

Dire Situation

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Prologue

The crack of the 22 rifle was sharp in the still mountain air. There was a slight echo off the ridge just across the small draw. With the sound came a puff of feathers and the head of the red-shafted flicker disappeared as the bird fluttered to the ground totally lifeless.

The man walked over and picked up the dead bird that was roughly the size of a robin or a dove. The breast of the bird would be a welcome addition to his meal today. Even this small amount of protein would help fuel his body for another day. Such was life now after the collapse.

Chapter 1

I hate this job. And I should quit because I am hardly making any money by the time I pay for my gas to get to work and drive home every day. It seems like about half of my weekly pay goes to fuel for my pickup. To save money I did reduce the taxes that are taken out of my paycheck by claiming three for the number of dependants on my W-4 form. I am single and have no dependants and just did that to reduce my weekly tax state and federal payments. I'm not sure if that is a felony or not but I obviously lied on a federal form.

Gas is seven nineteen per gallon now. All grocery prices are very high and are still going up about weekly. Of course our government still says that inflation is less than their goal of two percent. If the government lies to me then I should be able to lie to them. Fair is fair I figure. With fuel and grocery items going up every week how can they say that there is almost no inflation? Oh, that's right they don't count food and energy (fuel) in the inflation numbers. The two things that every working person needs and they don't count them in their inflation numbers. Health care costs have skyrocketed and the government does count that, but only one third of the rise instead of the whole amount. The government's inflation numbers are completely bogus. When the government says inflation is at, say two percent the real number is actually over ten percent using the government's own numbers and the exact method they used in the nineteen eighties and nineties. So yes they are lying to us.

Am I worried about going to jail for lying about my dependants on the W-4 form? No, I am not worried. Come tax time if I owe the government money I will pay it then.

But I don't make much money and in previous years I got money back so I doubt if I will owe much if any taxes to the government. And every day I wonder if things in general will hold together until tax time anyway.

See I don't think the economy is all that great and in fact things look pretty dismal for everyone's future. Dismal enough so everything might just collapse. Technically both the world economy and America's economy is in recession right now. The world for many months and the USA just this month because our GDP has been slightly negative for the last two quarters in a row. And that is using our government's inflated GDP numbers. I think we have been in a recession for much longer if the real GDP numbers were used, not that it matters anyway. The fact is things just look bad for our future.

The Federal Reserve Bank knew bad times were coming and they dropped interest rates several times to try to keep things going but it never helped. Now interest rates are back at about zero percent again after having risen up to around two percent for a short time. So now what can the Fed do? Well they did the same as in the last recession, they started printing money. And obviously that is not working either. Though it did make our stock markets start to go up again after they had lagged some.

I think that is why prices are going up so much is because of the money printing. I think hyper-inflation is just around the corner. When or if that happens America will just plain collapse. America will become the same as Venezuela. And Venezuela has been suffering from hyper-inflation and a collapsed society for many years now with the situation here in America possibly getting even worse than there if that is even possible. I think things will get much more violent here just because the people of Venezuela had very few guns while the people in the United States have hundreds of millions of guns.

So if I think all that will happen here in America then what am I doing to get ready for it? Well I am buying and stocking as much food as I can at my place. And I had moved out of town and rented a very small house in the mountains. That is why I use so much gas in my pickup just driving to work.

I did get a real deal on the rent for the house. It belongs to a friend of mine. It was his favorite uncle's cabin and when his uncle passed away he inherited the property. Which was great for him but he now lives well over a thousand miles away and has his own house for him and his wife and kids.

So he is letting my stay in this house for a hundred dollars per month plus I have to pay the small property taxes and the house insurance. That way he gets a little money and the house costs him nothing to own. And no one knows I am renting this place so he pays no income taxes on the little bit of rent I pay him. And I keep the place up and also prevent any vandalism or theft just by living here.

While that is a great deal for both of us, the house is very small. Around seven hundred square feet but it is off-grid so I pay no electric bill. I heat with wood and even cook on the wood stove in the winter. I do have propane for the kitchen range and the water heater. It has its own well which runs off the solar setup. There is a separate small garage that is just big enough to hold my pickup and few other things.

I am big and strong and not afraid of work so I have cut an amazing amount of firewood that I have stacked up at home. The firewood cost me very little money. I got a twenty dollar permit from the forest service and cut all the wood I have within five miles or less from the house so there was little gas used for transport of the firewood. The chainsaw came with the place. Because the house is so

small it takes very little to heat it during the long winters here.

The down side is the long commute to the small town where I have my crappy job. I am a butcher's helper at the only grocery store in this town. By helper I mean I do all the work but get little of the pay. But it is a full-time job which are very hard to find and especially so in any small town. I do get a tiny employee discount on some items in the store which does help out some too.

I mostly buy things that provide the most bang for the buck food wise. Rice and pasta are mainstays that I stock up on for the bad times coming. And when we have a good sale on something that I eat I buy as much as I can at that special price. I do have quite a stockpile at home now though I also continue to add to it every week. I can never buy much all at once but I am steady with my at-home food stocking program.

As part of food stockpiling I also stock up on ammunition because I can use that to get more food. I have a few guns that I bought used for very reasonable prices. For the most part they are strictly hunting guns. I don't have many because I only bought four. I figure four is enough and because it's only four I have been able to buy plenty of ammunition for each of them. I think I am pretty well setup in that department so now I just concentrate on buying more and more food along with a few other sundry items like personal hygiene and such.

