

"Yeah, sure. Let me go home and get you a set of my clothes. I'll meet you at the main street park in 30 minutes. OK?"

"Great. Thanks. This means a lot to me."

Jacob headed back towards home with Bowser and Dave headed for the park. Something was bothering him and he doubled back and did so just in time to see Jacob talking to the guys in the white van.

Damn. Dave turned and headed away from the park as fast as he could. A few hours later he was still aimlessly walking when he realized he was near a shopping center that had a 24x7 Target. Walking in he got a few pairs of jeans, generic shirts, socks, boots, not a good pair but better than nothing and underwear. Heading up to the checkout counter he got out his credit card and zipped it through the machine. It came back declined. He immediately realized his mistake. Dug some twenties out of his bag and paid the bill.

Grabbing his purchases he nearly ran out of the store. They must have had a watch on his cards and now knew where he was. Quickly walking down the shopping center he ducked into a sandwich shop also open at this early hour for breakfast. Before he even made it to the bathroom he heard the distant wail of sirens. Changing he pushed up a ceiling tile and put anything that could tie him to the cop up in the ceiling, dropping the tile back in place when done. The extra clothes he bought got stuffed in his pack. Realizing he had a few weeks of facial hair growth he used the scissors on his multi tool to trim it close. He'd have to get a good shave soon.

He walked out of the bathroom, ordered a coffee and a sausage and egg sandwich and took it to go. He was getting really tired from all the walking, something he hadn't done in weeks and needed to find somewhere safe to hole up. Leaving the store he saw a dozen cruisers and at least two black SUVs in front of the Target with officers spreading

out in all directions. Turning the other way he put his head down and walked.

As exhaustion overtook him, he finally had an idea. At the next corner was a bus stop and he waited just a short time until one arrived. He got on, paid his fare and took a seat in back. Moments later he was asleep.

“Hey, you. Buddy. Hey, wake up.”

He awoke with a start and grabbed that hand that was poking him. The driver tried to pull away.

“Oh, sorry. My bad. You just startled me. I must have dozed off,” He said as he released the driver’s wrist.

Rubbing his wrist the driver said, “Yeah, well my shift is over and you can't stay here.”

“Of course. Again, my apologies. I'll be on my way.”

Grabbing his pack he walked off the bus and after a moment figured out where he was. It was mid afternoon and he felt better if not completely refreshed. Checking his wallet and cash he still had about \$300 left. Just down the block he saw a barber shop and thought a thorough make over was in order. Thirty minutes later he left with a buzz cut and a clean baby bottom smooth shave, and \$30 less in cash.

Walking down the block to a modest pizza joint he took a booth and ordered a twelve inch cheese and pepperoni, a Caesar salad and a coke. He needed to figure out his next steps and was still famished from his ordeal. There was a TV on the wall with the various court shows on and just a few other patrons in the restaurant. His soda arrived followed ten minutes later by the salad and a few minutes after that the pizza. He was wolfing down the salad and had about half the pizza gone when he heard a gasp followed by a call, “Hey, can you turn that up?”

As hungry as he was he was berating himself for burying himself in the food instead of paying better attention to his surroundings. The other customers and even staff were all staring at the TV as the volume was raised.

“... have been shot. I repeat, the President, Vice President and a substantial number of cabinet members and congress members have all been shot. Washington is in complete lock down and as you can see from our Skycam 7 helicopter there are emergency vehicles everywhere. In a joint statement from the FBI, Department of Homeland Security and TSA, they reported that in nearly every case the gunman immediately after firing on their targets turned the gun on themselves however the suspected ringleader, Dave Walker is apparently still at large.” A photo of Dave from just before the abduction was shown on screen along with the statement that anyone with information on his whereabouts is strongly urged to contact authorities as he is highly dangerous and should be considered armed. Dave was about to bolt before someone recognized him when he remembered his buzz cut and shave should have altered his appearance enough that hopefully the people wouldn't recognize him. Besides, hurrying out would raise suspicions.

The news story went on and on about terrorists and unknown conditions. A bunch of talking bobble heads pontificated endlessly this being the fault of guns or the fault of the system or any of a dozen other places to put the blame. One commentator with a clue tried to bring up the topic of succession and who was actually in charge but was cut off with more sensationalized drivel.

Finally the news loop started to repeat as they had no new information and people drifted back to their meals. The waitress came over looking at Dave and said, “Can you believe that? Who'd do such a thing? Can I get you a refill on your soda?”

Dave nodded and as she walked away breathed a sigh of relief that his appearance now was different enough from the photo on the news that she didn't even suspect him.

Finishing his pizza and the second coke he paid up leaving a modest tip. Just stay grey and under the radar he thought. Do nothing to call attention to yourself.

Traffic seemed heavier than he remembered as he aimlessly headed down the street. As he walked his mind cleared and he focused on what he needed to do. Shelter for the night. Transportation to try to get to his in-laws and hopefully his wife. Eventually find a good lawyer and try to clear his name. With his limited funds and no ready options for more he was on the lookout for a computer with free Internet access. The only one he could think of that wouldn't cost him was the library so he headed there.



At the desk he did pay for a dozen printer credits, just a dollar, and took the most secluded workstation he could find while still being able to sit with a view of the entrance. No one paid him any attention but if they had it would have been apparent that he was checking out the doors every minute or so and might have even been considered suspicious.

Surfing as quickly as he could he brought up the addresses to Karen's sister and mother. Both were still in Missouri, one still in Parkway and the other a bit outside. It was about 600 miles from Atlanta to Parkway and Dave printed out three maps with directions for three substantially different routes. One for the quickest, and two other ones that avoided the highways as much as possible. Next he called up the local map and looked for coin shops. He found three within a mile and to avoid buying more printer credits he wrote these down on the back of the maps. A quick check of the news reported that most of the government people that were shot did indeed die however some were still in the hospital in critical condition, none expected to survive the night.

Next search was for dollar stores, pawn shops and second hand stores. He found a bunch and also wrote those down. Finally he found a local electronics store and added that to his list.

The last thing he did, and he knew it would be risky, was to log into the top two prepper/survival forums he was a member on and post his statement.

*WARNING! You are under investigation.*

*You have not seen me post lately as I was kidnapped by some elements of the government. They found suspicious content on another forum that was posted by someone else using the same screen name as I use here. The agents held me captive for weeks torturing me at least daily trying to get me to confess to something I knew nothing about as I was the wrong individual. The comments they let slip now make me believe that the recent assassinations in Washington were what they thought I was involved in. Let me state once and for all, it was NOT ME but someone else on a different forum using the same screen name I use here. I had zero involvement and do not support or believe in the individuals who did perpetrate this, whoever they are. The government is watching and you too could be at risk even for something you did not do! Good luck my forum friends, I am catching a train to upstate NY to disappear before they find me so*

*you will probably never hear from me again. Regardless of what the media says, know that I love my country and I am innocent of their accusations.*

*-ARSurvivalDude*

As soon as he finished he closed the browser, cleared the cache and left as fast as he could without drawing suspicion to himself. He hoped the NY statement would have them looking in the wrong direction, at least for awhile.

Checking his maps he headed for the first coin shop. He traded in two one ounce gold coins and got nearly spot price so he was satisfied. With almost \$3500 in his pocket he had more options now available to him. Heading to a second hand store he bought an old wallet similar to his for a dollar plus a few more changes of clothes and a duffle bag to carry them. Total price, ten dollars. It didn't have the rest of what he was looking for so he started on to the next one. As he was walking up to it he noticed two dark SUVs parked across the street and an unmarked white van right in front of the store. Could they have already traced the library PC and recovered the browser history showing his possible destinations? Maybe he was just being paranoid. Either way he turned well short of the store into a flower shop, browsed around a few minutes and then left going back the way he came from. Skipping down the list to a dollar store he started heading for that one as he noticed evening approaching. Again less than a block down from the dollar store he noticed a white van and two SUVs.

No longer being a coincidence he knew his plan was blown, time to tie up some loose ends and leave town. He left his credit cards, drivers license and any other identifiable information in his wallet and transferred everything else to the other wallet. The cash was split up between his newly acquired wallet, bag and duffle bag with three of the \$20s put in his original wallet.

Dave found a cheap hotel and gave them a different name and paid cash for one night. The room was plain and normally would be considered almost disgusting but was perfect for what he needed. He locked his bags in the room and left his second hand wallet there too, taking the original wallet with the \$60, credit cards and his IDs he put it in his pocket and headed down to the counter. He asked the guy behind the counter where he could go for a good time.

“Well, there’s an Outback down the block, they’ve got pretty good steaks, or a few blocks the other way is a karaoke place. Or you...”

“No, I was thinking more along the lines of a good time with some companionship...if you catch my drift.”

“Ah”, said the clerk with a leering grin on his face. “You want to go to the Blue Oyster bar. Here’s the directions,” said the clerk drawing a quick map on a scrap of paper.

Dave noticed it was only a mile away but with all the activities today, still recovering from the various abuses and tortures and his weakened conditions he thought a cab might be better. The clerk called him one and a few minutes later Dave was giving the cabbie the address for the Blue Oyster. He turned around and said, “You sure you want to go there? I can take you to a much nicer place... the woman at the Oyster are kind of skanky and well, to be honest you got about a 50/50 chance of getting mugged.”

Dave thanked the cabbie for looking out for him but said the Oyster was where he wanted to go.

“Sure buddy, it’s your life,” he said as he pulled out in very heavy traffic. “How about that stuff in Washington today? I heard they shot all the bums. Wonder who’s in charge now?”

He added a few “Uh huh” and “Mmms” at the appropriate times but let the cabbie do the talking. The meter said \$6.00 for the mile ride. Dave gave him a twenty and asked for a \$10 back and then asked the cabbie to meet him back in here thirty minutes which he agreed to after adding a comment about it sure was going be a quickie.

Walking into the Blue Oyster as he slipped the \$10 in his pocket he could see just how bad the place was. He grabbed a place at the bar, set his wallet down and ordered a beer. Normally he would have preferred something stronger but in his condition he’s wasn’t even sure about the beer. It didn’t take long before the resident “ladies” were trying to see if he wanted to have a little fun. He grabbed his wallet, put it in his pocket and danced with one for a few slower songs, noting, at least, an unwashed smell emanating off her. After the second song ended he went back to the bar and ordered her a beer. Paid for it and put the change back in the wallet and set it on the bar again.

He made small talk with her for a few more minutes before she hinted that perhaps they could go somewhere a bit more private. He said he'd like that but had to take a piss first. Getting up he headed off to the bathroom, did his business while trying to avoid touching any of the disgusting surfaces and came back out. Looking across the bar he saw her and his wallet both gone. Smiling to himself he walked out just as the cab pulled up and hopped in. "Back to my hotel, please."

At the hotel he paid the cabbie from the \$10 still in his pocket and again let him keep the \$4 as a tip.

He checked the bed for bugs and surprisingly found it had none and the sheets seemed to be clean so he figured he'd spend the night. With any luck his now stolen ID and credit cards would get spread around and used all over town pretty quick. That should keep those SUVs chasing ghosts for awhile, he thought as he drifted off.

Being weeks since Dave was able to sleep in a bed he slept like a rock. Nothing disturbed him and he woke up feeling somewhat refreshed for the first time that he could remember. Gathering his stuff up he left the room key on the counter on his way out. A Denny's was just down the block and while not his first choice it was at least cheap. With a full stomach he paid his check and asked at the counter if there was anywhere he could check his email. They suggested a coffee shop with Internet stations a few blocks down. He thanked them and left.

The shop was easy to locate and he ordered a coffee and sat around waiting for a station to vacate. Once one was available Dave did some searches for long distance trucking companies and also owner operator firms. After checking an online map he wrote down the ones he found, closed out, cleared the browser cache and left.

Most were clustered in an industrial area which was a number of miles away. Other than wanting to get out of town, Dave wasn't in a hurry and to conserve his cash and strengthen up his muscles he decided to walk it at a casual pace. By lunch he made it to the right area of town and stopped in a local diner. He ordered a Reuben with fries and an iced tea with a piece of peach pie for desert.

As expected many of the patrons were from the area businesses and Dave overheard a number of guys discussing their latest assignments and loads and where

they were headed. He made note of a few and paid his tab and left. Hanging around outside he waited for one of them to leave and approached him. The guy told him to pretty much pound sand so he backed off not wanting to start any trouble.

About a half hour later one of the other prospects left. Dave approached and said that he couldn't help overhearing that he was headed towards Champaign, IL and Dave needed to get to St. Louis. He'd be willing to pay, cash, if the trucker would let him ride along as far as possible.

"How much you willing to pay?"

"How much you want?"

"\$500."

"That's a bit steep considering you're already headed that way. How about \$100."

"Forget it.", said the trucker turning towards his rig.

"OK, \$300?"

The trucker paused a moment and then continued walking and saying, "Get in".

Dave climbed up into the cab, pulled \$300 out of his duffle and held it up so the trucker could see it. He handed him \$100 and put the other \$200 in his shirt pocket.

"Hey!"

"Nothing personal, you now know I'm good for it, I'd just feel better giving you the rest when you drop me. Ok?"

"Yeah, I can live with that, just don't try anything funny."

"Yes sir."

"Jack."

“Huh?”

“My name is Jack.”

“Oh. I’m Dave. Dave... Johnson.”

For the first one hundred or so miles they made small talk back and forth. Dave related that he was down on his luck, had lost his job and took his last bit of savings and possessions and was heading to stay with his sister. Mostly not a lie, just a lot of omissions in his story.

Jack accepted the story without question and didn’t ask for any other personal information.

At a lull in the conversation Jack said, “I assume you don’t mind if I put on the radio?”, as he was reaching for it.

“Nope, it’s your truck, I’m just a guest.”

“...degrees with a chance of rain. 50 degrees tonight as the clouds move out and 78 tomorrow with sun all day. Back to the news desk.”

“Thanks Roger. The ongoing story relates to the events in Washington. It seems that the line of succession to the presidency still has not been determined and no one is approving any spending. The payroll will not go out this week for all government workers and social security and other entitlement programs are on hold until this gets worked out. A spokesperson for the White House said they expect this to be resolved by the end of the week. In other news, the Dow and Nasdaq opened sharply lower today and the sell off continues.....”

Late that evening where interstates 64 and 57 met up in southern Illinois Jack exited the highway at Mt. Vernon. He parked the truck at another restaurant that obviously catered to truckers and said dinner time and invited Dave to join him.

They ate and at the end of dinner Jack handed the check to Dave and said, “You seem like a good guy a bit down on your luck. Why don’t you pay for dinner out of that \$200 in your pocket and we’ll call it even.”

“You sure? I don’t skip out on my obligations.”

“Yeah. I’m going hit the head and take off. You’ll be OK then?”

“Yes. I’ll be fine. Thanks Jack.”

Dave paid the \$30 bill, left a tip and headed out. A Motel 6 sign was lit up in one direction and Red Roof Inn sign was the other way. Remembering that left seemed to be working for him he turned left and headed to the Red Roof Inn. He gave them another assumed name and pulled out the cash from his pocket to pay.

“I’m sorry sir, we need a credit card.”

“Oh, OK.” He reached around back and felt his pocket. He followed it up with a quick self pat down and then acted all upset that his wallet was either lost or stolen.

“Sorry, company policy. Without a credit card to cover the room I can’t give you one.”

Dave mumbled something about calling the manager and reporting them to corporate walked out and down the block to the Motel 6.

Using yet another name the clerk was more than happy to take the cash for the room for one night. Dave was pretty certain the clerk made it a pocket transaction but he didn’t care. He went up to his room on the second floor, locked the door and settled in for the night.

After cleaning up he turned on the TV.

