

## **At All Costs**

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## Chapter 1

That night Chris awoke in a puddle of sweat, sheets freezing cold thanks to the storm outside. Graduating High School two months from now, time was creeping slowly by, ensuring he enjoyed every last second of sitting in class learning Shakespeare, Algebra, and how to write 30 page essay's about nothing practical of course.

It was Tuesday morning, and the Clock read 3:58 AM, the town was still asleep, or so he thought. Preferring to not lay in the ice cold sheets again, he headed downstairs for a drink of water. The cold hardwood floor under his feet was not like this time of year. Every board seemed to creak on his way down, dating the old house that had to be built in the early 1900's. That's when he heard what sounded like a stampede of Elephant's upstairs, the rumbling sound deafening and shaking pictures off the wall. Sterling , Colorado was not well known for anything other than the small downtown strip, and mountains in the background. There were hardly ever planes flying overhead, let alone so low and close to the town. Chris ran to the kitchen to peer out the window. The house still shaking he couldn't make out any details other than darkness outside.

"What the hell is that?" Yelled Keith , Chris's Father as he ripped open his bedroom door. Chris tried to reply but it was useless as a second wave passed overhead at that very moment. Chris ran outside to see what had happened. Then once on the back deck, he saw them. Blacked out aircraft, it had to be Military , they were transport planes. There was the loud roar of aircrafts in the distance, but he could hear rustling in the woods, twigs snapping. Moving closer to investigate and make sure they weren't thieves stealing from their storage shed again. He heard a bang coming from his front street. Suddenly when he turned, in the light from the back porch he could see the air was full of fumes and he smelt the strangest smell, feeling his eyes roll back in his head he fainted. He couldn't even yell for help.

Later Chris awoke to the sounds of sirens and what sounded like fireworks in the distance, he was dazed and nauseous. It was now daylight and he was laying beside his Shed in the backyard, the grass was still wet with dew. *Must still be Morning* he thought to himself. He ran inside, to check on his family and see just what was happening. His legs were still wobbly to walk on like rubber, and pain shot through his entire body, vision was blurred. What would cause that? Did a plane crash and the fumes reached him? Was there a Gas leak on the nearby pipeline?

Inside the house there was still silence, pictures, dishes lay smashed on the floors. Front door was closed , but something wasn't right. His mom would have had this all cleaned up by now. " Mom? Dad?" He shouted , while moving upstairs hearing no reply. Reaching the top he could see signs of struggle, the bedroom was a mess sheets and blankets on the floor with some red stains that looked like blood. The door also had a red smear and a hole in it from something hitting it bluntly.

Seeing this and already having seen so many movies and T.V show's, Chris knew shutting up at this time was a good idea. He began listening for any noises in the house, hearing nothing he moved to the Living room to turn on the TV and check the phones. Dead, everything was dead. Trying one last option Chris went into the Basement and dug out an old Battery powered Radio, receiving an Emergency Broadcast.

"This is the United States Government, This is an Emergency Broadcast Bulletin. Please stay indoors until Help arrives. Stay out of the streets, avoid leaving for any

reason. Emergency services have been suspended , including Police, Fire, and Medical. Repeat, please stay indoors.” The static infested Radio still delivered a pretty clear message, but Chris still had no idea what was happening. What could create such unexplained Chaos? It’s amazing how much society relies on electricity and technology to stay up to date and informed. Chris walked out front, hoping to see someone going for a newspaper, or washing their car , something normal. Instead seeing a large orange “X” with some other numbers marked beside it, similar to what was seen in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina.

Walking back inside, puzzled and exhausted. Chris could do nothing but lay on the couch , blackness.

## CHAPTER 2

"Chris! Chris! You okay?" His friend Myles sat over him, gun in hand. Wearing a dirty ball cap, Myles was on the heavy side but pretty rugged and in shape.

Chris slowly woke, "I think so, what the fuck is going on here?" Chris asked, still doped up and nauseous.

"All I know so far is that someone invaded us, its like Normandy except the opposite. Two nights ago, I was out at my camp by the Lake so I was out of town, and safe apparently. Everyone is told to stay indoors, although anyone that has actually been seen by anyone has been collected and sent to some Camps for now, or shot for running" Myles explained while running out of breath.

"Woah, two nights ago? This was just this morning no? I only woke up a few hours ago since it happened, All I remember was ..."

"You probably got hit with that Nerve gas shit they've been using, that and Tear gas, these guys mean business. It's getting hard to tell the good guys from the bad though, even their equipment looks similar, guns I mean, and no one leaves anyone alone. I did good to stay off the main roads and stick to trails for now." Myles sat on the opposite couch, clearly exhausted.