I think my job here is pretty secure even though many other people across the nation are getting laid off their jobs. Many businesses are closing, most of which are filing for bankruptcy. Times are getting harder for normal people and also for businesses. The checkouts here tell me that at least half of the shoppers use the food stamp EBT cards to pay.

In Congress right now they are working on a bill to re-vamp the food stamp program. They say it is to make it

better but I am sure it really is because it is costing so much now with so many people on the program, like half the population. I am quite sure that any change they make will be met with many protests in the cities no matter what change is eventually done.

There has now been a big change here at our store. The store is no longer sending out weekly sales flyers. No more sale items at all. We are the only grocery store in this small town and with gas now well over eight dollars per gallon I guess they figured no one would drive to the city to shop so this store has a captive customer base. I think they are correct. The checkouts are saying that people are complaining but we still seem to have about the same amount of business.

Well Congress did finally pass the food stamp reform bill they had been talking about for a couple months and the President signed it into law. It has many major changes. One change is that the cards will only work at grocery stores or large department stores that have a large grocery section. No more using the cards at convenience stores, gas stations, and such. And that is just the start of the many changes.

The cards can now only be used for a selected list of items. The list is rather extensive but contains only basic items. Most are food items of course like bread, flour, sugar, coffee, cereal, and similar standard items. The non-food items are soaps, toothpaste and brushes, antiperspirant, bandaids, aspirin, and a few other common items. The law now also states that eligible items might change monthly. This is a very big change and sure to cause problems.

The next change is that everyone on the program will have to re-apply and part of that process will be to show proof of citizenship. That is big deal.

Congress clearly stated that many parts of the new law are designed to reduce the massive fraud that the

program had suffered for most of its existence. Congress said they expected taxpayers would save considerable money as a result of this bill just by reducing the amount of fraud. I think that is very likely true except that I believe there will be no savings simply because more and more people are signing up all the time thanks to the degrading economy.

Low and behold I was correct about the immediate protests to the new law. And naturally some of those protests turned into riots. Apparently I was not the only one who expected the protests and riots because there was a massive police presence in most of the large cities. And for the first time in a long while when the riots started they were dealt with harshly by the police and quickly broken up with many arrested. And unlike in the past when most of the arrested ones were released with no charges the next day, in this case they were not released and instead trial dates were set for all of them.

And only then did we find out that there was another new part of the food stamp reform law and that was anyone getting food stamps and were arrested while in the program had their EBT card immediately revoked. Past crimes did not affect the use of the program but anyone on the program that committed any crime while in the program now would be dropped from the program immediately and would have to re-apply after completion of any punishment for said crime. So only after they did their community service or got out of prison, or completed their probation could they re-apply for the food stamp program and they might or might not be allowed back into the program. So all those arrested rioters just lost their food stamp money, at least temporarily.

Chapter 2

The denial of food stamps for illegal actions caused many more protests. But this time most of those did not end in riots. Some did though and again many people were arrested and prosecuted.

The citizenship requirement had the largest impact on the program when the new number of participants came out a month after implication of the new law with the number on the program less than half of the previous month. The authorities did say this number would rise because some were still re-applying and some had to wait to get their birth certificates to prove citizenship. They expected a large rise in participation in the following month and it should mostly level off after that rise.

It was also announced that many people were self-deporting, supposedly because of the new food stamp reform law. I had my doubts about the self-deporting part but I suppose a few might have done so. The government was correct when the following month's participation numbers came out and there was the sharp increase as was expected. And the following month the numbers only went up a small amount as they had predicted.

During this time the eligible item list was shortened a considerable amount. Also now certain price limits were in place so expensive brands could not be purchased with the EBT cards. The government said people were buying expensive items and reselling them for half price just to turn the item into cash that they could use for drugs and booze so that change was made. The government also stated that additional changes would become common practice in the following months as the new system was continually

fine tuned to reduce fraud and still supply the needed nutrition for those on the program.

While the protests faded away there was still resentment and unrest in many urban areas. Then it came out that Congress was looking at reforming many of the remaining entitlement programs. These programs included housing, Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security Disability among others. No one knew what to expect but we did not have long to wait when it was announced that most entitlement programs would have to be re-applied for and one new requirement was that in every case proven citizenship would be a requirement. Medicaid for non-citizens would still be allowed but the whole cost would have to be absorbed by the states because the federal government would no longer pay any for non-citizens but would continue to pay their normal amount of about half for citizens.

The government apologized for the hassle that this re-applying would be for everyone but also said they expected this would result in huge savings of taxpayer dollars. All entitlements would continue with no stops during this re-apply period. All participants would have three months to complete this process. In most cases the process had been streamlined and added personnel were shifted into different departments to increase the manpower to make the process faster. For the first time the government seemed to have a solid plan.

All this cost saving of taxpayer dollars was great but the yearly federal deficit was still expected to be approaching two trillion dollars even with the expected savings. And that was not the spending but just the deficit. Obviously that was totally unsustainable no matter how you looked at it. With the federal debt already at twenty four trillion dollars and this year that was expected to reach twenty six trillion, more would have to be done to try and

cut that huge deficit. The only question was what could be done.