“... Washington is still in chaos. The Dow and Nasdaq were both down nearly 20% today when trading was halted. Most major cities are experiencing sporadic violence and looting and a number of states are talking about mobilizing the national guard. In sports today...”

Dave flipped it off and started thinking. While the past month had been his personal disaster, it looked like the country was on the precipice of a nationwide

disaster.

All night he tossed and turned and didn't sleep well. Feeling lousy when he got up the next morning he flipped the TV on and headed to the shower. He missed the news cast.

“... With still no clear leadership in Washington a number of Senators are all claiming to be in charge but no one is accepting their self appointed promotion to president. In overseas reactions ....”

Feeling a little better after cleaning up, Dave checked out and walked further into town. As he did he saw a minivan pull up and a frumpy looking soccer mom get out. She opened the back, took out a sign and a hammer and awkwardly hammered it into the ground, closed up the back, got in and drove off.

“GARAGE SALE, Fri 9-4, Sat 9-4, Sun 12-4”, with an arrow pointing in the direction she had driven.

For some reason Dave turned and walked that way too. A bit later he came to the garage sale and saw mostly junk along with a bicycle trailer for towing a toddler for only \$25. He offered \$20 and the woman accepted. He asked if he could come back later to get it and she said sure, put it to the side and marked the tag on it “Sold”.

Walking up and down the streets it took him 3 hours and 4 garage sales before he found a mountain style bike for sale. Fairly beat up but still in serviceable condition. He bought it for \$75 and rode off on it. Back at the first place he picked up his trailer, connected it and put his bags in the trailer. He looked over the “junk” and made an offer on a sleeping bag which was accepted, added that to his trailer and headed out.

Taking a big chance he flagged down a local cop car that was driving by.

“Hi officer. I was just passing through and wanted to pick up a spare tube for my bike. Do you have a bike shop in town?”

“No we don't however there is a sports store about a mile down, they should have bike parts.”



“Thanks. It’s on my way so I’ll be sure to stop.”

Dave rode off breathing a sigh of relief. He pulled into the shopping center when he saw the sign for 'Hibbert sports.' Dave realized he didn't have a way to lock up his bike. Taking a chance he took it in with him and told the first clerk he saw that he just bought the bike and didn't have a lock yet and then asked if he could leave it inside.

They thought it a bit odd but said it would be fine. He grabbed his bag, a cart and headed off into the store. Shopping carefully he picked up some more MREs, a lock and chain for the bike, 4 spare tubes and a portable pump and toolkit. The equipment totaled just under \$100. He went back and got a water filter designed for hikers, some state maps and a case of water bottles and bought them too. He then took the bag of purchases to his bike and wheeled it outside and stored the purchases and his bags in the trailer. Mounting up he headed west on route 15 past the high way and kept riding.

About twenty five miles later he was exhausted and being on a deserted stretch of highway with a forest and occasionally a stream visible through the trees he thought this was as good place as any to spend the night. He went far enough into the trees to be invisible from the road and setup a small camp. Not much more than just his sleeping bag on the ground, a bottle of water and a cold MRE. Fire might have attracted attention.

The next morning he quickly packed up and had a few Cliff bars for breakfast. Consulting his alternative route maps he saw that he was in good shape and was basically paralleling the highway route. Coming up would be some bigger towns and the big river right before St Louis. He didn't think he could get past St Louis tonight and didn't want to spend more money on a hotel. Instead he road to Belleville and then headed back south on route 158 and holed up in a cemetery just outside Milstadt for the night.

Starting out bright and early he wanted to try to get past St. Louis today. He worked his way down 158 to Quarry road and then had to ride on the highway, taking 255 to get over the Mississippi river. He got a number of horns blown at him but luckily made it across without encountering any police or getting hit. Immediately after crossing he took Koch south and stayed on lesser trafficked roads continuing south until nearly Bernhart. Exhausted he again found some woods to hole up in and spent two nights and a day in between resting.

Following secondary roads he was able to reach the Young Conservation Area and spent the night there. Shortly after setting up camp it started to rain. Dave arranged a few Mylar sheets to keep the rain off of him but as the ground saturated it seeped up and he ended up soaked and shivering. Thinking back to the last time he was wet and shivering got to him and he broke down and cried letting all the pent up emotions, from his torture, out. He spent two nights here allowing his sleeping bag to dry out in the sun and breeze during the day in between.

He wanted to push all the way to Parkway but finally relented and stopped in the River Round Conservation Area. Over the past week he had mostly healed up and his muscle tone and endurance and come back. Still not what it once was but he was feeling much better. Taking it easy had helped so far and time would help with the rest. His side was still tender but as long as he was careful with it he was able to function almost normally.

The next morning he got up and rode on to Parkway. After looking up the address and getting his bearings, he headed off to his mother in-laws house. Hopefully she knew where Karen was. Turning on to the correct block he saw the house and, just a bit further down, the all too common now black SUV parked outside.

“Damn!” he said and just kept his head down and forward as he rode on. Once out of sight he circled around until he found a location he could also park and watch without seeming out of place and without being seen by the SUV. He waited and waited. Hours later his patience paid off when Sheila came out, got in her Buick and drove off. The SUV stayed there. It was really Dave’s lucky day when she turned his way instead of going the other way. He mounted up and started riding the same way.

Sheila easily overtook him and kept driving. Dave followed along as best he could but quickly got left way behind and he lost sight of the car. He kept pedaling and as he got to Main street he saw the car parked in the lot at a grocery store. Pulling in he locked up his bike, took his pack and headed in. The store was not large and he soon spotted her. Not knowing what else to do he approached her and said, “Sheila?”

She turned and responded, “Yes?” with no sign of recognition.

“It’s me. Dave. Karen’s husband, your son in-law.”



## Part II

Squinting a bit Sheila finally recognized him with the week plus of facial growth and the buzz cut. She started wobbling and Dave was concerned she'd faint. He rushed forward and grabbed her keeping her upright until the sensation passed and she cleared her throat stepping back a bit. "Karen said you were dead."

"It's a long story. Suffice it to say that the government thinks I had something to do with the events in Washington. I didn't but they don't believe me and kidnapped me and told Karen I had died."

"Dave, I've not known you to be a liar but that story I simply can't believe."

"How do you explain that black SUV in front of your house? They're watching you too."

"Oh, um. That probably just belongs to the neighbors or some other innocent reason."

"Sheila, do me a favor. Carefully think about why the SUV is there and think about what I said. I'll meet you here at the same time tomorrow. Don't tell Karen as I believe she too is in danger."

As Dave disappeared, Sheila mindlessly finished her shopping noting how empty the shelves were. Many of her usual items were missing. She asked the checkout girl and got a response about deliveries not arriving on time or at all lately.

Pulling into her driveway she gave the SUV a good long look and had to admit that it did look suspicious and can't remember if it had ever been moved since it first appeared. The dark tinted windows made it difficult to tell if anyone was inside.

Not wanting to be rash by going up and banging on it, she called Tom, the local police chief instead. They had grown up together and remained very close friends ever since. She asked him to come by and check it out. If he hadn't already been married, after Frank had passed away and she was done mourning she might have even pursued Tom. Since it wasn't an emergency, he agreed to swing by when he had a chance.

A little later that day she just happened to be looking out the window when Tom pulled up. As he got out of the car the SUV suddenly roared to life and raced out of there. Tom was torn between pursuing and checking on Sheila. He chose the latter but also called it in with the plate data. The response back was that the plate was classified by the government and no further information was available on the vehicle.

Not having ever encountered a classified vehicle before he thought it was interesting but other than filing his report, didn't give it a second thought. Knocking on the door Sheila answered and Tom was relieved to see she was OK. He told her what he had discovered and had a nice chat with her over tea and cookies. When he finished his cup he thanked her and headed back out to his car.

Later that evening, while still at the station, he was paid a visit by a man in a dark suit. He presented ID that only identified him as DHS and then told Tom that he did not see a black SUV today, turned around and left. Tom checked in the computer system for the report he had filed earlier and could find no trace of it. Shuddering he made sure his firearm was locked and loaded before heading out the door to go home.

The next day Sheila didn't see the SUV but did see an unmarked white panel van parked further down the block and thought she saw movement in it. She got in her car and took a longer route to the store doubling back a few times just to make sure she wasn't followed. Going in she picked up a few items and lingered for quite awhile but never saw Dave. Could she have hallucinated it yesterday? But then what about that SUV? Shaking off the weird feeling she paid for her items and went out to the lot. She put the bags in her trunk, got in and started the car.

She almost screamed when a voice from the back said, "Sheila, it's me, Dave. Don't turn around or talk, at least not yet. They'll see your lips moving. Just drive and take a long route. Even better, go to a store that's at least a half hour away from here."

Doing as she was told Sheila pulled out and headed further away from home. After a couple of minutes she mumbled, "Can I talk now?"

Dave stayed down in back and said, "Yes. They never bugged your car. I watched it all night. I'm sorry for scaring you but the SUV was in the parking lot of the store watching the door. I had no way to get into the store without being seen."

“So you broke into my car instead?”

“You did leave it unlocked.”

“Of course I did. This is a small town where people don’t break into each other’s cars. So, your SUV story checks out. They, whoever ‘they’ might be, are watching me. Why?”

Over the next 20 minutes Dave laid out the story, the kidnapping, the torture, his escape and the threats they made against Karen. He wanted to find her, warn her and make sure she was OK. Oh, and to let her know he was still alive too!

Sheila arrived at a strip mall and said she’d be back in a few minutes. About 10 minutes later she returned and as she was opening the door Dave heard a scream that was quickly cut off. Looking up he saw a guy with one arm around her waist and another over her mouth.

“Shut up or I’m gonna really hurt you! Give me your money!”

Sheila was fumbling with her purse and tears were already streaming down her face.

Dave gently released the latch on the rear door and kicked it as hard as he could. It caught the thug hard in the thigh causing him to release Sheila as he nearly fell over. Dave quickly got out of the car and told Sheila to get in.

The guy was getting up from the ground. “Big mistake,” he said grinning while he pulled out a sizable knife. As he lunged at Dave, Sheila screamed again. Dave side stepped pulling his P22 out and putting a round into the leg of the thug who stumbled, caught his balance and turned, “Now I’m not going to just hurt you, I’m going to kill you and then her, but not before she screams a lot.”

“I would advise you to rethink your plans,” said Dave.

“Screw you!” as he lunged again.

This time Dave was ready for him and didn't bother with another warning shot in the leg. Instead he went for two shots center mass and one to the head. It might be a 22lr round but with proper shot placement they can be just about as lethal as any other round, as ever so briefly flashed through the thug's mind before he died.

He got back in the car and told Sheila to drive. He had to yell "NOW!" to get her to snap out of her shock and drive.

She finally got enough composure to work up from nearly comatose to freaking out. Dave had her pull over and wait until she settled down and got coherent.

"Gun, you, gun, shot, dead, gun...."

"Sheila, he wasn't just interested in your money. You do realize that animal would probably have raped you and possibly even slit your throat when he was done?"

"But... but... you..... gun... shot him."

"Yes, I did. If shooting someone is required to protect Karen or you I will not hesitate. I did give him a warning shot. He did not heed the warning."

Sheila finally just broke down sobbing. After a few minutes she got her composure back and admitted to Dave that he had done the right thing but wouldn't he get in trouble?

Dave asked her if she has been watching the news at all.

"No, I rarely do. Why?"

"In the motel I stayed in some nights back I got caught up on what has happened in the past week. You remember my story from earlier, specifically the part about the shootings in Washington?"

"Yes."

"Well, whoever orchestrated that may have started the collapse of the US if not the world."

“How?”

“So many people were killed that the line of succession was broken and no one knows who is in charge. A large part of the government has just shut down now and many other smaller parts are trying to do a power grab. Domestically all the government hand outs have been effectively shut down and the major cities are now collapsing. That guy we just encountered was nothing compared to what is happening in the big cities. There are no more deliveries from overseas as customs is part of the government and the collapse of society with the resulting danger has stopped most domestic deliveries too.

“That doesn’t sound good,” she said in a worried voice but obviously still wasn’t putting it all together.

Dave continued, “No, it isn’t. Think about it. Tens of millions not getting paid. Limited or no protection. No deliveries. No deliveries means no food. Remember Katrina?”

He could see the gears turning as she was putting it all together and finally responded, “My. Oh my. Oh this is going to be real bad.”

“Yes, imagine all the hungry masses consuming everything in the city like a plague of locusts and then streaming out to where more resources are... the country. We probably have a day or two at most before they arrive and that guy could have already been the start.”

“Oh dear. Oh what are we going to do?”

“It gets worse. With the US falling apart at the seams the rest of the world is taking advantage of the situation. Without the commander in chief, our military can’t be the world police, not that they should be, but you get my meaning.”

“We’ve got to get out of here!” said a now panicked Sheila fumbling with the keys.

Dave grabbed her arm pulling it back and said, “Calm down! We don’t want to just run around with no focus or plan. It’ll only get us in trouble or killed. First off we



need to get back to your house and gather up some stuff and then go find Karen. You do know where she is, right?”

“Yes.”

“OK. Last question for now. I noticed you leave the car in the driveway. Can you park it in the garage or is it filled with stuff?”

“Not much junk but Frank, bless his soul, his old truck is still in there taking up a lot of space. He called it his project and referred to the garage as his man cave. I’ve heard him start it up but can’t remember him ever driving it.”

Thinking for a minute Dave came back with a plan, “Here’s what I want you to do…”

Sheila dropped Dave off a few blocks from the house, drove home and parked in the driveway on the side opposite the truck. Taking the bags she went into the house. As it got dark out she closed up the blinds, as she did most nights, and made sure the back door was unlocked. Going about her normal schedule she was just sitting down to a simple plate of homemade macaroni & cheese when a voice said, “That smells good.”

“Damn it Dave, stop that. You’re going to scare me to death!”

“Sorry, Mom,” replied Dave using the term of endearment he used to call Sheila when he was first dating Karen.

“Well, I made enough for both of us. Grab a bowl and dig in.”

Having a home cooked meal for the first time in about a month, even just macaroni & cheese, had to be the best thing Dave ever tasted. Once Sheila was done Dave proceeded to eat all that remained.

“I guess you were hungry.”

“Well, the past month wasn’t exactly a walk in the park.”

“Dave, do you mind my asking... did they really torture you like you said?”

He took off his shoe and showed her the missing nails on some toes. Working his way up, while still staying modest, he showed the almost healed bruises. The scars from the lacerations and burns. Even the marks on his wrists and ankles caused by the restraints when he was writhing around in pain.

Sheila had tears streaming down her face again but this time they were for Dave, not herself.

Dave, feeling a bit uncomfortable got up and handed her a few Kleenex and said that he was going to check on the project truck as he headed towards the door leading to the attached garage.

Since the garage had no windows Dave was able to put on the light and not worry about someone seeing him in there. He flicked the switch and saw a nice set of tool boxes. If the contents were anywhere near as good as the cases then there was a first class home shop here. Sure enough, as Sheila had said, there were a bunch of boxes stacked up, but nowhere near filling the garage. With some rearranging you could probably have gotten her Buick in here too.

He turned to look at the truck, or at least he assumed it was. Something big was under a large tarp. Sheila made an appearance at the door and said, "I haven't touched it since Frank passed away 3 years ago."

Dave walked over. Grabbed the cover and pulled it off in one motion. He needed to scrape his jaw off the floor. Frank had what appeared to be a mint condition if not fully restored M715. The very late 1960's military version of the civilian Jeep Gladiator. Walking around it Dave found the hood was not closed tight and wires leading out from under it to a box on the wall. Reading the model name on the box Dave figured it was a trickle charger. He also saw that it was sitting on blocks with the tires hanging free. This was a gold mine of a find.