"Where is everyone else? You alone? How did you think to come here?" questioned Chris.

"Family is gone is all I know, I was with Greg but he...didn't make it, he broke his ankle on the dirt bike when we were riding out from the camp, and we got rushed by a group of them, I had to leave him. I had no choice...and your my best friend in this shithole of a town, I had to see if you were here somehow." Myles explained, hands shaking and eyes red.

Chris didn't speak for a couple minutes, trying to process what had just been fed to him, shocked at how he slept not just through the day but through the entire day before also. Strangely still wanting to sleep even more. Confused at who was attacking the Country and who to trust. By the sounds of things, they were on their own, help wasn't actually help at this time.

"You got any weapons here? Y'know in case we need to fuck someone up ? We need to get supplies. We can't stay here, they are making rounds checking for stragglers and loose ends." Myles mentioned with a grin, yet still sad look inside his eyes. Trying to be strong in a time when no one really would be, especially an 18 year old.

"My Dad has a couple rifles I think, I'll have to check, I've never actually hurt anyone before...well physically." Chris replied with regret and concern.

"There's a first for everything bud! Gotta do what you gotta do."

They both headed to the basement to check for the guns, once they got to the last step they could clearly see the gun rack was broken into and emptied. They really wanted to prevent anyone surviving on their own, or putting up a fight. This was beyond well executed, minus the fact Chris remained hidden beside a shed for two days from them.

"Shit! Now what are we supposed to do? These aren't zombies where an axe and a stick will do." Chris said with sarcasm.

"Well we at least should grab food and water, some clothes, pack light we don't know how long we we'll be on our feet" replied Myles.

Chris grabbed two duffle bags from the basement and began packing some changes of clothes, 6 pairs of socks, canned food, boxes of crackers, whatever was left of the bread, and a couple knives he kept in his underwear drawer. They hit the road merely an hour after Myle's woke him up from his nap. Heading straight through the back woods to the Gas Pipeline nearby, seemed like a good enough trail to start heading North towards the edge of town. Their next goal was to try and find some stores that they could possibly find some supplies or weapons at, and obviously to figure what the hell was happening out there. Normally the woods were thick and hard to walk through, but there had been so much foot traffic through there recently it looked like there was a herd of Moose parading through there just minutes before.

The pipeline was business as usual strangely, birds chirping, the odd deer or porcupine, just Nature. Makes you realize how actually unimportant humans are to the world, the Animals are probably hoping we kill ourselves off. Honestly, seeing how things are these days, I think we would be doing them a favour, sad how we have the power to create and help so much and we turn around and destroy things for profit instead. There was a lot of time to reflect and think on the 20 mile hike they had to make it to town. Myles really didn't say much, most likely wondering like Chris where his family is. Were they safe? Just such a helpless feeling.

"Beautiful day at least, huh?" Said Myles smugly, to try and break the awkward silence.

"I wonder what they want?" asked Chris.

"Shit, I don't know, I suppose they heard about how great 'Murica is? Heard about the giant burgers and ass load of guns, and American cars of course!" Replied Myles with a redneck accent.

"First of all, all the cars and everything are built in China now, and I bet they just heard that's how we eat and live so we would probably be easy to take over. Honestly, they would be right for the most part. I wonder who it is, the Russian's? The Chinese? It's someone with SERIOUS military and backing. I've never heard so many aircraft in my life as that night, imagine how many cities that was over?"

There was no conversation after that, just thinking, lots of thinking and walking. Things went from Chris being a High School senior about to finally see his hard work of sitting through bullshit lesson after bullshit lesson to pay off. All the years of learning Spanish, Algebra, Ratios, Poetry, and American History wouldn't help him now. Good thing his Father and Uncle's all were avid Campers and hunters so he grew up learning some outdoor skills. He never enjoyed hunting though, he did it but with regret every time, and would avoid it whenever he could. The thought of killing an innocent animal for almost sport, when they could buy that same product at the store seemed unnecessary. Understanding now he may have to get used to hunting, and killing for that matter...maybe even a Human being.

Myles crouched down, holding up his fist motioning Chris to stop and get down. "Shhh, get down!" he whispered. "Over there, I heard something..." The moon was fairly covered by the cloudy night sky, so visibility was limited. They could hear a man moaning and groaning in the distance, he sounded in pain.