So far the steps taken by Congress were actually tiny. Sure what they did would help but again it was just a tiny amount compared to the total yearly deficit. Could anything really be done?

I think for all practical purposes the answer was that nothing could be done. It was way too late fix the problem. Apparently I was not the only one who thought that way because foreign investors mostly stopped buying US Treasuries and instead started selling them. Someone still had to buy our Treasuries so our government could keep going and I think that person was the Federal Reserve Bank. They were already doing some Quantitative easing they said but never said exactly how much and I for one believe that number is huge. I think the Federal Reserve Bank is now actually bankrolling our whole government. No way that could last long if it was true.

Then the rising retail prices started to really take off. Food and fuel were not exempted either. When gas hit ten dollars per gallon I think everyone knew the end was coming soon. Inflation had never been experienced like this in the United States ever before in its history.

During all this time of Congress trying to cut entitlements in different ways I had continued my stockpiling of food and essential items. I never stopped or let up at all even when the stacks of those supplies were piled all over inside my small rental house.

When gas got to twelve dollars per gallon I finally quit my job. I closed my bank account and took the money as cash. I had saved up a little cash and two weeks earlier I had sent a check to my friend with my rent for the next two months along with extra for at least some of the house insurance and property taxes. Before closing my bank account I made sure that check had been cashed.

I had the house propane tank filled though it did not take much fuel. I had more groceries in my pickup and I filled its gas tank on the way out of town. When I bought the gas I also got some fuel stabilizer and added some to the gas tank. When I got home I figured I would not be going back into town for a long time. I would wait at home until the economy turned around again.

And that is just what I did, I just stayed home. Fall was almost here and the air was already starting to cool down. With no job I started hiking everyday when the weather cooperated. I always carried my small twenty-two rifle on these hikes. And I always tried to bring home something to eat. Mainly rabbits and an occasional squirrel though sometimes a grouse. The doves had already flown south for the winter. At first I did find a few berries to eat but they were mostly gone by the time I had quit my job and started my foraging. Part of my planning had been to buy a couple books on foraging in this area so I would know at least some things growing wild here that I could safely eat.

There were a few oak trees in the area and I did harvest many of the acorns. After collecting the acorns they turned out to be a lot of work but I had nothing else to do anyway. I soaked them through several changes of water to remove the tannins until the meat inside tasted sweet instead of bitter. Removing the shells was the tedious part of the process but I got used to it and it did help keep me busy with something to do that was productive.

When I baked bread I usually roasted some acorns at the same time as long as I had the oven going anyway. I liked the acorns toasted better than raw though either way they were pretty good. I ate them by themselves and crushed some to add to things I baked. I had harvested quite a lot of them though I knew they would never last me over winter because I liked eating them just too much.

The house had come with a small freezer and when the temps dropped a little more I shot an elk which I processed myself. I cut and wrapped most of the meat though I did try making some home-made jerky in the oven. The jerky turned out fine though I wished I had bought a meat slicer to make the job easier. Before the snow got too deep I shot a second elk and with this one, though I did freeze some of the meat, I made almost all of the meat into jerky.

Once there was a lot of snow on the ground things got really boring at my place. I never had any television because I couldn't get any over-the-air reception here. I did listen to the radio everyday though I only got one station to come in good. Fine if you liked country western music.

The radio provided me with all the news. Things had gotten much worse since I had quit my job. Prices had apparently gone way up but the news was not calling it hyper-inflation yet. They said the average price of gas in the nation was sixteen twenty three per gallon and that sounded like hyper-inflation to me. They said grocery prices were at an all-time high but they didn't elaborate any. It sounded like very few people still had jobs but they never gave the unemployment rate or really any stats at all, instead just talking in general terms. To me it sounded like for the American citizens the situation was dire.

Chapter 3

Before the heavy snow I had been hearing some shooting in the distance. Not shooting like a war but more likely people out hunting where there are just one or two shots at a time. Since the heavy snow has been on the ground I no longer hear any shots at all. Of course I am not outside near as much either so there might be shooting that I just cannot hear because I stay mostly buttoned up in the house.

One day I did see a buck deer out the window so I quietly opened the window and dropped him. The deer was turned into jerky with only the scrap pieces being ground up using my old hand crank meat grinder and then frozen. Sometimes I just make a little rice and throw in some of the cut up jerky pieces to add protein and add some flavor to the rice. I still have a ton of rice on hand. Well, maybe not a whole ton but I do have a lot of it. It was really cheap to buy, stores a long time, and is easy to make along with being simple to add extra items to it, like the jerky. I have many of the twenty pound bags still on hand here.

Winter still has a tight hold on the back country and I wonder if all the regular roads are being plowed out by the county. The road to my place has not been plowed and it has always been plowed during other winters. The radio plays music but there now is very little in the way of news on it along with no advertising. They do still have the weather forecasts which are nice but really makes little difference to me because I plan on going nowhere anyway.

While I do stay mostly inside I still try and exercise every day. I have no exercise equipment mainly because of space considerations in this tiny house. So it is things

like push-ups and jumping jacks and such to help keep me fit.

I tried making some buns to have with some of my ground elk meat but the buns did not turn out very well. I ate them of course because no food is wasted in this house. I will try again with making the buns and hopefully my next try will be better. If not I will just use slices of my home-made bread instead like I have done in the past. I try making different things to eat just for something to pass the time and for some variety. I do have a few different cookbooks.