Over the next 2 hours Dave filled the tires, found a jack and lowered it off the blocks and did a full inspection. All the fluids looked good and he found a few cans of PRI-G so hopefully Frank had treated the gas as the tank was showing full. Tentatively he tried to start it. On the second try it caught and started right up. After idling for just a few seconds he turned it off to avoid filling the garage with carbon monoxide. It worked.

He almost jumped up and down with glee.

Now he just needed to get rid of the guys outside in the van. He went back in the house, took his pack and told Sheila that if he didn't return she was to leave in the morning, go to Karen, tell her everything and they were to disappear. Sheila tried to argue but Dave told her this is how it has to be. He had every intention of being back shortly but if something bad happened she was not to get involved and make sure her and Karen got to safety.

He slipped out the back and disappeared into the darkness of the night. Calling on his former military training and outdoor skills he worked his way down a few blocks, over and came up behind the van in such a way that unless they looked specifically for him, with the darkness, they'd never see him. The approach alone took nearly an hour but he was now sitting literally right next to the van and could catch portions of their conversation.

"... don't like this. How much longer are we going to sit here watching this old broad? My wife's complaining that the direct deposit still hasn't hit our checking account yet and the mortgage is about due."

"We're not doing too bad ourselves, Tricia's still getting paid, at least for now, but with the way everything is collapsing out there... I don't know how much longer I want to keep working for free. "

"They say when it all gets worked out they'll pay us."

"When will that be? With the way things are falling apart I'm not sure even if they can figure out who's going to run stuff or if they'll be able to save it. You know I live just outside St Louis and it's crumbling. Not as bad as New York, LA, Chicago and Atlanta, but it can't be more than a few days away from being just as bad. I'm worried about Tricia."

"I hear you. I'm tempted to just call in sick and stay home to keep an eye on the house and family. No way I'm letting some punk just take my new flat screen."

"I say we come to an agreement right now. If nothing happens by end of tomorrow we just call in sick and head home and let Washington deal with it."

“Fine with me...”

Dave quietly put the P22 back in his bag thankful that the situation appeared to be about to resolve itself. Taking nearly as long he worked his way back down the block and took the long way around coming in the back door again.

Sheila was watching TV and he called out as he closed the back door so he wouldn't scare her again.

“Oh, Dave. I was so worried.”

“No need to worry. Things actually worked out quite well.”

“You didn't...?” said Sheila holding up her hand like a gun.

“No, nothing like that. I have to admit I was considering it but they're sick of watching the house and in another day it sounds like they're going to give up. I think we give it another 24 hours and then bug out when they leave.”

“Bug what?”

Dave explained the term and then changed the subject to what was on TV.

“Dave, I've been a fool. I never watched the news as it was too depressing but now I realize I've been missing everything that is going on in the world. I didn't think it was possible but it's probably worse than you described this morning.”

“It's time to wake up now Sheila,” said Dave. He gave her the 30,000 view of being aware of what is going on, of situational awareness and of being prepared. Further he explained the equipment, the skills and the mindset are what got him here after his ordeal.

She realized he was right and things were going to change one way or another in her life. She now felt the sense of dread too and wanting to make sure her baby, Karen, was OK. They left it at that for the night and Sheila went off to bed while Dave got comfy on the couch.

The next day they took it easy, mostly just packing up essentials like canned goods and some changes of clothes for Sheila plus misc toiletries. As Dave explained they may or may not come back. Sheila wanted to take all the pictures off the walls but Dave talked her into taking just the actual picture, not the glass and frame too. Instead of a large pile, the thin pictures all fit in a single folder. Given Franks M715, Dave asked if Frank was into guns or anything.

Sheila said she didn't think so but he was welcome to look around. A thorough search revealed no hidden panels or bunkers but did yield a 12 gauge Remington in the grandfather clock and a 1911, WWII era, in the back of one of the tool drawers. A single box of rounds for the 1911 and just what was in the shotgun, 4 rounds, was all he could find. To say that Sheila was surprised at what was in the house was an understatement but when Dave explained the point of the shotgun, hidden in a clock, yet readily accessible and near the door and how Frank could have used it to defend them she understood. Coming to terms with a new paradigm was not easy but she was taking it like a trooper.

Around 2pm that afternoon the doorbell rang. Moments later a knock on the door. Sheila, it's me Tom. Are you OK in there?

Dave quietly told her to answer the door but say nothing about him as he grabbed his bag and disappeared into the garage.

She opened the door with a smile. "Hi Tom. I'm fine. How are you?"

"I'm good Sheila. Do you mind if I come in?"

"Uh, no. To what do I owe this visit?"

"Sheila, let me be blunt. Your car was seen leaving the scene of a murder and, well, I have to ask you about this."

She sat down on the sofa and broke down in sobs.

"Are you really OK?" Tom asked getting her some tissues. "Is there something you want to tell me?"

As she wiped away the tears and got the sniffles under control, “Tom, you know I have special feelings for you...”

“Now Sheila...”

“No, please let me continue. I would never do anything to jeopardize your marriage. I just want to make sure you know how much you mean to me. Growing up you were always there and have been a very good friend.”

“I would have to say I feel the same. I look at you as a sister I never had.”

“Yes. That describes my feelings too. A brother I never had. After I lost Frank, if you hadn’t been married I might have considered more than a brother, but I’m good with a ‘brother/sister’ relationship and knowing that you are happy with Jane. Over all of these years you know I have never lied to you. Right?”

“Not that I know of... you’re the most upfront and honest person I think I know.”

“I have something to tell you then and I am asking you to hear all of it first. OK?”

“OK. Go ahead.”

Sheila related all that had happened in the past few days. Dave showing up, the shooting at the strip mall, what he told her and the proof she saw with her own two eyes. As she finished it was like a big weight was removed from her shoulders. Just confiding in someone else was a relief.

“You know that is hard for me accept. One point in your favor, however, is the prints on the body came back. He’d spent time in jail before on theft, rape and assault and was currently wanted for other parole violations. Professionally I have to investigate this but personally I’d probably shake Dave’s hand for taking that scum off the street. Do you know if he’s coming back?”

“I never left,” said Dave pushing the garage door open. He leaned against the doorway with one arm obviously out of site.

“Dave, you planning on shooting me too?”

“Only if you try to hurt Sheila or arrest me.”

“DAVE!” yelled Sheila.

“Sorry Sheila, but I’m not going back to that facility. You saw what they did to me. I’d rather be a fugitive the rest of my life than to end up back there.”

“I assure you I’m just investigating. Why don’t you put the gun down and we’ll talk. See how your story checks out. After all you did save Sheila and that counts for a lot in my book.”

“Dave, Tom is a good guy. You can trust him. He will be fair.”

Dave brought his other arm out and put the P22 into his belt. He walked forward and held out a hand to Tom. “I hope you’re as good as Sheila has made you out to be.”

Tom shook Dave’s hand, “And I hope you’re not lying.”

“I’m not,” said Dave as he turned his arm showing the first of many injuries. Over the next few minutes he gave Tom the same ‘torture tour’ that Sheila has seen. By the end Tom was visibly shaken.

“If that wasn’t enough to convince me, that SUV you had Sheila check on? When I ran the plate it came back classified... heck I didn’t even know there was such a rating. I filed a report on the call. Later that night some guy from DHS shows up, tells me that I never saw it and leaves. I checked the system and the report was gone. Disappeared as if it never happened. I’m not a tin foil hat kind of guy, but you’ve given me much proof and no reason to doubt your story.”

Dave raised an eye brow, “Tin foil hat? Do you also know the terms BOB, GHB and SHTF?”

“You mean what I have in the back of my cruiser and what has been going on for the last week? Then yes I do.”

Both men smiled for the first time that day.

Dave went on to describe in a bit more detail including the web site that started this whole mess. Tom admitted he'd been to both but had never gotten access to those private forums and he too knew nothing about what was discussed in there. By the end of the conversation it was almost like two old chums.

Tom rose and stated, "My report will reflect that Sheila was attacked, defended herself and when she realized what she had just done she panicked and left the scene. Other than leaving the scene no crime was committed and given the thug's history she definitely had just cause. I am exercising my discretionary powers and not charging her with leaving the scene. Case closed."

They both thanked Tom and then shared that they were planning on leaving tomorrow after the van drove off. Tom offered to do the same thing with the van that he had done with the SUV but they said no that it might draw too much attention. He said a farewell and headed out to his car. As he was walking down the driveway a number of motorcycles came up the street. Obviously some type of gang from one of the big cities and when they saw Tom in his uniform they started yelling at him.

He tried to ignore it but when one of them shot at him he pulled his weapon and started firing back. The guys in the van quickly drove away. Dave ran to grab the shotgun. By the time he got out there all he saw was a single biker standing over Tom pointing a gun at him. Dave fired all four rounds at the biker permanently removing him from the situation and ran to Tom. Other than a grazing wound on his arm, and being on the ground, he was fine. Going around he made sure the rest were dead. They were.

Tom was back on his feet and told the two of them that now would be a good time to disappear. The paperwork alone would take days and being as this was a gang of thugs who shot first he had no problem with what had happened to them. But he didn't know what the government agents might report or when they might come back.

Dave and Sheila quickly loaded the M715 with the last few boxes and drove off as additional patrol cars were arriving. Tom waved the cars over to him.

They were headed for a farm outside of Wheatland, MO, about three hours away. On the way Sheila explained that it had been her father's and Karen was staying there



while she tried to put her life back together. While they still owned it the land was being leased to other farmers who were keeping it productive. Not wanting to get there in the dark Dave checked a map he picked up at gas station along the way and detoured to the Wheatland campgrounds on the north west shore of Pomme de Terre Lake.

At the campground they made a small fire and heated up a simple dinner from their prepackaged can goods. A few others camped here soon wandered by. Seeing these people were families with kids Dave invited them to join and opened up a few more cans. The parents were thankful for their generosity as they all had been going hungry lately.

“Bless you both. My kids have had nothing to eat today and we haven't eaten in two days ourselves.”

“Why?” asked Sheila.

“There is no food out there. The stores are all empty and we had to leave our home with just the clothes on our backs when the rioting started.”

The other families nodded their heads and offered similar stories.

Dave went over to the truck while they were chatting and brought back a dozen cans of corn beef hash, green beans and fruit cocktail along with some disposable plates and plastic utensils, all supplies he and Sheila had packed before they left the house.

“...it's really bad out there. Society seems to be in total collapse....”

“...our neighbors were shot the night before we left...”

“... I heard FEMA or Homeland security is setting up camps to help us out, we're trying to find one...”

“...yeah, I heard about those too, the guy who told me said they're using secured facilities, for our protection, and that these are near major transportation routes...”

“...I hope they got food and water...”

The conversation went on for a few hours but no one was able to provide any firsthand knowledge, just rumors and confirmation that the US appeared to have no government as of yet. One of the people also mentioned hearing that Europe was talking about intervening somehow. As the conversation broke up and people went back to their camp sites Dave cleaned up their area and put the fire out.

“Sheila, why don't you get some rest first. I'll take the first watch.”

“Watch?”

“You heard the people. They have no food. We do and it's not secured just sitting in the back of the truck. If we both go to sleep I'm sure someone will try to take it. Heck, in their situation I would try too.”

“Makes sense. What do I have to do?”

“During your turn just stay awake and watch for anyone approaching the truck. If some does just wake me up. OK?”

“OK.”

Dave let her get a good 4 hours in before he woke her.

“Sheila, it's your turn. After four hours, wake me and I'll let you get a few more hours of rest.”

“But that means you'll only have four hours of sleep.”

“It's enough.”

Her shift passed uneventfully and Dave relived her giving her the opportunity to get a few more hours of rest. Shortly before dawn a lone individual that Dave didn't recognize from the evening before approached the truck in a somewhat suspicious way. Dave, who was walking around their camp area, made sure the guy saw him, then moved his light jacket to the side so the handle of the gun was visible in the predawn light. The guy stopped, looked Dave in the eyes and thought better of his actions, turned and went back the way he came. When Sheila woke up Dave made no mention of this to

her.

After a light breakfast of oatmeal they cleaned up their camp site, packed up and headed out for the last bit of the drive.

Heading south down the county road that passes the farm, Dave saw a couple of black SUVs on the property in front of the farm house. Even though Sheila told him to pull in he kept driving. As he passed she too noticed the SUVs and became frantic.

“Sheila, calm down! There is nothing we can do at the moment to help her. You have my word I won't let them hurt her. OK?”

“Dave, please, save my baby.”

“I will, Sheila, I will. I promise.”

He took a left onto a state highway and drove just past a tree line before pulling over and getting out. Stay here, he said as he checked the 1911, tucked it in his belt and took off through the trees. He got about halfway to the house when he heard screaming. Looking out through the trees he could see a half dozen agents practically carrying Karen to one of the SUVs as she thrashed around yelling for help. At this distance and against at least six agents he didn't dare take a shot.

They put her in one of the SUVs and two agents got in on either side of her. The other four hung around outside the SUVs until two more agents came out of the house with a couple of boxes. They loaded them in the back of the other SUV and then gathered together to talk for a few minutes. When it looked like they were about to break up Dave ran back to the truck with Sheila and said that they have her and he's going to follow.

He turned the truck around and headed back to the county road. He didn't see the SUVs coming this way and they weren't at the farm anymore so they must have gone north. Driving quickly he soon caught sight of them in the distance. He slowed enough to maintain a visual on them but not get close enough to be identifiable. It was easy to follow as they stayed on highway 54 heading west all the way to Nevada, MO which was near the border with Kansas. In town they headed north for a few blocks and turned into an industrial park. As Dave came up on the turnoff he continued past, went a few

blocks more and turned behind another building. Again checking his weapon told Sheila to stay put. Scouting back slowly he soon found the two SUVs parked outside a self storage facility right next to the railroad tracks.

Both vehicles appeared empty but he didn't want to get any closer and risk discovery. Armed guards were posted at the entrances to the storage facility and about half the doors were open with people visible inside the storage spaces. Routine patrols of armed guards also walked the outside and inside of the 8 foot fence which had shiny razor wire at the top, obviously a recent addition he thought.

He worked his way back to Sheila and gathered some equipment and supplies having her carry some and follow him. Dave led her to the building across the street from the storage center. Using a roof access ladder on the outside of the building they made their way to the top and setup a small camp site out of sight to anyone below.

Once they were situated Dave worked his way to the edge and peeked over observing the scene below in the facility. About an hour later a train pulled to a stop next to the facility and three large storage rooms with closed doors were opened up. A line of armed guards formed a route from the rooms to the rail cars. People, Americans, were led out of the facility towards the railway and loaded into a couple of box cars. Once in they were closed up and a lock was placed on the door of each car. He noted the guards, while armed quite heavily, did not appear to be military, due mainly to their dress and lack of discipline.

Dave did not see Karen in the group. As darkness fell that evening large portable lights were turned on lighting the facility up like it was still daytime. Many of the people in the rooms voluntarily closed the doors but a few were left open. Around 10pm a group of guards went up to one of the doors and pounded on it. They yanked it open, stormed in and dragged a woman out. Dave didn't recognize her either. She was dragged off to the other end of the facility, led into a storage unit, the door was closed and shortly afterwards muffled screams were heard emanating from that unit. Sheila came to look but Dave shoed her back to their spot on the roof.

This went on for nearly an hour until the screams stopped. Minutes later the door was opened and the woman was half walking half dragged out. She was naked, bloody and had apparently been sexually abused in addition to being tortured. The guards dragged her back to the unit they took her from, dumped her on the ground in front of

the space and walked away. As soon as they left the other women inside came out, grabbed her and brought her inside attempting to cover her up as they did. They closed the door behind them.