I leave the radio on all day most days. Then one day the station went off the air. It happened during the middle of a song so I don't think it was planned. That was three days ago and there has been no broadcasts since. Oh well. It was pretty worthless anyway though it was kind of nice to hear someone's voice.

I think it makes the days seem longer now when I cannot even listen to the radio anymore. When not exercising I often just watch out the windows. I keep an eye out for larger song birds that I shoot the heads off with the twenty-two and add the breast meat to my supper. I have many thousands of rounds of the twenty-two ammunition so I don't worry about running out. Now after the first of the year I have stopped shooting any birds or critters so those left can reproduce in the spring. I still have plenty of the deer and elk meat.

I have a few books here and I read some almost every day. I have read all these books several times. I also completely read the labels on all the food I have left. I now wish I would have bought a bunch of cheap books at the thrift store before I quit my job. I am in better physical shape now because I often exercise just for something to do. Usually several times per day.

The snow is melting more every day now so spring is here. I still have a lot of food left but not so much variety

anymore. The radio is still just dead air. I see no reason to drive to town and check and see if things are better because I am quite sure they are not. Soon wild plants will be growing and I can start gathering some of the edible ones. I am not a gardener and I have no seeds to plant. I had thought about buying some seeds because they were cheap but this mountain area is not a good spot to grow garden plants.

I do have a cheap mountain bike and I will use that to go farther out to gather wild edibles. Also I will use the bike to go to a nearby lake and do some fishing. There is also a good sized creek within bike distance that I know also contains fish. As the variety of my food stores diminished I have started taking a vitamin every other day. I have a lot of the vitamins and I think they will help me stay healthy.

It is warmer now with all the snow gone. Green plants have not started to show quite yet but I did ride my bike to that closest lake and harvested some cattail roots. Man that water was cold. I also caught a couple fish before heading home. It was a worthwhile trip but I had to start a fire to warm up after I was in that cold water getting the cattails.

I have been doing a whole lot of thinking. I figure I am going to die. I had started with close to two hundred pounds of rice along with many other food items but the rice had been the cheapest and so I had bought the most of that when stocking up. I have also used mostly rice since this started. I have about thirty pounds left of the rice and very little of anything else. When I had seen how fast I was using up the rice I cut back. Instead of rice with meat, I instead started having meat with rice. More meat and less rice.

But even cutting way back on the rice I am still using it up and I cannot replace it. Soon I will be able gather small amounts of wild edible plants but I live in a pine

forest. Pine forests are noted as being mostly sterile; there are pines and little else here. But there are meadows and some other open areas and that is where the deer and elk feed. I will soon be competing with those deer and elk for some of those green plants.

But so I will be able to gather some wild plants but honestly it will not be enough. Yes I will gather more cattails and other plants growing in the wet areas too along the creeks and the lake. But it will not be enough. I figure I can get through the summer months just fine. But next winter if nothing changes I will die. I might die with a full stomach of meat but I am quite sure you cannot live on meat alone.

Not a very uplifting line of thought. But there is no sense in pretending that things will be all rosy. Eating the fish will help. But there again I have to be honest. The lake is quite small and has limited fish. As that fish population drops it will get harder and harder to catch any fish. The creek has some fish but those in the creek are way fewer in number than those in the lake. Hawks and eagles and other critters live here and they all eat fish too.

For right now I am fine and I am healthy and with summer it is the time of plenty. But I will keep in mind my predicament and try to figure something so I do not end up dead.

Chapter 4

Summer is here and now I am only eating meat and whatever I can forage for the most part. I am saving as much of my remaining food for this winter as I can. And unfortunately I was correct about the fish in the lake getting harder and harder to catch. So far I have just been fishing in just one spot. It has been a very good spot but now there seem to be way fewer fish here. I have never even walked all the way around this small lake.

I have ridden bike here many times on the road that is just barely a road. Certainly not suitable for a car. I have always just been on this end of the lake. There is my favorite fishing spot and then the lake shore gets marshy and that is where I gather cattails. Now I am going to explore the whole lake to hopefully find other fishing spots and just to check things out.

I haven't gone very far when I find the car. It had been driven where there was no road and it was remarkable that it made it this far. After I found the car I walked back towards the road looking for the car's tracks. I found no actual tracks because they had obviously been washed away from recent rains. But I did find evidence of its passage that seemed to have been made since the end of winter. Interesting.

I continued on but now I was way more alert and moved much slower. People meant danger. I could not really see any kind of human-made trail here but I guessed that whoever drove that car likely came this direction. It just was the most likely. I should turn around but I kept going. Maybe a quarter mile or so past the car the land

became a little more rugged and I was forced closer to the lake. And that is when I saw her.

I looked ahead and saw someone in the very cold lake. It was a naked woman. No, it was goddess. She was not in distress even though I knew the water was very cold. She was bathing but she did not stay in the water long. The air here now on this sunny early summer day was warm and I could feel the warmth of the sun on me but I knew that water was very cold.

She exited the water and sat on a nearby rock in the full sun to soak up the heat which I bet felt good after that freezing water. Yes, a gentleman would have never watched the woman but there were no gentlemen present. There was just me and I could not tear my eyes away from the woman.

After a bit she went to where she had some clothes and got dressed. She had extra clothes with and carried them to water's edge and rinsed them out. Then she turned and walked directly away from me. Naturally I followed but stayed well back in the woods. She walked a couple hundred yards maybe and then I saw the old cabin. She hung the wet clothes on a rope between two trees and then entered the cabin.

I waited a few minutes but she did not come out. I then went back into the trees farther and made a wide circle around the cabin. The only other man-made thing was an obvious outhouse. Those two structures were both quite old. I circled back to where I started and just sat down to watch the cabin. I had nothing to do anyway. So I watched.

Sometime later the woman came out of the cabin and went behind it to I assume the outhouse. When she came back she went down to the lake. I guessed to wash her hands maybe. When she was out of sight I made my move. I walked up and sat on the front step of the cabin to

wait for her with my little twenty-two rifle in my lap. I had seen she had no weapon.

I saw her coming back shortly but she was not very observant, walking with her head down following an obvious well-worn path. When she was very close I spoke.

“Hi.”

The woman jumped and looked at me. Then her face got kind of soft and her legs buckled. I leaped up and was able to catch her as she fell. She was out and I carried her small form into the cabin. There were two bunks and I laid her on the bottom one she had obviously been using. I covered her with a light blanket and just watched her for a moment. Then I looked all around at the small old cabin.

It was neat and clean inside but everything was old and rather crude. It was one open room. There was a small wood stove but in my walk around outside I had seen only a tiny pile of very old looking firewood. There were two new looking suitcases and quite a bit of new food on some open shelving. The food was mostly gallon-sized cans of long term storage food. I snooped everywhere in the cabin. There was no fishing equipment. I found no guns. There was a fair amount of food but very little was meat. There was a open gallon can of TVP which was textured vegetable protein. There were some cooking pots and just a very few utensils. There was not very much other than the food in the cabin. I walked back to the woman then brought one of the two old chairs close to her to sit and just wait for her to open her eyes.

She made a slight noise and I stood and was looking down at her when her eyes opened. She immediately let out a noise like a muffled scream and her eyes closed again. She was obviously terrorized. I had found some water near the old sink and grabbed a washcloth there which I wet down and started patting her forehead with it. I

hoped the cool wet cloth would bring her around. And it did.

Her eyes opened again and I could see her terror but she stayed awake. I stepped back but kept my eyes on her.

“Hello. I’m sorry I scared you. I will not hurt you. I know you are terrified of me and I understand that. I know you will not trust me no matter what I say. And I understand that too. I will say again that I will not harm you in any way. I think we can help each other but obviously not right away. First there will have to be some trust and that would only come very slowly. My name is Wyatt. What is your name?”

She stared at me and said or did nothing.

“You don’t have to trust me but you can still speak. What is your name?”

She did nothing and we both just stared at the other finally she spoke.

“Angie.”

“Thank you. I am going to leave in just a minute. I have only one question before I leave and it will be a very odd question. Are you a vegetarian?”

She stared at me with a very odd expression on her very pretty face. At least a minute passed before she again spoke.

“No.”

“Thank you. I will leave you now. But I will be back. When I come back I will not hurt and I will only stay with you for a couple minutes. When you see me again please don’t run or be scared. Just give me a chance to eventually gain your trust. Goodbye, Angie.”

I turned and walked out the cabin door which I closed behind me. I never looked back and walked all the way back to my bike and rode home deep in thought. By the time I got home I had decided what I would do tomorrow.

In the morning I got up and taking the small package I left on my bike again. Today I had my fishing gear instead of my little rifle. I rode back to the lake and left my gear with the bike and walked directly to the cabin. At the cabin I walked up and knocked on the door.

“What do you want?”

“Nothing. Next to your door is a small package of jerky. I made it and I think it tastes pretty good. It is elk jerky. I hope you like it. I often add it to my meals when I cook. I will stop back in a couple days. Again, I will never hurt you in any way. Good bye, Angie.”

I walked back to my gear and taking the fishing stuff I walked to a new spot closer to the abandoned car. It was a good spot and I caught three fish and left. One the way I stopped a few times and walked a loop to gather edible plants. Then I went back home.

The next two days I gather additional plants and shot one squirrel some distance from my house. I always try to hunt a mile or so from the house. The following day I again headed to the lake. Once there I headed directly to the cabin and knocked on the door.

“Why are you coming here?”

“Because we need each other. The fact is we will both die this winter unless we join forces. That is an absolute fact. It is sad or it is tragic but it is a fact. Did you at least try the jerky?”

“Yes. Thank you.”

“I have fishing gear with me today. If I catch you a fish will you eat it?”

There was no answer. Then I heard small noises from inside. The cabin door had brackets and a bar to bar the door from inside. I could hear that bar being removed and the door opened.

“I do not know how to prepare or cook the fish.”

“Thank you for opening the door. I will help you with the fish, assuming I can catch one. Want to come with me while I fish?”

She stared at me.

“Okay.”

I turned and taking my stuff I walked down to the lake shore for a ways to a likely spot. I had things ready and started to fish. I have experience fishing and this morning the fish here were biting. I caught two and stopped. Neither of us had spoken while I fished. She followed me when I walked back toward her cabin. Before we got there I found a likely spot with some large smooth rocks near the water. I stopped there and quickly cleaned and filleted the fish using a rock for a cleaning table. I handed her the fillets.