Dave must have dozed off as a clattering door woke him up. Checking the time he saw it was nearly midnight and he had only been out of it a few minutes. The guards dragged another prisoner out, a man this time, and led him down to the same unit. Again the screams went on for nearly an hour again and the man too was bloody, tortured, both physically as well as sexually and naked. The dragged his bleeding form back to his unit and dumped the body on the ground. Unlike the woman, his 'friends' didn't open the door or try to retrieve the body. This was repeated 3 more times involving 2 more men and one more woman.

No more abuses happened that evening as the facility pretty much went into lockdown the rest of the night.

The following morning a captive made a break for the fence and started climbing. A half dozen shots ended his attempt and his life. A bit later that morning a bus showed up disgorged nearly fifty people including some kids who all seemed to want to go into the camp.

“Wait!” said Dave to himself, “This must be the FEMA camps the refugees mentioned the other day. They think they’re going in to be helped.”

Now it clicked, people either voluntarily or against their will were being rounded up at hundreds if not thousands, no it must be tens of thousands of these 'you store it' storage centers all across the country and then shipped out like cattle to centralized facilities. No, not facilities, jails. But why? Where? Did they think all of these people were responsible for what happened? Or was this some type of master plan? Or was FEMA or Homeland or whoever was running this just out of control with the government structure gone?

Regardless, Dave vowed he'd have to move quick before Karen was either raped or shipped out. He went back and told Sheila all that he had seen and surmised and they discussed options for a rescue that would not wind up with them all dead, or worse, captured. He observed the SUVs coming and going throughout the morning and finally the way to save her came to him.

He took the 1911 and Sheila and went back to the M715 and waited. Only about an hour passed until an SUV came past. He waited a minute and then turned out and followed. A few miles later he caught up and tailgated for about 10 seconds before swerving a bit and honking. Another 10 seconds and he then raced around. As he went passed he leaned over and waved his middle finger. Cutting in front he smiled as there was only one agent in there. He drove for a few more seconds and then slammed on the brakes.

The agent in the SUV screeched to a halt just barely stopping before hitting the M715. Dave jumped out waving his hands and yelling. The agent simply sat in there staring at him. Dave worked his way to the window and still gesturing and yelling he banged on it a few times. The agent still just sat there. Shrugging his shoulders Dave reached behind his back, whipped out the 1911 and raised it up. This got the agent's attention but before he could react Dave pulled the trigger. A .45ACP round to the head is pretty lethal and thankfully the windows were not bullet resistant.

At the sound of the gun Sheila got out and came around the truck.

“Quick, help me. I'll take care of him, you try to clean up the glass and blood.”

Dave dragged the body into a grove of trees and stripped it. Removing his clothes he found the agents clothes fit reasonably well. Sheila had the SUV clean enough but said he'd have to leave the window down as a bullet hole in it would seem pretty out of place.

Heading back to the facility, Sheila turned off where they had been parked before. She went back on the roof and gathered the rest of their gear putting it back in truck and waiting there. Dave meanwhile drove right up to the entrance and the guards raised the gate and waved him in without a second look.

He pulled up where the other SUVs were parked, got out and started walking down the aisles. Finally a guard came up to him asking who they wanted this time.

“We got a lead on Dave Walker... His wife, Karen, was listed as being here and I need to talk to her.”

The guard said, "I'll check the roster and have her brought to the interrogation room in five minutes."

Not expecting this but rolling with it Dave responded, "Fine." He turned and walked off to the room that he suspected the guard had referred to.

As he opened the door he could see rope, chains, whips, and various other implements with dried blood on them. He shuddered at the thought of what had happened in here as he remembered the screams from the night before.

Hearing people approaching he turned to face the back of the room, assumed an authoritative stance and grasped his wrist behind his back. As they entered he altered his voice a bit and commanded, "Leave her."

"But sir..."

"LEAVE HER!"

"Yes sir."

"Close the door on your way out."

He waited until he heard the door close before he turned around. Karen was bound to the table by her wrists and had her head down. A single bulb in the center of the room provided the only light. He walked over and undid the ropes. No sooner were they free when she launched into him. The self defense training he insisted she take was being used to great effect as Dave back pedaled.

When he saw his opening he finally caught her arm in mid swing, twisted her around and grabbed the other arm. Just in time he remembered to assume a wide stance as the side of her shoe just missed raking his shin. He hated to do it but he pushed her forward against the table holding her down until he could get his mouth near her ear.

In a loud whisper he said, "Karen, it's me, Dave. Just hold on a minute."

Something must have made it through her anger as she finally stopped struggling. He slowly released her and she turned to look at him, a stunned and pained expression

on her face.

“Dave? Is it really you?”

“Yes.”

As her voice started to rise, “But, how... Dead... I was told...”

He clamped his hand over her mouth whispering again, “Shhh they may be outside listening. We have to get you out of here.”

She tearfully nodded her head yes.

“Ok, I'm going to yell a few things and make some noise. I want you to scream as if I was beating you, occasionally throw in a 'Please no' and a 'Stop'. We'll keep this up for a few minutes and then when I shout a question at you with a threat you'll finally break and agree to take me to where I want to go. Understand?”

She nodded yes. He let her go, grabbed a whip and cracked it. She immediately screamed. He repeated a few more times.

“Talk bitch!”

“Please no, I don't know what you're talking about.”

“Oh I believe you do. Now talk! Where is he?!”

He banged one of the bloodied metal objects against the side of the table.

She screamed again. A few more whip cracks and pounding noises. Karen even got into the act slapping her own thigh a few times for effect.

Dave finally yelled, “Either tell me where Dave Walker is or I'll have a chat with your mother. We do have her at another facility you know.”

“You Lie!”



“You think so? Take a look at this.”

“No, it can't be.”

“Oh yes. Either you tell us where he is or I'll make sure she gets extra special treatment from the guards. Now talk!”

Sounding as defeated as possible she replied, “OK, I can't describe where but I can take you to him.”

“No tricks. If I don't check in every hour you mother is to be turned over for special treatment. Speaking of, it's about time for a check in.”

After a few moments he then assumed a professional voice and said, “Agent Smith.”

He paused a few moments.

“Yeah, I found her. She's going to take me to Walker. I'll call in when we have a location. Hold off on the mother for another hour.”

A pause.

“Acknowledged.”

“OK bitch, let's go.” First he tore her clothes a bit and ruffed up her hair. He then took a pair of cuffs that came with the agent clothes he was wearing, cuffed her, wrists in front, and held her arm while he opened the door with his other arm. As he expected the guards were nearby and probably heard a good part of the act, but most likely not the quieter parts.

“I'm taking her with me.”

“Yes sir. We'll have a driver meet you up front.”

Again, unexpected but Dave went with it. “Very good.”

Dave guided Karen towards the SUV parking. Her head drooped and she walked with a completely defeated attitude. He thought they just might yet get away with this.

Another agent approached them and opened the rear door for them. Dave pushed her in and then followed behind sitting next to her. The other agent went around to the driver's seat, got in and started the engine. He went to raise the window and noticed the bullet hole.

“What the?”

“Some dumb ass red neck,” Dave smoothly supplied. “He shot his granddads 30-30 or some other relic at the truck. Let's just say that hick won't be shooting anyone else ever again.” Dave added a bit of a laugh and a finger in the shape of a gun gesture while praying that he didn't look up and see the blood stains still on the ceiling.

“We can take a different one,” he said reaching for the ignition to turn it off.

“No, we need to get moving. This one is fine for now.”

“Your call, sir. Where to?”

Looking at Karen, “Speak up... which way?”

She gave him a puzzled look. Out of sight of the driver he moved his finger in the shape of an 'N'.

“Head North.”

“You heard her. North.”

They pulled out and headed North. Dave noticed the M715 parked by the side of the road and really hoped Sheila followed along but with the tinted windows would she know they were in there? Otherwise this was going to get messy.

“How far?”

He held up 4 fingers.

“About four miles,” Karen said.

At almost the 4 mile point the M715 came racing around and screeched to a halt in front of the SUV. Sheila hopped out and gesturing wildly with her hands in the air called to the driver. “Help! Help! You have to help me.”

“Ma'am, please step away from the vehicle. I am on official government business.”

“No, you have to help. There has been a break out at the facility.”

“A break out? Who?”

“Them,” said Sheila pointing towards the back seat.

The driver turned to look at them. Dave shrugged his shoulders. As the driver turned back Sheila was standing there with the Walther P22 pointed as his head. Dave pulled out his 1911, stuck it against the other side of his head and said, “It's not your day. Is it?”

He reached in and removed the agent's gun and radio.

“Now get out real slowly. Sheila, back away.”

She did and kept the agent covered from a safe distance while Dave took the keys out of the SUV. He opened the door and helped Karen step out. She ran to her mother who hugged her while Dave took the agent's cuffs, had him get in the back and cuff himself to the cargo rings on the floor. Dave then got in, pulled the SUV off the road a ways and behind an abandoned barn at the back of a field. He walked back to the two ladies.

Karen spoke first. “Get these off of me!” She turned hand held up her cuffed wrists. Dave checked all the pockets and couldn't find any keys.

“Um Karen....”

By now she had already figured out what he was going to say so she said to just figure something out while they got the hell out of there.

The headed a few miles east and then doubled back south working their way to 71. Traffic was almost none existent and after about an hour and a half of almost total silence, mainly due to exhaustion and being emotionally drained on everyone's part, Karen started getting vocal about finding a way to get the cuffs off. Sheila told her to pipe down that she's lucky they got her out of that place. They both lapsed back into silence and Dave wisely kept his mouth shut. Coming up on 44 he saw the sign for Joplin and realized they were only a few miles away. He took 44 to 66 heading west and somewhat short of the city in a still semi rural area quickly braked and turned into an auto service shop.

He told the women to wait in the truck, made sure the 1911 was locked and loaded, tucked it in his belt and got out. Walking up to the building he saw the main doors closed and the lights out. Trying anyway he gave the door a tug and found it locked. He walked over to the service doors and tried but they too were locked. Dave turned and went back to the main entrance tugging it again in frustration. Looking around he didn't see anything readily at hand that he could easily break the glass with but the thought left his head when a guy came around the side of the building in oil blue overalls. The shotgun he was pointing Dave's way left no doubt that he meant business.

"What you want?"

"I was just looking to see if you were open. I need a chain cut. I can pay."

"A chain? Looked to me like you was trying to break in. Probably steal all my stuff."

"No, really. I just need to borrow a pair of bolt cutters for a few minutes. I can pay to use them."

"What you need them for?"

Dave gestured to truck and waved the women over. They both got out and walked over. He pointed at the cuffs on Karen's hands and said he just needed to cut them off

but would be fine with just cutting the chain between them for now.

"Well, I don't rightly know now. Seems to me if the lady is in cuffs she must have done something bad. I could get in trouble for helping you."

"No, I put them on her but I can't find the keys."

The guy seemed to think about that for a minute and then his expression turned what can only be described as evil. "Well, I guess I can help but you two wait out here, I'll take her in the shop with me and fix her right up and she can thank me herself."

"No, you can bring the cutters out here and I'll pay you."

The shotgun came up pointing right at Dave, "I wasn't asking. She's going with me and you can just screw off out of here."

Dave and Sheila had put their hands up when the gun was pointed at them. The guy moved the barrel towards Karen and gestured her to move toward the building. She looked at Dave and her mom with a pleading look on her face as she started to walk towards the building. With the guy distracted as he turned to watch her walk Dave reached for his 1911.

The guy was faster and had the gun back on him before he could draw.

"I told you to screw off. Guess you can't listen real well can you. Take out the gun real nice and slow using 2 fingers and toss it this way."

Dave had no choice but to comply.

The guy picked it up held on to it. "Now, turn around and get down on your knees."

Dave did, his mind racing to find a way out of this but coming up blank.

The guy walked up to him, put the gun against his head and after the first shot Dave realized he was still kneeling but felling no pain.

Karen screamed and started running back his way.

Dave no longer felt the barrel against his skull and he turned to see the guy down on the ground bleeding from his temple and quite dead. Looking up he saw Sheila standing there with the P22 still clutched in her trembling hand. Moving quickly he got up and took it away and got her sitting down on the ground.

Karen slipped her cuffed hands over her moms head and tried as best she could to hug and hold her.

A few minutes later a car drove by heading east. It slowed down and the occupant was definitely checking out the body on the ground and Dave was sure the cuffs were visible too. As the car continued down the road Dave took it as a sign that they needed to get moving. He had Karen get Sheila up and into the truck. They both hopped in and he drove on heading west.

The rural transformed quickly to urban and on a whim Dave took a left onto Range Line road. Barely a block down he saw a harbor freight that appeared open. He pulled in the lot, handed the P22 to Karen, and locked the doors as he left the truck and entered the store. The lights were off.

"Hi. No power, here's a flashlight you can borrow," said a clerking handing him the light.

"Oh, and it's cash only, all prices are triple what they are marked. No exceptions."

"That's fine. Where do you have your heavy duty wire cutters?"

"Aisle 8, near the back."

"Thanks." Dave walked off and quickly located the right aisle. He grabbed a small and large pair of bolt cutters. While he was there he grabbed a few gas cans, a siphon, a hatchet and handful of lighters. About \$100 worth of merchandise. It cost him over \$300 but he still had plenty of cash on him.

"Any gas stations open nearby?"

"Yep. Head south a few miles. There's a few that still have gas and generators to pump it. Ain't cheap though."

"OK. Thanks for the info."

Dave headed out the door as another guy was coming in. He noted that the stranger had pistol tucked in his belt too. For that matter, the clerk never even commented on Dave fairly openly carrying his 1911. Sheila and Karen were waiting for him in the truck and Sheila seemed to have calmed down, although Dave noticed a chunky wet spot outside her door as he approached the truck.

"Sheila, how are you doing."

"I think I'm OK now Dave."

"No, you've just gotten over the shock of what you did. By the way, thank you for saving my life."

"Honestly? I did it as much for Karen as for you. He didn't leave me any choice."

"I know. You did what had to be done. I wasn't easy and you don't ever want it to become easy. Later on, maybe tonight, maybe another day, or sometime in the future it's all going to come back to you. Just remember you're not alone. I'm here if you need to talk, after all I've had to take a life also."

"Thanks Dave. Karen, don't you ever let him go. If you had any idea what he went through to find and save you...."

"What he went through? Mom, I'm the one who thought he was dead and had to bury him. Finding out he's alive and well is quite a shock."

"Yes dear, but...."

"Ladies, now is not the time. Later when we've got somewhere safe to rest we can all talk. OK?"

The both nodded. Dave put the truck in gear and pulled out heading south. About

a mile down the road the buildings stopped and he saw piles of rubble. At first he thought they were doing some rehab work but when they passed block after block of destruction he realized they were passing through the path of the tornados from a few years ago. The realization that not all disaster events are nationwide really hit home with the three of them in more ways than one.

Passing out of the rubble field Dave finally spotted a gas station that was open. Only one pump, 4 cars in line and an \$11 per gallon price tag. He pulled in and waited his turn. When he got to the pump the attendant said, cash or silver, or gold but I can't make change. Dave said he had cash and to fill the truck and both 5 gallon cans in back. Nearly \$450 later they were topped off and even got a free windshield wash for their money.

He pulled out and headed a few more blocks south to the entrance ramp to 44. Just after getting on the ramp he pulled to the side, stopped and turned off the truck.

"Why are you stopping?" asked Karen.

Dave got out, went to the back and brought forward the small bolt cutters and snipped the chain between the cuffs. "Sorry, I forgot all about the reason we stopped here."

Flexing her arms Karen thanked him.

"So, now what?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, just that. Now what? Government is gone, society is falling apart, items are priced outrageously and we have no where in particular to go. Our survival plan always assumed we'd bug in with our supplies at our house back in Atlanta. Now that's all gone and at least I am a wanted fugitive and no telling what they think of either of you. So, instead of wasting gas driving aimlessly, we need to come up with a plan of action."

"Wanted fugitive?"

"Later dear," chimed in Sheila. "Dave's right, we need to figure out where we're



going to go."

"We can make it about one full state in any direction on the gas we have, although using it all up might not be in our best interest in case we have to flee."

"Flee? From what?"

"Government, rioters, mutant zombie bikers, did I say government?"

"Dave, what kind of place are you thinking of?" asked Sheila.

"Something on or near water with plenty of natural resources. Forest, open land, etc. Preferably limited access and neighbors you can count on, or at least those that will leave you alone."

"I can give you 3 out of 4 but I can't say if the neighbors will support us, be hostile or chase us away."

"How far?"

"Probably less than 100 miles as the crow flies, maybe 200 to drive it."

"Where are you thinking mom?"

"Right after you got married your dad and I bought a vacation house in the Ozarks on Table Rock Lake. It's on a peninsula with about 2 dozen other houses and only one road in or out. They have fields and forests surrounding it."

"That sounds near perfect, can you get us there?"

"I think so. I know we took 173 for the last long stretch. It's near Cape Fair."

Dave dug out a Missouri map and laid out a course to get them to Cape Fair as Sheila felt she could find the house from there. The drive was down mostly country roads but even then nearly no other vehicles were seen. When they got below a half tank he looked for a station to fill up at. Three that they passed were closed and two more were open but said they had no more gas. Finally they did find an open station and didn't

get gouged too bad for the gas. Continuing on they made it to the small town of Cape Fair and Sheila directed them a bit south and west to their vacation home.

Coming down the last road there was a short stretch with trees on either side of the road just ahead. As they approached two armed men stepped forward with shotguns and blocked the road. Dave came to a stop well back from them and noticed more men in the woods off to the right and left also armed.

One of the guys approached the window with his weapon held low but ready.

“Sorry, road’s closed. Turn around and go back.”

Sheila leaned over so she could see the guy and said, “I live here. Let us through.”

“Sorry ma'am. I don't know you. Turn around and go back.”

“Now listen here son, I'm Sheila Parker and my house is at 137. Don and Cindy are our neighbors on one side and Mike, Melody and their son, Matthew, live on the other side.”

The guy backed away a few steps and motioned to the men in the woods. One of them stepped forward and approached.

“Lady here says she's your neighbor.”

The guy bent slightly to look in the truck.

“Sheila?”

“Mike, tell him to stop threatening us and let me through.”

“Jake, that's Sheila. She does live next to us. She's OK.”

“Sheila, where's Frank?”

“He passed away three years ago.”

“Has it really been that long since you've been out here?”

“I'm afraid so Mike. I guess I don't have to tell you that circumstances out there have not been good. Long story but suffice it to say we need to stay at our place for awhile.”

“Go, get settled but come on over to the Johnson's place tomorrow at noon. I'd say bring a dish but...”

“We have enough food to take care of ourselves,” interrupted Dave.

“Well OK,....”

“Dave”

“Dave. Then come on over to the Johnson's tomorrow with a dish around noon. We're having our weekly community meeting. If you're going to live here you'll need to pull your weight.”

“Like security rotation and getting some crops in the ground?”

“Uh, well, yeah. How'd you know?”

“Good. I'm happy to see you got a start here. How's the farming going?”

“I'd rather we wait until tomorrow's meeting so we don't have to repeat it over and over.”

“Agreed. We'll all be there.”

Mike waved them past as Dave put the truck back in gear and drove on to the house just ahead. Sheila had him drive a few more houses down to the end of the block and make a U-Turn. Back to the main road she had him follow it around in a big horseshoe to the main road just south of the guards in the woods. He turned right and headed back to the house.

“So, does this meet with your approval?”

“Yes. The layout is simple and the one road in gives us an easily defensible route. I like it.”

They pulled up to the simple house. It consisted of a main room, kitchen, couple of bedrooms and a loft space that could function as another bedroom or hobby/office area. Two bathrooms and a single car attached garage rounded out the home. The outside was fairly modern looking but the inside had more of a rustic cabin décor.

It took an hour to unload everything from the truck and put it away. Dave came across the large bolt cutters and tried them on the handcuff bracelets Karen was still wearing. It just wouldn't quite cut through them.

“Sorry honey. Looks like you get to wear your new jewelry for a while longer yet.”

“Just figure out some way to get these off of me.”

“If I had the preps from our place back in Atlanta I had picks and a book that would have told me how to get these open.”

“You mean all the rubbermaid containers of stuff you kept in the basement?”

“Yeah, those and the guns and ammo and such.”

“You know I wasn't dumb enough to leave them there when I heard you had died. I packed them and took them out to the farm. Unless the government found them they are probably still there.”

Dave's eyes lit up. “Did you leave them in the open?”

“No. I hid them in the barn. Unless they move a bunch of hay they probably won't find them.”

“I gotta go back.”

“Not now. I lost you once. I'm not going to lose you again.”

She stepped forward and hugged him.

He returned the hug and could feel her start sobbing. They just held each other while Karen cried and cried. Sheila quietly stepped out and went next door to see if Melody was around.

When they finally separated she looked at him and said, "You still haven't told me what happened."

"You sure you want to hear? This will take awhile."

"If you're up for telling me I want to know."

Dave took her over to the sofa, pulled the dusty sheet off stirring up clouds of dust in the process. They both coughed, then cracked a joke about the servants and laughed themselves silly. With the tension broken for the moment Dave guided Karen to the seat and began his tale.

He told of the accident on the highway and the abduction. He described his imprisonment and torture. Karen cried and cried when he stripped and showed her the damage they had done to his body and the scars he still retained. Putting his clothes back on, he waited until she composed herself. He mentioned the questions and the apparent mistaken identity but that no one would listen. Next was his escape and encounters with the neighbor, places around town and finally the prostitute at the bar. She wasn't happy to hear this until he described, in detail, what happened and why.

Even Karen agreed that it was actually smart to get his supposed wallet with ID and credit cards stolen to throw off the agents. He told of the trucker and the garage sales. He described his week long bicycle ride. Karen knew he should have done that ride in a day, two at most. To have taken a week spoke volumes to the physical toll the torture did to his body.

Dave continued the story with finding her mother and the agents watching her. He described the thug who had grabbed her and how he had killed him to protect her. She held him again and thanked him over and over. Moving on he added the encounter with the local police chief and the gang. Finally he described how they had arrived at the barn

just in time to see her dragged away and how they followed and watched for a way to rescue her culminating in their meeting in the torture room.

“And you know the rest,” he finished.

“Oh Dave. What you've gone through.”

“What about you? Tell me your story.”

“Well, as I was about to leave the house a police car pulled up. A cop got out and verified my ID and then asked me to go back in doors where we could talk. He told me there had been an accident on the expressway and you had been trapped in the truck which had burnt up. Eyewitnesses gave him the plate which he used to ID the truck and you as the owner. Two days later the corner called and said I could get the ashes. When I went there he handed me a container and offered his condolences. I asked if the container really had what was left of you. He admitted that only part of it was you, the rest was probably bits and pieces of the truck. There was no way to sort ashes. I just cried and cried and cried.”

“Oh Karen, I'm so sorry.”

“No, it isn't your fault.” She almost lost it again but finally composed herself and continued, “I held a small memorial and that's when mom said maybe I should get away for a while and offered grandpa's farm. I knew I could never live in the house anymore, not without you. The very next day I had it listed with a realtor and had movers out two days after that to take everything I wanted. Much of the furniture I left but all our personal stuff I took along with the preps you had in the basement. At the farm I had them stack your stuff in a stall in the barn and then when they left I piled three rows of hay across the front to hide it.”

“Smart thinking.”

“I know I never got into the prepping like you did but now I wish I had. I just hope the agents never found it. Do you know who the agents work for?”

“FBI, CIA, DHS, NSA, take your pick. I never did find out. You?”

“Nope, they never told me. I settled in at the barn for about a week and a half and no one bothered me until the day the two SUVs pulled up. There was a knock on the door. When I opened it they just barged right in and grabbed me. I kept asking what they wanted and demanded they let go. They never said a word to me. I was dragged out to the truck. I tried to get loose but couldn't. They put me in and sat on either side. One of them moved his jacket to show the gun he was carrying and the other cuffed me. That was it. A long drive to the storage place and they dumped me in a unit with a half dozen other women. We heard screams that night but had no idea what was going on. That morning they tossed us a bottle of water and a box of breakfast bars. We split them up, ate and then just waited and waited. When the guards came they opened the door and dragged me out into the blinding sunlight. When I was tied to the table in that compromising position I, for the first time, really felt scared and the full impact of the situation hit me. You have no idea the emotions that ran through me when I thought, at first, that you were going to rape me, and then found out that you weren't an agent but my husband and still alive.”

With her story out the emotions poured out with it and again they held each other and both cried this time. Emotionally exhausted they just sat there until Sheila returned.

She made dinner for the three of them and they spent a little time cleaning the house until it got too dark to see. With no power here either they pretty much turned in at sundown.

Rising the next morning at sun up they took care of their personal hygiene as best they could, had a simple breakfast and then finished cleaning three years of dust from the house. Sheila boiled some potatoes over a small fire that Dave made in the wood stove and turned them into potato salad. At 11:50 they left the house and walked the long block to the Johnson's home. All the other neighbors were also walking. Dave had the 1911 on him and was happy to see others armed but not so happy to see mostly 22 varmint guns and little pocket pistol revolvers.

The potluck lunch was laid out and everyone dug in and most went back for seconds. Sheila caught up with the neighbors who mostly knew her. Only some of the more recent residents had not previously met her. About 1pm Mike stood up and rapped on the table. In a few moments conversations ended and silence fell.

“Welcome everyone. I'll start this weeks meeting with the news that Sheila and...

“ he paused.

Sheila spoke up, “My daughter Karen and her husband David.”

“Have joined us.”

One of the new people called out, “Hey, you said no extended family as we don't have resources to take care of them.”

Sheila is a home owner here.

“David isn't. He's extended family.”

Those that knew Sheila spoke on her behalf while a few families who had wanted to bring in others spoke against. Unfortunately everyone spoke at once and no one heard anything.

Pounding on the table Mike finally got everyone settled down. However before he could speak Dave stood and talked. He briefly told his story, described what was happening out there and then said that they were self sufficient for now and as soon as he could make a day trip he could bring back many more supplies including some real weapons that he would be willing to share. A few men looked upset at the weapon comment but many more men and women nodded their heads in his direction as they knew their hobby guns would be no match against a gang or worse.

His comments seemed to satisfy the residents as they moved on without really settling the issue.

The meeting continued with Mike posting the rotation for security. Dave noted that 6 men were on duty which was nearly a third of the male force for this small community. He also heard no mention of farming or any other pulling together efforts.

Finally he couldn't take it any longer and when it looked like Mike was wrapping up the meeting he stood and asked some hard questions about food, water, power, defense and more. One guy told him to shut up as he was an outsider and his ideas weren't welcome. Dave was still considering his response when Mike again took the floor and said, “Jethro, shut your mouth.” This actually earned Mike a scattering of



applause.

“This gentleman,” said Mike gesturing to Dave, “has asked some hard questions and he is 100% correct. We do not have any long term plan. With the events going on in this country what are we going to do in a month or two when we run out of supplies? The big cities have already fallen apart and less savory elements are spreading out taking what they can where they can. I say we work with him and turn this place into a self supporting community for the indefinite future.”

Much more applause but some grumbling too. Dave spoke up next, “Mike, if we can get mostly self sufficient, then we should also bring in more people so we're not spread so thin.”

“What, you gonna bring more of your relatives in?” yelled the same guy from earlier.

Turning to look him in the eye Dave said, “No, I was thinking the family you wanted to bring. After all, we'll all do what we can to protect family over strangers. Right?”

This disarmed Jethro who wasn't expecting Dave to support him. He fumbled and stammered before finally sitting back and mumbling 'bout this maybe being a good idea after all. They all agreed to meet again in 2 days time after they all thought about their future.

Mike had Dave stay back when the group broke up.

“You got some good ideas. You really should probably be leading us. I just got thrust into the position as I've lived here longer than most.”

“No, the people look to you just for that reason. I'll be happy to help, heck even be your right hand if you want, but you need to remain as the figure head or leader or whatever they consider you.”

“I can't do this without you. Just in a few minutes you've put forth many ideas that we had never thought of and you seem to have won over some of the trouble makers in the process.”

“If you want it, then you have my help.”

“Yes I do. Now what should we do first?”

The conversation between the two of them lasted until nearly dinner as they laid out the plan for how many more they could bring in, food production, fishing and limited hunting, better defense, generator and solar power and on and on.

Mike and Dave spent a good part of the next day just walking their half mile by roughly third of a mile peninsula. Roughly twenty percent was forest with another twenty percent homes and roads and such. The remaining sixty percent would work well for farming and livestock.

The next day at the community gathering Mike had each household speak in turn about what they thought the community should do. Most of the responses matched the list he and Dave had already put together but a few new items were offered too. When everyone was done, Mike read the master plan he and Dave had constructed and noted the new items he had just added during the meeting. Most everyone was nodding in agreement and the vote was unanimous to move forward with the plan and priorities.

Dave and Mike met with the people who could bring in some reasonably close relatives to increase their local population from around 50 to nearly 100 individuals. Two groups were readied. One, led by Jethro, would travel to each relative and offer them the chance to join their community on the condition they bring enough supplies to be self sufficient, food wise, for at least 90 days and as many other items from a separate, yet to be formed, list as they could and of course agree to help with the work and the guard duty.

The other group, consisting of Dave, Karen, Bob and Dan would try to make a run to Wheatland, grab Dave's preps if they still existed and then scavenge what they could on the way back. Bob had a truck with an eight horse trailer and Dave said he'd be able to fill a third to a half with his stuff if it was still there. With no time like the present, both groups would head out first thing in the morning.

Shortly after sun rise Jethro and his wife hit the road with the other group leaving about 15 minutes behind them. Heading north on 173 they made it to 413 and continued

north not seeing another vehicle the entire time. The first sign of trouble was a roadblock on 413 coming into Republic, MO. Dave had him stop about a quarter mile short and wait. He got out and walked to within yelling distance and asked if they could pass.

A short conference was held and they said, "Sure, but you have to pay a toll."

"What's the toll price?"

"Half of what you got."

"We ain't got much."

"Well then we'll let you keep your truck but we get the trailer. After all, that is half," he said snickering.

"I guess we ain't got a choice."

"I'm guessin you don't." Again more snickering.

Dave turned, prayed they wouldn't shoot him in the back and returned to the truck. He quickly told them what the guys were demanding and then pointed out the parking lot just up ahead and told Bob his plan. Bob agreed and told everyone to get ready to shoot their way out if necessary. He put the truck in gear and slowly drove forward putting his turn signal on to turn into the lot. He did and then continued in the lot towards the guys from the blockade who were now walking over to claim their prize.

Suddenly he floored it and cut a hard turn whipping back around and heading out of the lot and back on 413 from the direction they had come. Shots rang out but none hit the truck although Dave was sure the trailer had taken a few.

They quickly found some county roads that bypassed the town and headed right to 44 taking it east. About 10 miles down the highway they saw a large convoy of hummers and larger military vehicles heading the other way on 44. As they passed the solders turned their guns towards them but no shots were fired.

Highway 44 skirted around Springfield and they could see a few larger sections of the town burnt down with some small fires still smoking away. They got on 13 and took

it to 83 finally turning just before Wheatland. They'd been on the road nearly 3 hours although a chunk of that time was spent dealing with the roadblock.