“Can you hold these for a bit while I get a fire started and ready to cook these?”

She said nothing but walked to the water to rinse her hands then took the fish from me.

I had seen the fire ring where she had been cooking. I gathered a little wood and promptly had a small cooking fire going. I had cut a couple of suitable pieces of brush to hold the fish to cook them. When everything was ready I took the pieces of fish one at a time from her and skewered them on the sticks. I had brought a couple spices with in my backpack and doctored up the fish before starting them cooking. Only then did I turn to her and start talking.

“The fish will not take long to cook. You want to bring us each a plate?”

As her custom she said nothing but left and returned with two plates and two forks. When I thought the fish were done I put some on each plate and we both started eating. She was the one who started the conversation.

“Do you always carry a gun?”

I was wearing a pistol like I always do.

"Yes, I always carry this pistol everyday for protection and I carry a rifle when I think I might shoot some game for meat."

"And have you shot people?"

"No, you are the first person I have seen in at least a year. But as I think you know any person you meet can be dangerous. We now live in a very dangerous world."

"What would there be to gain if we "joined forces" as you said?"

"You have some food and I have some food. Mine is mostly meat and you have very little meat. Joining the two will give us both much better nutrition. I can gather a lot of meat by fishing and hunting."

"So that is the only reason you want us to join?"

"Well, seeing how it is likely we will both die otherwise I would say that is a pretty good reason."

"I don't have wood to heat the cabin in the winter."

"I saw that. I bring more to the table than just the meat I can supply. I have a house with solar power, running water, plenty of firewood, plenty of gas for cooking and for added heat."

"So you would expect me to move in with you?"

"Yes. But it would be like brother and sister and I would expect nothing from you."

"So you have this great place but you have no real food. Why is that?"

"Because I was poor and only could buy so much food. I have been nowhere to get anything for a year or more so what food I had is mostly gone now."

"You had enough food to last more than a year?"

"Yes, I saw this coming and bought extra food for months as I got the money. I also hunted of course for meat and I also forage for wild edible plants in the area. As you can see I have been eating enough to live and even exercise to keep my strength up."

"So this wonderful place has two bedrooms?"

“No. It is small and I sleep in the loft. If we do this I would still sleep in the loft. It is a queen bed and room for two but you could sleep down on the couch. I will not lie to you. You are small and the couch would work fine for you. You would also have the option to sleep with me but as brother and sister.

I can only imagine how scary this is for you. Obviously you do not have to make any decision today or even this week and I do not expect you to anyway. I will come here every couple days if you allow me and I can bring you fish or other meat to stretch your supplies. Maybe at some point you will have some trust in me.”

“Obviously I can do nothing to stop you. I’m sure while I was asleep you searched the cabin and saw I had no weapons. So if you are going to be honest with me then tell me if you expect more from me if we move in together?”

“You are a beautiful woman and I am a man. I am attracted to you because of your beauty. That is a fact. If you moved in I would not expect that attraction to fade. I can say I would not act upon that attraction but doubt you would believe that. With the way you look I can only imagine how often guys hit on you. And when things fell apart I would assume you realized just how much danger you were in because you were a woman. That is why I said we can take this slow but the fact remains that we each only have two choices. We can join forces or we can both die.”

“No there is another choice for you that I do not have. You could kill me and take my stuff or just enslave me.”

“But I haven’t have I?”

“Not yet.”

“And that is why I am not pushing you but only stating the facts as I see them. I should go. You have shown me some trust by talking today. That is enough for

now. I'll come around again in a couple days. Is that okay?"

"I can't stop you."

"Please don't say that because it is not true. You can stop me if you tell me to never come back."

"Yes, you can come back to see me. But I will never submit."

"Fair enough. Goodbye, Angie."

"Bye, Wyatt."

I left thinking. She at least said goodbye this time and we did talk a bunch. I think I laid everything out for her as honestly as I could. And she had obviously been thinking about things too.

Chapter 5

Over the next week or so I visited Angie twice. She seems to be opening up to me some but very slowly. She does not seem to really fear me but more just seems resigned to her fate if I decide to attack her. But each time when I left I asked if I could return and she has said yes each time. One thing did change on my second trip and she saw that immediately.

“You shaved! Is that supposed to make me fall for you?”

“I looked in the mirror and saw myself through your eyes and decided I must look very scary. This is my weak attempt to look more normal.”

She made some comment and then never brought it up again. But the next time I went to see her things were way different.

When I got closer to Angie’s cabin I heard banging. It was strange and I assumed strange was bad. I had no rifle with me but I did have my pistol. I drew it and advanced carefully while keeping to cover. When I got close enough I saw what was causing the banging noise. There were two men trying to get into her cabin. One had an axe and was trying to chop through the only door. Both men looked very thin and the axe hits on the door were very weak. It looked to me that the axe wielder was just about to collapse from the exertion. But the threat to Angie was real and I would put a permanent stop to it.

I turned and came up unseen behind the cabin. I peaked around the first corner and both men were still in the front. I advanced along the side of cabin and this time I did not look around the corner but boldly stepped out with the pistol up and ready.