As he did last time, Dave instructed Bob to just drive past without slowing while they scoped out the situation. Nothing appeared amiss and no SUVs were in site. Turning around at the next cross road they doubled back and pulled in heading straight for the barn. Karen opened the doors and they backed in right up to the stall she indicated.

The hay appeared to have not been moved so they had high hopes the equipment was still there. Ten minutes of heavy lifting and the first containers came into view. Three more hours later they had the trailer loaded and the hay back in place just in case the agents came by again. Bob drove the truck out and parked it in the driveway while Dave used a broom to obscure their tire tracks by and in the barn. He closed it back up so it looked untouched.

Karen wanted some clothes and other personal items from the house so Bob and Dan hung around outside while Dave accompanied Karen into the house. Karen went to the room she had her things in and was boxing them back up while Dave just wandered the house. Returning to the back porch door that they had entered through, a flashing light caught his eye. He bent over and saw a small box about the size of a deck of playing cards mounted to the wall and a little magnetic catch on the door itself.

“Hey Karen?”

“Yeah?”

“Did you grandfather have a security system?”

“I don't think so. Why?”

“In that case we got to go! Now!”

He rushed in and helped her throw the last few items in a box. He grabbed two and she grabbed the third. On the way out he pointed to the flashing light.

“That wasn't there before I would have remembered it.”

“They got the place bugged expecting you to come back or even me to show up. Let's get out of here!”

They shoved the boxes in the back of the trailer just in time to see a SUV speeding down the road hit the brakes and turn into the driveway fishtailing.

Dave shoved Karen in the trailer and pulled his 1911 while yelling to Dan and Bob to take cover.

The SUV slid to a halt in front of the pickup effectively blocking it in as two agents jumped out. Dave immediately recognized one as the agent he had locked in the SUV and he looked pissed.

Dave moved away from the truck forcing the agents to get between him and Bob and Dan. One agent tried to cover Dave while the other had his gun pointed at the other two.

“DROP THE GUN WALKER!”

“On who's authority?”

“ON MINE!”

“No, you're not in charge who's pulling your strings?”

“DROP IT! NOW!”

Deciding that Bob and Dan were harmless the second agent turned toward Dave with his gun too. Moments later they both heard the racking of a shotgun and started to turn.

“No, you just keep facing me but lowering your guns would be good if you want to live.”

They looked undecided but finally one started to lower as the other spun around. As the shotgun rang out the first quickly raised his towards Dave and fired. Dave was

already diving for the ground however. He hit the ground and rolled bringing the 1911 up and lining it up the agent. He fired one round hitting him square in the stomach and dropping him to his knees.

Dan and Bob ignored the shotgun victim, as he already lost most of his blood in the dirt, and rushed forward to take the gun out of the agent's hand.

Karen meanwhile came out and rushed to Dave who was rubbing his arm. "You're hurt!"

No, I just rolled over on a rock in the dirt. He pulled his hand away and saw it covered in blood. Just then his knees wobbled and he dropped to the ground. Dave woke up minutes later to find Dan bandaging his arm.

"Take it easy Dave, you've been shot but it's not serious."

Dave pushed Dan away and struggled to his feet. He looked at the dead agent, the one he had locked in the SUV a few days ago and then turned his attention to the other agent.

"Who's running this mission?"

Silence.

Dave kicked the agent, none too gently. "Who's in charge? Why are you after me?"

"Because, Dave Walker, you know the plan."

The voice. The same voice from the torture room.

Dave raised his 1911, pointing it right at his face. "I do not know of any plan."

The agent sneered at him, "You planned and orchestrated the extermination of the US government. We have records of your screen name and the site where this plan was discussed. We know it was you. Why don't you just admit it? Even Bin Laden boasted about his accomplishments."

Dave's hand was trembling causing the gun to waver in front of the agent his rage just barely controlled. "I know what site you mean. I accessed it once and tried to register. I found out someone else already had using the online name I commonly use. I LEFT THE DAMN SITE AND NEVER WENT BACK! I COULDN'T! YOU WERE TOO BUSY TORTURING ME TO BOTHER TO LISTEN OR EVEN CHECK THE IP TRACES!"

Spit was flying from his mouth as he screamed the rest of his response at the agent. The smirk never left the agent's face the entire time Dave yelled which enraged him even more.

"Oh Screw It!" he said cocking the hammer and taking up the slack on the trigger.

As the others held a collective breath Dave lowered the weapon, looked at the agent and said, "You knew. You knew all along. You're part of this and I'm just a convenient scapegoat."

The smirk remained but his eyes gave him away and the others saw it.

"You bastards. You would have let me rot in a hell hole jail or be executed all to protect YOUR plan. You're gonna pay for this."

"You can't prove anything."

"No, but I can take it out of you."

"Yes you can. Of course the charges for attacking an agent will pale compared to the one you and your friends will face for destroying the government."

"This has to stop."

Before anyone could react Dave drew his 1911 once more and put a round right between the eyes of the agent. He died instantly with a smirk still on his face.

"Dave!" yelled Karen while the rest stood there sharing equally horrified expressions.

Dave looked from one to another until he finally broke, dropped to the ground and cried. They could make out bits and pieces as he sobbed. “The torture” “The abuse” “You just can’t understand”

Finally Bob took charge of the situation, “We have to do something. We can’t just leave the bodies here.”

Dave, coming out of a trance, seemed to finally connect with the reality around him. A reality he had just created.

“No, this is on me. When they come I will take full responsibility and accountability for what happened here today.”

“Dave, no, you can’t...” began Karen.

“I have to or I am no better than them.”

Bob looked to Dan, nodded and said, “Well, I guess we should probably head out then. You two go on, I wanted to grab a couple of tools from the barn that we might be able to use, that is if you don’t mind Karen.”

“No, take what you want. C’mon Dave, get in, I’ll drive.”

She guided him to the passenger seat, went around got in and drove off.

“What are you think?” asked Dan.

“They can’t investigate what they can’t find. I don’t agree with what Dave did but somewhere deep down I think I understand. Find a tarp and couple of shovels. My bones tell me a storm is on the way. We can use that to our advantage.”

Over the next hour they scrapped off the gravel of the driveway exposing the dirt. Carefully they dug a couple of graves, dumped in both bodies and covered them over carting away the excess dirt and leaving it in an old garden. Once buried they scraped the gravel off the tarp and over the dirt carefully shaping it to match the undisturbed gravel. A few buckets of water from the well dumped over the area blended it in nicely.



Finally Dan got in the SUV, drove it forward directly over the shallow graves. They both wiped down any part of the vehicle they might have touched, and took the rag and keys with them.

To most investigators it would appear the SUV arrived and the agents left the site via some other method of transport never to be seen again.

Gathering up some garden tools to keep their cover story to Karen intact they hit the road heading back to their homes on the peninsula.

### **Part III**

Over the next three months the country pretty much fell apart. With no one in charge, no line of succession, scores of two bit bureaucrats all claimed the presidency, some by voice, some with small, very small, home grown armies behind them. None were accepted and most ended up battling with each other, usually in words, sometimes with weapons.

Local, county and state police tried to maintain order but the sheer number of people formerly dependent in one way or another on the government for their employment was overwhelming. Many officers figuratively threw down their badges and went home to take care of their families instead.

Each step was another nail in the coffin. More unemployed meant more desperate people willing to commit crimes to keep their families fed and protected. The increase in crime overwhelmed the police who threw up their hands. Less police prompted the unsavory elements of society to become bolder in their crimes and atrocities. More bad stuff out there prompted yet another round of businesses to close resulting in another influx of unemployed, repeating the cycle.

More than the others Dave was surprised when the government didn't come knocking on his door.

Day to day the small community continued to exist. A bit of fishing and hunting along with intensive farming helped everyone with the majority of their food needs. Most open land quickly got tilled and turned over to productive use. Early on a flock of chickens was also acquired and added primarily as an egg source although one day the community expected to see at least some of them on a plate too.

The grid kept failing and returning in the early days but finally went down and stayed down. Other than a few solar panels and a handful of generators there was no power. Fuel was considered a precious commodity and wasting it in a generator just to turn on a light was almost considered a crime by the group.

Over all they held out for nearly three months completely on their own with no outside contact and while their food situation was good, fuel and some other consumable

supplies finally forced the group to head out and see what they could buy, barter or scavenge. Like before, Dave, Karen, Bob and Dan agreed to load up and head out.

Shortly after their previous return the entrance road was blocked with some vehicles arranged to look like an accident that was never cleared. Early one morning, just past sunrise, the group moved them, pulled out and put them back, waving to the concealed guards as they drove away.

Ten minutes later, after an uneventful drive down the empty two lane road, they came across the first vehicle. A late model sedan, hood up, doors open and quite obviously abandoned. A thorough inspection showed anything useful having been stripped out and a hole in the gas tank indicating even that had been drained. Not far down the road more cars and a few trucks were encountered in similar condition.

Continuing on for about another ten minutes they came to a gas station and pulled under the canopy. Like the community, the station had no power and seemed deserted. The tank covers had been removed and while there was a faint odor of gas, the tanks themselves had all been emptied. Entering the store, with both the front and rear door open and leaves on the floor, the group found bare shelving and a large dark stain, probably blood, on the floor and what look to be drag marks.

“I wonder if the whole country is like this?”

“Don’t you think that’s a bit farfetched Dan?”

“Four months ago I’d agree, now after what we, and especially you have been through I’m not so sure.”

“Guys, do you hear that?” Karen called from near the door.

They all stepped outside and could hear a sound of an approaching vehicle.

Scanning the road Bob called out, “There!” pointing to movement way off in the distance.

Dave brought up his binoculars and saw a dark colored pickup. It appeared to be an extended or crew cab model, covered in mud and with an unknown number of people

riding in the bed. He narrated what he saw.

“Did they see us yet?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Wait for them? Hide? Shoot at them? Drive away?”

“We only got seconds... quick everyone back in the store. Take cover and aim, I’ll wait out here and see what they want. If you hear shots, don’t ask, just return fire.”

Bob, Dan and Karen ran for the store with Karen yelling back, “Be safe Dave, I love you.”

Dave wished he could promise her that he would be but the rules of this new world were rapidly changing. Nothing could be taken for granted anymore. He leaned on his truck’s hood while holding his AR in a low ready position. Simply raising the barrel while pulling the trigger would send dozens of rounds at the truck and its occupants. He just silently prayed it wouldn’t come to that.

Someone in the truck had obviously seen him as the pitch of the wheels on the road lowered in frequency indicating a reduction in speed. The driver leaned a hand out the window and banged on the side a few times causing everyone in the bed to bring up weapons, apparently rifles and shotguns, into a ready but not directly threatening posture.

He noted that the group appeared to have a clue as only a few focused on him, the rest were scanning to the sides and their rear.

The truck finally stopped about 50 yards away from Dave and still on the road. He noted it as a fairly new Ram model, definitely lifted with perhaps 36” off road tires and while the original color was black, it appeared brownish grey with all the dirt covering it. The ticking of the engine indicated a diesel and he noticed that the driver did not turn it off but rather just sat there while it idled. The windows had a bit of a tint and that, combined with the dirt, made it impossible to see who or even how many people were in the cab.

Dave lifted his free hand in a wave. The driver, arm still out the window returned the wave but made no further action.

The standoff dragged on, one minute, two, three. After five minutes Dave was about to take the first action when he noticed his three companions coming out of the store with their hands on their heads. As he turned he saw two more guys, in full camouflage with rifles pointing at him approaching him from out of the woods behind him. Turning back to the store he saw two additional camouflaged guys following his friends and his wife out of the store, again rifles drawn and pointing at them.

Knowing they were out gunned he leaned his AR against the truck and stepped away putting his hands in the air and heading towards his group.

The driver of the truck finally turned it off and instantly everyone in the bed jumped out and dispersed out in all directions quickly disappearing into the woods. From the cab itself three guys got out and then the driver, a vaguely ethnic looking woman, emerged. As she approached the group Dave noticed that her features appeared to include a healthy amount of Native American. Turning his attention to the three guys accompanying her, he saw they too had prominent Native features too.

Without preamble she started, “What are you doing here?”

“Excuse me?”

“I’ll ask one more time, what are you doing here?”

“Unless you own this gas station, it’s none of your business.”

“Just as I thought. More looters. Shoot them.”

The men raised their rifles as Karen yelled out, “We’re not looters! I just need some.... products.”

The woman stopped, paused a moment and said, bring her, keep the rest covered.

One of the men dressed in camouflage grabbed Karen’s arm roughly dragging her towards the truck. Dave launched himself towards him earning a rifle butt to the head

dropping him into a semi conscious state on the ground.

The woman turned, and yelled out, “Randy, we’re not savages! Go take perimeter. Doug, gently bring her. I will have a discussion with her and there is no need for further violence.” Gesturing to Bob and Dan, “Check on your friend.”

Doug indicated where to walk and Karen did so looking back at Dave with tears in her eyes.

“I’m sorry for what Randy did to, I’m assuming, your husband.”

Karen only nodded in response.

“I’m sure we may be coming across as rough and militant however you know how the country is now.”

“No, actually we don’t. We’ve got a place about....uh, we have a place that we’ve been at for the last three months or so with no power and no contact. Even the radio stations seem to be gone as we could get nothing on our battery powered units. Our group finally all but ran out of fuel and the women are getting quite low on our products. We’re out looking for both but we’re more than willing to buy or barter. Scavenging is our last choice.”

“You didn’t say where your place was.”

“No, I didn’t.”

For the first time the woman cracked a bit of a smile and held out her hand, “Nancy.”

Shaking her hand, she replied, “Karen. Are you going to kill us?”

“Unless you do turn out to be looters, then no.”

“You believe me?”

“Shouldn’t I?”

“No! Yes... wait. Yes should believe me as I’m telling the truth, but what makes you believe that I am?”

“Let’s just say I’m a good judge of character and it hasn’t steered me wrong yet. Go check on your husband. He’ll have a heck of a headache but it shouldn’t be anything permanent.”

Karen rushed over to Dave and saw that he was sitting up and appearing mostly conscious now. She gestured and the guys in camouflage disappeared back into the woods.

Nancy walked over to the truck, picked up the AR leaning against it, looked it over and handed it to Bob. “Here, you should probably hang onto this until he’s competent to handle it again.”

Dan spoke up, “So, we’re good?”

“Yeah, we’re good.”

“If I can ask, how’d you get the guys in the woods so fast? We heard the truck coming but I can’t figure out how you got them here before you?”

“I didn’t they were there all along and called us to come check you out. We ‘control’ this area,” she said making the air quotes around control.

“What do you mean by control?”

“Consider this our hunting ground and a buffer zone around our homestead. We intend to keep out all unfriendlies.”

“You mean looters?” Dave asked finally aware enough of what was going on to join the conversation.

Turning to him, “That’s just one. There are others. How’s the head?”

“Sore. How do you think it is?” he replied with a bit more sarcasm than intended.

Ignoring his remark, she added, “We got the two bit armies, the just plain bad people and now the foreign troops too.”

“What?” came the response simultaneously from all four.

“You don’t know? Where you been the last three months?”

Karen spoke up, “I said, we were pretty isolated in our community taking care of all our own needs. Until now that is.”

“You must have been. I assume you know about the mass assassinations?”

“Yes.”

“And the economic and general collapse of society.”

“More or less, yes.”

“Well, with no established order of succession, all sorts of people tried to claim the throne.”

“Throne?”

“You know, the presidency.”

“OK.”

“Well, some tried through conniving their way in, others with a small number of supposed troops backing them. It was a real mess. Of course the criminals took full advantage of the situation. Finally the UN said enough and began putting together an international response to, as they said, help us restore democracy. In the last thirty days nearly fifty different countries have sent troops under the banner of the UN to our shores. Some actually did come to help, but most seem to be here for payback. Instead of helping the people they’ve taken over the commodities. They control the main ports, the mines, the large farms and have been trying to take over the oil fields in Texas and the Dakotas but the locals, along with a contingent of US troops have been fighting them



to a standstill. Almost any natural resource of value is now occupied by at least one country. A few reports have even said that the UN troops are fighting among themselves, along original country lines, over some of the resources.”

The four of them stood there in shocked silence until Nancy waved her hand in front of them bringing them out of their trance.

Dave asked, “How do you know this?”

“Ham radio. Amateur operators across the country are the only source of news. One of the first things the troops did was to take over the media to control the message and suppress their virtual takeover of the United States.”

“I can’t believe the government is doing nothing about this!”

“What government?”

“Joint Chiefs?”

“Assassinated too.”

“Governors?”

“Ditto, at least the ones that could have made a difference.”

“So, what happens now?”

“My guess? They all carve up the country taking a chunk each and the US ceases to exist.”

“We can’t allow that!”

“We? I’m barely keeping my family and friends fed and protected. No way I’m going to start a war.”

The conversation continued but no further progress was made and no additional information was revealed. Nancy told them if they needed to reach her to just come to

the station and tie a handkerchief or bandana to the vehicles antenna after they stop. The hidden observers would let her know that a friendly party was at the station. She'd either come meet them or make arrangements to meet at a different time.

Just before parting, Nancy suggested another possible source of fuel and supplies that she had not yet checked out but they were welcome to it for now although she also implied she'd expect the favor returned at some point too. The group thanked her and drove back the way they came and then followed her directions to a different mini mart with a couple of gas pumps and a partially filled tank.

This time they stopped the truck and immediately paired up, rifles ready and spread out searching the surrounding area before return to check the station. Two remained on guard duty while Dave and Karen tried the door. It was locked yet the inside appeared untouched.

Dave spent a few minutes attempting to open the door with a crowbar but finally gave up and simply smashed out the glass wincing as he did so. He hated to think the he was indeed lowering himself to looting but the community had need of the resources. As a token gesture he did write a note stating that they took supplies and some fuel and that when things returned to normal he'd be back to pay for them and the damages to the door.

They loaded the truck with toiletries and as much assorted food as they could. The gas tank was filled up and all the spare cans they had with were also filled. The process took a few hours as they had nothing more than a hand siphon pump with which to extract the fuel from the below ground tanks. All goals accomplished for now they headed back to the community.

Each month seemed to bring worse and worse news. Through Nancy and her amateur radio sources it was discovered that the UN had appointed an acting president, an ambassador from France, and he was to assume the role until fair and open elections, as defined by the UN, could be held. His very first acts were to suspend the constitution under presidential decree and citing security concerns as the basis. Next he enacted decrees eliminating the first ten amendments with shoot on site orders for any violators. Finally he placed the entire US armed forces under the authority of the UN and demanded the launch codes for all weapons be changed to codes that he, and only he,

had.

It didn't take long for the first few people to be executed for speaking out, in violation of the suspension of freedom of speech, and even more to be gunned down by the UN troops for refusing to give up their weapons, a violation of the suspension of the right to keep and bear arms. The blood of the UN forces began to run as a few citizens finally decided enough was enough.

Dave and Karen were working in their garden harvesting what they could for the community canning event happening tomorrow. Once everyone's garden began producing the group decided a weekly canning get together each Saturday would allow for better allocation of the equipment they had. Produce was mingled together and more efficiently prepared and then equally shared. Not everyone was good at gardening or canning, some were better at repairs or providing security or any of a myriad of other tasks the community needed done and each pulled their weight in support of their own families and of the overall group.

It was one of the runners who came to get Dave. The runner, Mario, was barely old enough to be called an adult and didn't have an abundance of skills or experience so he was put to work on pretty much any non skilled grunt work needing to be done. Right now that work was running all over the community with deliveries and messages allowing the others to continue their tasks without interruption.

“Mr. Walker, sir!”

Turning, Dave looked and replied, “Hi Mario. Can I help you with something?”

“They need you at the roadblock. When they sent me a big dark truck had pulled up and a woman said she was looking for you.”

Dave looked to Karen and mouthed ‘Nancy?’.

Karen shrugged having no idea but already removing her work gloves and reaching for her ever present rifle. Dave grabbed his and a shoulder bag with a half dozen loaded magazines and a medical kit and they headed for the entrance road while Mario took off at a trot on his next task.

Reaching the roadblock they noticed that it was indeed Nancy and what they later found out to be her brothers standing around the truck, rifles over their shoulders, patiently waiting.

Nancy called out, “Karen, Dave, good to see you once again, I wish it was under better circumstances.”

“How’d you find us?”

Blushing a bit, she replied, “We discretely followed you after you cleaned out that store I sent you to. Every so often we’ve stopped by to check up on your group but, as you said, you’re doing pretty well on your own so we left you alone.”

“What do you mean ‘Checked up on’?”

“You got two guards on the left side, one about ten feet in the tree line and another about twenty five feet in. Ditto on the right but they’re only a few feet apart but at least they’re down behind a fallen tree that they’re using for cover.”

Seeing the surprised expression on his face, she continued, “We grew up in the woods. Trust me when I say you wouldn’t know we were there unless we wanted you to.”

“I see. So I’m assuming this is a friendly visit?”

Once more she appeared uncomfortable in giving her answer, “Actually, I’m here to ask you for help.”

“Me?”

“Well, you and your community?”

“What kind of help?”

“We’ve reconsidered and are now taking your advice and going on the offensive... or as your movies like to say, the war path,” she said with a bit of a smile

and a smirk.

“And what does that have to do with us?”

“Well, two fold. One, we’d like to move some of our people here. They’d be fully self reliant and we’d actually provide you with a substantial surplus of supplies and food in return. All we ask is that are able to enjoy the same protections your defenses here provide. They’ve got their own tents and just need an out of the way corner of land to setup on.”

“Why us? Aren’t you doing better at keeping them protected?”

“Yes we are but we may be away for days or weeks and if things don’t go well we might not be coming back at all. I want to ensure that they at least have a chance.”

“Fair enough. And the second request?”

“Come with us.”

“With you? Where? Why?”

“Come fight for our country. Help us take back what is ours and drive off the invaders.”

“How can we protect your people if we go with?”

“Oh, not everyone. Just those that are willing to put it all on the line.”

“In other words, join you on a suicide mission.”

“We hope it won’t come to that but, yes, that is a possibility.”

Karen chimed in, “Just what is this offensive you’re talking about?”

“A small town a bit north of here...”

“Aurora?”

“Yeah, that’s the one. We heard the UN troops there are being quite oppressive and taking liberties with the locals....”

“Liberties?”

“Putting it bluntly, torture, abuse, target practice at best, sex slaves at worst. It’s not a large contingent but they were able to kidnap a bunch of kids and got the rest of the population to turn over their weapons in return for not harming the kids. After that it was fairly easy for them to take over. We’re hoping to liberate the town.”

Karen looked repulsed at Nancy’s statements while Dave visibly shuddered.

Nancy gave Dave a questioning look and asked, “Are you OK?”

“NO! I WILL NOT PERMIT TORTURE OR ABUSE OF ANY KIND!”

Her brothers came scrambling at his outburst thinking Nancy was in trouble but held up when they saw she wasn’t being attacked.

“Wow! I didn’t know you felt so strongly.”

Dave lifted his shirt showing just a sampling of the scars from the various abuses inflicted on him. He then broke down in sobs as he told her an abbreviated version of his story.

“Dave Walker. I thought that name sounded familiar. So, you say you had nothing to do with this?”

“Would I have said anything if I did?”

“I guess not. So, I assume you’re in then?”

“Yes.”

Karen added, “I’m not leaving his side. He goes, I go.”

“We’ll present your mission to the group and see if anyone else is interested and see if they agree to watch over your families. No guarantee but I’m pretty certain they’ll say yes. When do we go?”

“I’ll have someone check back tomorrow. Usual signal, they’ll pull up here with a flag on their antenna. Just give them your answer. After hearing the stories of what’s happening out there I don’t want to wait any longer than we have to.”

“Agreed.”

A hastily arranged meeting was setup for the next morning right before the canning session was to start. Mike, Dan, Bob, Jethro, Jethro’s relatives who had finally moved here and almost all the rest of the community showed up. Dave and Karen told what they had heard, discussed the distinct possibility of this not going well and people dying. Dave said that after what he had endured he would not sit passively by while others endured the same fate and that he was going to help.

Karen mentioned the other request of allowing a few of Nancy’s people to setup a camp in the community. The discussion quickly became heated about having to take care of outsiders but in the end agreed that if they were self sufficient and willing to share some surplus with the group then it would be permitted.

To end their part of the meeting Dave reiterated that he and Karen would be going on the rescue mission and anyone else was welcome but they had to square the possibility of not returning with their families first.

The meeting broke up so the canning group could get started but small pockets of friends and families stood around and talked. Some with tears, some in a heated fashion, others with a lot of nodding both yes and no but the words were mostly hushed and not audible to anyone else.

Dave and Karen went back to their place, loaded a couple of packs with the intent of being gone at least a week focusing primarily on food, medical supplies and weaponry and going heavy on the ammunition. Saying good bye to Sheila, Dave stepped outside to give Karen a few moments alone with her mother.

“Dave! Dave!”

Looking around for the voice he spotted Dan coming his way at a trot, “Hi Dan. What’s up?”

“We’re coming with.”

“We?”

“Yep. Bob, Jethro, his cousins Luke and Cindy Mae and me.”

“I’m not going to say I’m not relieved that it will be more than just Karen and I going but are your families sure about this?”

“You know, or actually you probably don’t, but Bob lost his wife a few years ago so it’s just him. He even offered the use of his home to Nancy’s people if they want it. I can’t quite put my finger on it but I get the impression that Bob’s not planning on coming back.”

“That’s bad if he gets reckless out there, it’ll put us all in even more danger.”

“No, not like that. Instead, I think if the mission is a success he’s just going to move on to the next town or the next place that needs help.”

“Peggy is fine with you going?”

“No, but she understands. Bob and I were both in the sandbox and saw some of the bad things people can do to each other. If this is even remotely the same then it needs to be stopped. Besides we didn’t give years of our life to the military just to let some UN pukes take our country away from us.”

“Jethro and his kin?”

“His cousins are both single and his wife is used to him going off on hair brained tangents. I’m not sure she even notices any longer,” he said with a joking smile.

“Well, it looks like our commitment will be the seven of us then.”



Just as he said it, Karen emerged from the house with her pack wiping her red and puffy eyes.

“I guess this is a bit hard on her and her mom?”

“Yeah, after all we’ve gone through these last months, it’s hard to walk away from our fragile blanket of security and head out into the unknown.”

“Hi Dan.”

“Karen,” he replied nodding his head in a polite fashion.

The three of them walked back to Dan’s place, got in his truck and waited a few minutes for Bob, Jethro, Luke and CindyMae to join them. They drove to the road block and found Mike waiting there for them.

“All of you,” he started with the tone of a lecturing father, “better come back alive. We understand your need to take care of this but we need you here too.” Fixing each with a stare he finally turned away as his eyes started to tear up.

Breaking the emotional and somewhat awkward moment, a truck took that opportunity to appear in the distance. They could see a red cloth tied to the antenna and relaxed their guard a bit expecting it to be Nancy. The truck pulled to a stop on the side of the road, the engine was turned off and Nancy and her brothers got out.

“Welcome,” said Mike extending his hand.

She gave it a firm shake and said, “Nancy, pleased to meet you...”

“Sorry, I’m Mike. I guess you could say I run things around here although it’s mostly lists and putting out fires.”

She nodded in apparent complete understanding. “Did they talk to you?” she asked gesturing towards Dave and Karen.

“Yes. We met just a few hours ago and the consensus is to allow your people into

our community and we'll help protect them while you're away taking care of the problem."

"Thank you. We have a few extra supplies I think you'll be able to use if you'll accept them as payment for this."

"Payment is not necessary as we all need to pull together if we're going to make it through this, but I would be foolish to turn down any assistance too."

Nancy seemed pleasantly surprised by his answer and lifted a portable radio to her mouth and spoke, "We're good. Bring them up."

Moments later in the distance a large yellow vehicle was seen coming down the road.

"You were expecting a yes?" Mike asked.

"Not expecting, but hoping for would be a better description. Dave has spoke highly of your group and your morals. He made it quite clear that he did not speak for you and it would be up to your group to decide but I got the impression that you have a good group here, unlike some out there."

By now the large yellow vehicle was seen to be a full size school bus about half full of people, some women, some children and a number of older people. While Dave expected them to all be Native American, most, at least visually, were not. The bus stopped and people were starting to disembark when Mike said they should wait as it would be easier to just pull the bus in once the road block was moved, unless of course they were need it back right away.

"No, it can stay here with them. Besides the back half of the bus is filled with their tents and supplies anyway. It would be good if they didn't have to carry them all the way."

Mike waved in a couple of the guards from the surrounding woods and started to push the first vehicle out of the way. Nancy's brothers quickly jumped in and they got the road cleared and the bus moving along with one of the guards riding along to show them the way. As the bus pulled away the sound of another engine in the distance

became audible. Looking back down the road they saw a couple of semi tractor trailers headed this way and Mike scrambled to get the roadblock back in place.

“No, that’s not necessary!” called out Nancy.

“Why?”

“They’re with us. After all I did promise you a bit of extra supplies.”

“A bit? There are two large trailers!”

“Oh, we have much more hidden away. Don’t worry, you’re not depleting our reserves.”

“I wasn’t worried... I just thought by a bit of surplus you were thinking a couple sacks of flour or something!”

The departure was delayed a bit while the semis and the bus were all brought in and positioned and Nancy made sure her people were well situated before she was finally ready to go. She pulled out with Dave’s group following and the roadblock was re-established.

Only a few days passed before Mike realized that this was the best thing they could have done. The older people had extensive knowledge of the land and growing food while the women and kids had the energy to dramatically increase their gardening efforts. Quickly more gardens were established and soon were producing an abundance of food for the growing community.

As they were about to leave, Nancy handed a handheld radio to Dave along with a car charger cable.

“Here. We’re on channel seven normally. We try to keep everything short and simple although somewhat coded in case others are listening.”

Only five minutes into the drive Nancy’s voice came over the radio. “Form up. D & K, don’t panic.”

Assuming she mean Dave and Karen, the seven people started looking around wondering why they shouldn't panic. Without any further warning, four additional trucks, lifted, off road tires and pretty dirty came shooting out of the woods just barely avoiding a collision with them as they got in line behind them.

A leisurely drive lasting barely an hour had them position almost a mile west of down at a car dealer. Parking the trucks on the lot mixed in amongst the ones already there provided a quick disguise, although the five lifted trucks didn't really blend in with the rest on the lot.

Everyone got out and Nancy gestured to the other four trucks where anywhere from four to seven individuals were getting out of each. All grabbed packs from the back and all were sporting rifles and or shotguns and a few also had bows in addition.

"I'd make introductions but for now the less we know about each other the less we can reveal if anyone is captured. Besides, we need to focus on the town, not on remembering names."

Nods all around indicated agreement.

Dave quickly brought up his binoculars and pointed them down the road before yelling, "Police! Hide!"

Every looked around but realized there really wasn't anywhere to go and mostly just remained standing where they were.

The police cruiser pulled up slowly turned in coming to a stop in front of the over two dozen heavily armed people.

Stepping from the vehicle, placing his hat on his head, the sheriff spoke out, "I've got a call about a large number of armed individuals causing problems."

He paused and looked the group up and down, back and forth.

"So, who's with me in driving those damn armed foreigner invaders from our country?"

Nancy stepped forward giving the sheriff a welcoming hug while everyone else let out a cheer along with some whoops and hollers.