I wasted no time with talk. Neither man saw me and I shot the one closest to me. I immediately swung on the other who had the axe. He came towards me but had no chance at all as I shot him twice in the chest and swung back to the other who was now on the ground. I immediately shot the first man again twice and then carefully put one more into the second man. Then all was quiet.

“Angie, it’s me, Wyatt. Are you okay?”

“Are they dead?”

“Yes. You are safe now.”

“Am I?”

I said nothing. I took the men one at a time and drug them around the corner of the cabin. I went through their pockets and took what stuff they had on them. Each had a pistol. I set everything down and dragged them again one at a time off well off into the woods downwind of the cabin where I left them. Then I made a circle around the immediate area where I did find two backpacks and one rifle. I carried them down to the cabin.

“Will you open up?”

She was slow but she did open the door. She had obviously been crying.

“Are you okay?”

“Yes, I was able to run into the cabin and lock the door. Thank you.”

She looked down for the first time and seemed relieved to not see any dead people.

“Come inside.”

She stepped back and I went in. She then put the bar back to lock the door after she closed it. She was obviously scared. She went over and sat on her bunk.

“Have you ever shot a gun?”

“No, I always hated guns.”

“I can give you a pistol or a rifle and teach you to shoot.”

"I don't think I could ever shoot anyone."

"I can understand that. Still if you wanted I could teach you and leave a gun with you. At least then you would have a choice. Though maybe right now is not the best time for doing that?"

"Maybe this is the best time. I just don't know. I was so scared. I'm sorry I made that comment about not being safe just because you are here."

"Hey, I understand. I can leave if you wish."

"No please stay at least for a while okay?"

"Anything you want."

We just sat quietly with neither of us talking for some amount of time. I was sitting in a chair and she stayed on her bunk. Then I got up and sat next to her. I saw that she was very close to tears. After I sat down, very slowly I put my arm around her. She stiffened a bit then she seemed to melt against me and started crying. We sat there for a while and she stopped crying but neither of us moved.

Finally she straightened.

"Thank you. I want to be strong but I just can't."

I looked at her and she was looking at me. I saw her eyes were full again and about to spring a leak.

"But you are strong. You came out here by yourself where you knew it would be safer for you. But some evil came way out here and found you. But you were still strong. You did not freeze but instead ran into this cabin where you would be safe. You are a strong woman. I am proud of you."

She tentatively put an arm around me and gave me a slight hug before withdrawing again.

"I'm ready to move in with you. But just as roommates."

"Maybe you should wait. This was very traumatic for you and you are still not likely thinking clearly yet. There is almost no chance of others finding you here."

"No I am ready and while I know what you are saying is correct, I don't think I could stay here another night. And I do trust you not to hurt me."

"If you are sure I can go back to my place and get my truck. I can't drive all the way to this cabin but close enough so we could maybe move everything yet today. If you are really sure."

"Yes, please let's do it today."

"Okay, it will take me maybe a couple hours to go home and return here. Just keep the door barred and start packing what you want to bring."

So I made as fast a trip back to my place as I could and was able to drive my truck up to where Angie had made it with her car. I had brought a pair of jumper cables with and thought we should bring Angie's car back with us if we could. I had also brought something else with to make transporting all her stuff to my truck easier too.

When I got to the cabin I knocked on the door and walking inside I could see that she had been busy getting things ready. She stopped just outside the door when she started bringing stuff outside.

"You do know there is no snow here, right?"

She had seen the big black heavy-duty sled I had brought with me.

"It should slide just about as easy over the grass as it does in the snow I thought and will allow us to carry a lot more stuff in one trip."

"I'll withhold judgment until I see how it works."

She was smiling. It was great to see her smile.

I filled the big sled up with as much as would reasonably fit and with Angie following carrying a suitcase we went back to my truck. And yes the sled worked out great. After we loaded everything into my truck we headed back to the cabin with me pulling the now empty sled.

"We should try to bring your car with back to my place."

"It has been sitting there for a couple months. Think it will still start?"

"I brought jumper cables but it might start on its own I think."

Two more trips and we had everything she wanted from the cabin now inside my truck. And her car started up pretty quickly on its own. The ground was solid enough so she had no problem getting her car back to the little road. I drove slowly to my house because of the stuff in the back of the pickup. When we got there we left everything alone for a minute while I brought Angie inside my house for the first time.

She tried a light switch first and went to the kitchen sink and tried a faucet before turning to look at me.

"Everything does still work just like you said!"

"I would not lie to you."

"Does the shower work?"

"Yes and I was hoping you would use it soon."

"You're awful!" She said but she was smiling again. She is really pretty when she smiles.

We spent the remainder of the day putting stuff away and her getting acquainted with everything in the house. I told her it was her house now so she was free to look everywhere. She seemed pleased with everything. When I started to get us some supper she went and took a shower. When she came back she almost took my breath away when I looked at her. She had dried her hair and done something with it and maybe she had some makeup on or maybe she didn't need any but she was certainly breathtaking to look at. I guess I was just staring at her.

"Hello. Earth to Wyatt. Hello."

"Sorry. You just kind of took my breath away for a minute. Supper is almost done."

"Thanks I guess but I am just regular girl. Hardly a model or something."

"You are far from being regular. I will warn you now that I will likely stare at you many times while you stay here."

"I'm not going to have trouble with you am I?"

"No, you have my word on that but I will try to stay honest and say that I will likely stare at you."