“It’s good to see you again Witchita,” turning to the group, “Everyone, meet Sheriff Witchita. We go way back and he knows this area better than anyone else.”

Turning back to the sheriff, “So, what’s the plan?”

“Guerilla tactics. Small strike groups, hit a number of areas simultaneously and then move on. Don’t stay in one place, don’t get pinned down. Hit them and run.”

“How many?”

“Best estimates, about three hundred troops.”

“From where?” asked one guy.

“Multinational. My people on the inside say that a hard core group of perhaps one hundred or so are causing most of the trouble with the rest just going through the motions but not as dedicated to the take over.”

“Hostages?” asked another.

“Not many. They pretty much just take what, or who, they want, use ‘em and dump ‘em. Anyone they’ve been abusing at this point is so far gone I think they’d welcome death instead of the hell on earth they’ve been enduring.”

The sheriff opened his truck and brought out a map which he spread out over the hood of the car. Everyone tried to gather around but some just couldn’t see.

“Ok, back up, clear some space,” called out Nancy. “Form your strike groups, figure four to six per group. We’ll work with one group at a time and assign you an area of town to hit. The sheriff believes all the weapons got locked up at one of the warehouses by the tracks. One group will be tasked with liberating them so we can distribute to the town’s people. The more of them we get to fight the faster we can overrun the bastards.”

Dave's group of seven agreed to be their own unit and volunteered for the weapon mission as they assumed the building would be well guarded and since over half of Dave's group had AR rifles with standard thirty round magazines and the rest had scoped 308 rifles and were shooters who grew up using them since barely out of diapers. He felt they were probably the best chance at getting to them.

The sheriff and Nancy agreed and gave them their objectives and some recommended approaches along with other inside knowledge and advice.

Each group had a different area to operate in and Sheriff Witchita joined with Nancy and her brothers making up the final group.

Everyone was given two hours to get into position with the operation to commence at three pm. No one knew if the UN troops had night vision equipment or not and felt a daytime attack, while more visible, would negate the advantages of advanced equipment.

At exactly three in the afternoon a large propane tank behind the Walmart exploded sending metal shrapnel flying for a quarter mile in all directions along with a mushrooming cloud of black smoke. Within seconds shots rang out dropping troops stationed outside both the high school and the elementary school. Before the echoes died away more shots rang out and troops stationed at roadblocks started dropping.

Some returned fire but not knowing the source they were randomly firing in all directions. Others dropped for cover grabbing their radios to call for backup.

Dave's group quietly made their way along the railroad tracks coming from the east. Approaching the warehouses they were surprisingly unguarded. Twice they ducked down as a vehicle with UN markings drove past but the occupants were focused on getting to the imagined front lines to repel the rebels and not looking for armed citizens already within their midst.

They had made it almost all the way through the warehouse area without finding any likely targets when they heard a loud, 'Pssst!' Cindy Mae pointed to a building with a small silo farm outside. Just past the limited parking area a door was cracked open and a hand was gesturing them over.

“It might be a trap,” warned Dan.

“I’ll go, you wait here.”

Bob jogged over to the building, rifle ready and slipped into the door. Barely a minute later he emerged and crouch ran back over to the group.

“What’s up?”

“The guns are locked up at the national guard office. We passed within about a third of a mile of it when we came in. Back that way,” he said pointing east.

“Will they fight?” Karen asked as they jogged back east, gun fire still quite frequent all around the perimeter of the town.

“Absolutely. He said everyone has had someone hurt or killed by them and they’re all ready for payback, they just need guns.”

“How will we get the weapons to them?”

“Won’t have to. He’s going to meet us there with everyone he can round up. Once we have captured the facility they’ll come swarming.”

They made it to the large grain facility and then headed south until the apartment complex became visible. Working their way around the back of it they dispersed into the small ten acre wooded area directly behind the single story National Guard building.

Knowing time was of the essence they simply advanced through the trees until they could see the building. Sure enough a half dozen UN vehicles were surrounding it, some armored, and some soldiers still inside the vehicles.

“Is that bullet resistant glass?”

“No idea. We have to get the troops out of the vehicles if we want to stand a chance.”

“We can shoot the ones we see but then the rest might call for backup. I don’t think we can risk an attack without getting them all at once.”

They debated back and forth for minutes however no one noticed Cindy Mae had slipped away from the group until Karen brought their attention to the naked body running from the woods towards the troops. They had to physically restrain Jethro from taking off after her.

“Just wait a minute. I think I know what she’s trying to do.”

“Help! Help! They’re trying to attack me!” she shrieked as she ran towards them.

“Znow hold on zere mizzly. What’z are you zaying?” said one of the soldier in a very thick European accent.

Most had gathered around, a few with blatant leers on their faces while others looked like they actually were concerned for her.

Cindy Mae’s actions worked. The rest of the soldiers in the vehicles, not wanting to miss the sight, if not also the ‘opportunity’ left the vehicles and came over to look.

“Karen spoke first. Target the leering bastards first.”

As the first ones reached to grab her, Cindy Mae dropped to the ground, six shots rang out just over her prone form and six perverts went to join their maker. Quickly working the bolts, the Jethro and Luke made every shot count while the rest, with their ARs, started in the center working their way towards the edges of the soldiers.

In just fifteen seconds twenty two soldiers were down and the remaining four dropped their guns and put their hands on their head.

“Bob, Dan, right, Jethro, Luke, left. Karen, take the center with me, we’ll meet at doors. Watch out in case more are inside.”

Working their way around the building the two groups met in front while Karen and Dave covered the soldiers and Cindy Mae slipped back into the woods, got dressed and retrieved her pack and rifle. She took over guard duty while Karen and Dave headed



for the front of the building. It was locked up tight but carefully looking in showed no one visible inside.

By now a half dozen pickups, beds loaded with guys, were racing down the road for the building. Bob recognized the driver of the first truck and waved them in. It took just a minute to wrap a winch cable around the door handles, slam the truck in reverse and tear the doors from the building. The guys swarmed in and moments later Dave's impromptu army had swollen to nearly seventy five strong.

Each member loaded as many guns and as much ammo into the truck beds as they could and walked alongside as they headed back to town.

"Anyone! We're under heavy fire and pinned down! We need help!" yelled Nancy's voice over the radio.

"Where are you?"

"Trapped in the cemetery!"

Dave ran to one of the locals, "We need to get to the Cemetery, now!" he shouted while dragging the man back towards his truck. The man got in the passenger side and directed Dave to turn at the next street, racing almost a mile south he gestured west again. Dave went about another half mile until he flew right across Elliot Ave coming to a stop in the cemetery itself.

His group jumped from the bed and scattered among the trees and headstones. The next forty minutes were a giant game of hide and seek, cat and mouse, life and death.

Dave and company worked their way tree to tree, headstone to headstone crawling and running in order to stay under cover. More than once the slabs of granite saved them from the flying lead.

Ever so slowly, soldier by soldier he they picked them off until the volume of gunfire was noticeably reduced.

"Nancy, you still there? We're here and have eliminated some of them. Make sure you don't shoot us by accident."

“Yeah, on the west side. We’re taking cover by a mausoleum.”

“Ok, we’re coming in from the east. Don’t shoot us!”

“Just hurry we’re almost out of ammo!”

“Another fifteen minutes passed before they finally saw the structure and the attackers. Coming up from behind them it was like shooting fish in a barrel and soon all gun fire ceased.”

Dave called out, “We’re here and they’re dead!”

Slowly Nancy and her brothers peaked around the side and then came out in the open rifles ready. The even dozen people gathered around, paused a moment to ensure all were safe and then turned their attention to the new guy.

“Um, I don’t know your name.”

“Pedro.”

“Dave.”

“Thank you for coming. We thought these people would eventually torture and kill all of us.”

“Not as long as I’m alive I won’t let that happen,” pledged Dave. “Now, let’s clean up the rest of town!”

The house to house and building to building operation took two full days to complete with Dave leading many of the charges against the UN forces. By the end, forty soldiers had surrendered and the rest were dead. The pile of foreign bodies were unceremoniously burned in a large pit well east of the city.

The city cheered Dave and his army who had come to rescue them. He tried to say otherwise but no one listened. Later they found out one of Nancy’s brothers had been

shot but was expected to make a full recovery. Two of the unnamed guys and a half dozen town's people weren't so lucky. Their gunshot wounds proved to be fatal but each, if asked, would have willingly sacrificed their lives, especially after seeing the torture and abuse some of the residents had suffered. The best doctors and psychiatrists would probably never make these poor souls whole again.

Not content to stop now, Nancy's original group, now known as Dave's Army, contrary to Dave's protests, and nearly two hundred and fifty strong went on to liberate Mt. Vernon, Republic and Branson.

One evening, resting after the multi day battle in Branson, the group, all still relatively healthy, were discussing their next steps when Dave turned to Nancy.

"I need to apologize to you."

"To me? For what?"

"They call this my army but this was your idea. You should get the credit."

"Dave, it's not about the credit. It's about freeing the people. They can call us whatever they want, as long as we're fighting for freedom that's what counts. Besides, this way the enemy is gunning for you as the leader and not me!" she added with a wink.

They all had a laugh knowing there really was more truth to that statement than anyone wanted to admit.

"So no bad feelings?"

"None at all. Your actions were instrumental in Aurora and have continued to be so in each additional battle. Your strategies have proven to be sound and allowed us victory with minimal casualties." She held up her bottle of water, "Long live Dave's Army!"

The rest held up their bottles, "Here here!"

Passing through Ozark and Niva their numbers grew to over a thousand and they

set their sights on Springfield.

The battle of Springfield would become the stuff of legends. The reports were that Dave, shot three times, still apparently single handedly took out a dozen guards freeing the tortured individuals they had held captive. Reality was that three shots barely grazed him, not much more than a scratch, and the dozen guards, seeing twice that number of armed US citizens coming at them quickly surrendered to Dave. Still the stories grew and evolved and his reputation became known over a wider and wider area.

After each liberation, Dave talked to the people. Told his fully story and showed them the scars to prove it. He never again wanted to be falsely accused of toppling the government and wanted as many people to know the lengths that radical elements within the former government were willing to go.

Reports were going on via the ham operators of the exploits of Dave's Army and his story. UN commanders were quickly making plans to eliminate this threat to their occupation. The US military was formulating their own plan.

The evening after the fall of Springfield Dave, Nancy and their closest advisors were strategizing on their next step when a growing noise got everyone's attention. A large helicopter, a Chinook, was rapidly approaching and apparently making to land. The citizen soldiers cleared a large ring for the aircraft to land and the moment the wheels touched down, every weapon was raised and pointing at the helicopter.

Slowly the sounds lessened as the rotors wound down coming to an eventual stop in the departing light. The rear ramp was lowered and a dozen men in full BDUs came storming out forming a perimeter around the ramp. They held their M16s ready but not pointed at anyone, even in the face of literally hundreds of rifles pointed back at them. Down the ramp strode a man with two stars on his uniform.

He stopped at the bottom of the ramp and called out, "I'm looking for David Walker."

A man in the very first ranks stepped forward, "I am Dave Walker. Who are you?"

"Major General Allen Jones, US Army, Fort Leonard Wood."

“Where the hell have you been?”

“Excuse me?”

“While the rest of the world has been carving up our country, abusing and torturing our citizens and taking over our natural resources, what, may I ask, the hell has the US military been doing?”

“Can we talk? In private?”

“Whatever you have to say you can say it here, I have nothing to hide from these,” gesturing to everyone around him, “true patriots willing to fight and die for their country.”

A cheer went up from those around him.

Major General Jones paused for a moment then leaned over and spoke into the ear of one of his men who shook his head no.

“That is an order soldier.”

With great reluctance, he called out, “fall back” and the soldiers retreated back into the helicopter while Allen walked toward Dave with easily a hundred rifles tracking him the entire way.

“First, I want to shake your hand...” he said holding out his hand.

Dave met him with a firm handshake, eyes locked on each other, never wavering.

“Second, I am here to inform you that in the investigation of your involvement with the mass assassination and coup attempt that you have been cleared of all charges.”

A wild cheer went up among the gathering and even Dave allowed a hint of a smile to play at his lips.

Once the cheering died down, Dave spoke, “I didn’t realize an investigation was in progress. I assumed I was presumed guilty, end of case.”

“By a splinter cell that actually orchestrated the entire plot, yes. This small group was actually behind the assassination events with tendrils and agents in all branches of military and government. We’ve just lately been able to discover that they were actually acting with the secret backing of the UN all with the intent of toppling the US and carving it up for the rest of the world.”

“Sounds like they’ve mostly succeeded, however I’ll ask again. Why hasn’t the military responded?”

“A combination of reasons. With no functioning chain of command we were bound by our last orders. At least until the puppet president started violating the constitution and even worse, putting us under UN control. At that point we locked down every base and have repelled nearly every attempt by the UN to acquire any of our assets. Cheyenne went into lock down and has the nuclear codes secured away and our overseas forces have all been semi secretly funneling their way back into the country and back to their bases. We’ve exceeded 95% of our troops back in the US just this week and are ready to finally go on the offensive.”

“So what does this have to do with me? With all of us?”

By now all the weapons had been lowered and the defensive ring had collapsed down as everyone slowly crowded in to better hear.

“You, David Walker, have reached folk hero status in the country.”

“Me? Folk hero? More liked f’ed up zero.”

“You sell yourself short sir. You and your army have shown the people that they can fight back. That we can reclaim our country, city by city if we have to. In the last three days there have been over a thousand citizen armies rising up and reclaiming what is rightfully theirs. The military is about to go on massive offensive and we’d like you to formally speak about fighting back. We want to broadcast on the amateur bands and as soon as we can switch over, to AM, FM and broadcast TV. Your story, our backing up your statements with our investigative findings and the continued offensive by both citizens and military just might break the hold they have on this country. What say you?”

“INCOMING!”

The voice yelled out from the helicopter while troops disgorged from it scattering in all directions. Seeing the military panic caused the citizen army to also scatter. Allen and Dave made it not more than ten steps when a missile streaked from the sky slamming into the helicopter exploding it into a ball of fire towering into the night sky and scattering shrapnel all around.

Frantic shouting at each other and into radios resulted in utter chaos, briefly pausing when high in sky a fireball exploded.

One of the soldiers came to assist the Major General to his feet who in turn help Dave up.

“What the hell was that?!”

“Missile from a UN drone. We just eliminated the drone,” answered one of the soldiers.

Dave looked from the Major General to the soldier to his people and back to Allen.

“I’m in.”

“This is KMOV-4 News out of St Louis. For the first time in nearly four months we are broadcasting the real news. When the UN arrived under the guise of helping they took over the station and mandated what and how we report. We are thankful that our city earlier today was liberated and we can finally report the truth. We want to warn our viewers that some of these videos and reports will be shocking however we feel it is important to show what the occupiers are really doing to our citizens.”

Various atrocities were shown without the usual media analysis and commentary. Instead the media, for once reported and didn’t sensationalize.

“After seeing those I’m not sure anyone could just turn away. Reports are coming in from all over the country of resistance movements and the US military has finally mobilized and is taking part in the battle for our country. This all started with one man, Dave Walker, originally framed for the assassination plot and later exonerated of all charges, who refused to accept what was happening. He said ‘enough’ and lead the initial resistance against the UN.”

Two weeks later.

“In national news, the UN building in New York was utterly decimated today when the Air Force dropped three bombs on it sending a clear signal that the UN is not welcome on US soil any longer. Citizens and troops, independently and in joint efforts have steadily pushed the UN into smaller and smaller pockets.”

Seven months later.

“Election results, while still preliminary show David Walker with a commanding lead. It’s still too early to call however if this trend holds through the night he will be the forty sixth president of the United States.”