"I guess not seeing anyone for a year will make the first person you see after that long seem nice."

"You are nice but anyone could also see that you are a beautiful woman."

"Thanks I guess but can we change the subject."

"Sorry to make you uncomfortable. Did you like the shower?"

"I would stay here with no food just to have a shower again. Thank you for bringing me here."

"Like I first told you this is totally a mutual benefit situation. We each brought something equal to this joint venture. Remember please, that I have been living alone for a long time so if I act weird or something just tell me. And supper is ready."

We ate and worked together doing the couple of dishes. By the time we were done it was getting about to my bed time and I told Angie I was turning in. She changed to her pajamas, which was just a tee shirt and shorts.

In the morning I snuck downstairs and was done in the bathroom and was puttering in the kitchen when Angie got up. I asked her if she slept okay on the couch and she said it was very comfortable as she walked to the bathroom. We had a very simple breakfast and later we went for a hike. She was surprised at the greens I was picking here and there as we walked. I told her that I had been mostly living off just wild greens and meat since spring. For lunch we just had a wild greens salad and a little jerky. She said it tasted fine.

And so went the days from then on. Sometimes I took my bike and went back to the lake to fish and usually brought home enough for a couple meals each time. Sometimes I would hunt and bring some kind of meat home for a meal or two. Angie always went with when I left home on foot. When she stayed home alone she made sure the doors were locked each time. I never offered again to teach her to shoot because that was her decision to make and she never mentioned it. We did seem to get along fine though she would sometimes catch me staring at her though it did not seem to bother her any.

Chapter 6

Fall came like always. This year Angie and I gathered and processed many pounds of acorns but only after she had tasted some. Once she approved of the taste she was all for gathering a huge supply. And I agreed because they obviously contained many calories and had a fair amount of natural oils which I thought was something our diets were lacking.

Also as the weather cooled I really stepped up my hunting. When I thought it cool enough I shot a smaller bull elk. This was about equally divided between being frozen and turned into jerky. Angie did alter the jerky recipe some and we both liked the result. Before the snows got deep I did kill two more elk with most of that meat being turned into jerky for longer storage and because the small freezer was pretty full already.

Then the snow really started coming down and both of us about quit doing any walking. We did start doing co-ed exercising almost every day. It was fun for both of us and kept us healthy and happy.

The winter dragged on and we were very careful with our food consumption. We did end up with a meat heavy diet. I had originally stocked a whole lot of vitamins and we both were taking one every other day to help with our health. We were often bored during winter and we talked a lot. I learned the cabin had belonged to her uncle who had passed a few years back. She had stayed with her parents in their home in the suburbs when the end times came. They too had seen what was coming and had bought a lot of food with most of it being the long term

storage foods. When the water stopped they used stored water at first then used their swimming pool for water.

Then in the spring there was a home invasion. Her parents were both killed but her father had killed the invaders before he passed. They had been talking about going to her uncle's cabin so she just loaded up what would fit in her car and came here.

I think it was getting close to spring when Angie tried the radio one day and we heard a voice!

It was a government propaganda recording but it gave us both hope for the future which was obviously the intent of the broadcast. Angie was really thrilled by the broadcast and when it ended she was bouncing around the room. She came to me and even gave me a kiss.

We had got along great from the first day she arrived but that was the first kiss that ever happened between us. I told her she better be careful doing something like that because it could start something.

"Maybe I want to start something."

"Maybe you are not thinking clearly."

"Maybe I'll just do this."

Then she gave me another kiss and it was not like the first one at all. It was a real kiss.

"You better cool it."

"Why did I hurt you? You seemed to like it."

"I did like it. A lot. But that could start trouble between us."

"Maybe I'll do it again and again."

"If that radio broadcast had any truth to it then soon we can go our separate ways and you can find a real boyfriend out in the new world."

"I don't need to find a boyfriend. I have already everything I ever wanted."

"You have just been trapped here with me for too long and you are not thinking clearly. Once you get out in

the real world again you will be surrounded by guys for you to pick from.”

“They will be too late because I already picked the one I want. Plus I know a secret.”

“What secret?”

“I know you love me. And I know I love you too.”

“Just because we don’t fight and we get along does not mean we love each other.”

“That’s true but in this case we do love each other. Don’t we? Say it.”

She is so pretty and she is sitting there smiling at me and it makes me want to grab her and never let her go.

“Say it! I know how you feel. Say it!”

She would never want a nobody like me. She is way out of my league and I know it. Since we started living together we have told each other everything about our lives. We are far apart on the social scale. She has just been trapped here with me for so long and maybe feels she owes me for taking her in or something. Someone like her could never actually love someone like me.

“Say it! Don’t make me come over there to teach you a lesson.”

She is just so darn pretty. Even after all these months she still takes my breath away every time she smiles at me.

“Say it!”

“I’ve loved you ever since I saw bathing in that cold lake!”

“You saw me naked in the lake?”

“Yes. I think I loved you since that first moment.”

“Then I am glad you saw me! I have known that I have fallen in love with you for quite awhile now. And I know it is true that I do love you.”

Then there was no talking at all for quite some time afterward. We were too busy to talk.

I guess it took a world ending event for me to find the one person I could love totally. And the fact that she feels the same way makes my heart almost burst.

The End