"We have to check it out, someone could be hurt" Chris started running, Myles followed. "HELLO? Where are you? We're not looking for trouble!" The man fell in silence, had he succumbed to injury? They kept running through the woods, and found him. Unconscious and bloody, his right leg was covered in red, and his left ear was half

missing. You could smell the blood, and the flies had already started flying around. Myles pulled out some water and splashed the man's face, the man awoke shaking and startled.

"W-who are you? Leave me alone!!" Screamed the man out of shock and fear.

"Calm down, were here to help, we were just walking trying to stay alive and head to town. I'm Myles and that's Chris."

"They...the military wouldn't let me go from a roadblock, I was with my friends. They were loading us up in trucks...I tried to get away..but .." He coughed and gagged , blood putruding from his lips . He was now clearly bleeding from his chest, lungs must have been taking in blood. " All I remember was hearing gun shots...I felt sharp pains in my leg, and lost my hearing, but kept running.." His head fell back on the stump he laid against as if he was laying on a pillow.

"Well we will try and get you close to the town, Myles grab his arms I'll get his legs!"

"No! There's no use, I've been here all day, lost too much blood, I'm done...Just stay away from the..." He stopped talking...and breathing. Chris and Myles looked at each other, both not sure how to feel, or who this man was saying to stay away from. They could almost feel the life leaving his body, the feeling made them both sick inside.

"What did he mean? Stay away from who? The military... The invading military, or our own?" Asked Chris over his shoulder, in a shaky and puzzled voice.

"He's probably just delirious from all the blood he lost...you'd be surprised what that can do to someones brain...fuck all kinds of things up. He clearly means the enemy, terrorists whatever they call them." Explained Myles sounding doubtful of every fucking word he just said.

" Really ? I think he was just trying to get one last meaningful message out...that's his deathbed confession, his choice of words could have two very different meanings. " Shouted Chris now clearly pissed off. "And we won't know, until we find out the hard way!"

"Look man, things are all kinds of fucked up right now, but this is still the USA, and we will just head to town and find out where we should go from there. That's all we can do, worrying won't fix shit, just drive us crazy." Myles tried to reassure himself. "We should get moving, It's getting late...probably a good time to avoid being seen though, keep the flashlights off."

Could the "insurgents" who were based out of caves in the desert, really take the US by such surprise with such force? Seemed unlikely, it had to be a group of Nations behind this , or something.

It was now almost Midnight according to his Timex, cheap but one of the few things that still actually worked. The town was just ahead across a field. There was only one gun store in town, but Myles' Uncle owned a pharmacy/convenience store and always kept a couple guns around incase of Robbery's and just because he loved guns, and beer. Heading into the town they could see a truckload of what looked like a SWAT team clearing an apartment complex up the road. They needed to be quick, and quiet whatever they were doing.

The Sterling Gun Store was just ahead on the right, all the street lights were out on the street. But spotlights quickly lit the area as they scanned from the next road over where they were clearing buildings. Making their way to the Gun store, they went around back. The windows were already smashed out and the door laid open. "Shit,

someone already cleared it out I bet” Said Myles.

“Let’s check it out, be quiet man.” Chris replied as he approached the door.

There was a strong copper like smell coming from inside, then as they moved further the kind of stench you cannot deny or forget. Death, there was two dead men laying in the middle of the floor. Red puddles surrounded them, making a slippery and disgusting surface to walk on with the hardwood underneath. Suddenly the spotlights shone through the front windows, startled them , they tried to duck out of sight. Chris slipping in the puddle of blood tried grabbing at the shelves on the wall to keep from falling, instead pulling them and the boxes that laid on top of them down with him. In a loud crashing sound, there was apparently a patrol sitting just outside the store.

“In the gun store! Move in and clear it!” Yelled a Soldier from outside.

Footsteps pounded up the front steps, They had to move now and fast. Myles helped Chris up and the boys ran out the back towards his Uncle’s store. Flashlights almost catching them as they fled, but thankfully missing them, not revealing where they were headed. They stopped just outside the Pharmacy looking back at the gun store to see it consumed with Flashlights and men armed to the teeth. The Store was all locked up but Myles had a key, he worked there part-time whenever his Uncle needed help to make some extra money, if he wanted to have any kind of fun in that town , he needed money. Both High school seniors, the boy’s were close, growing up together since Elementary. This is an unimaginable scenario, but they were glad to at least have each other for now.

The store sat silent, it was ransacked a bit but lots remained. Most people must have been snatched up immediately that night no time for a lot of people to raid everything.” How nice of them to leave us some stuff” Chris said sarcastically. Behind the counter under the till his Uncle kept a .357 Magnum and there were two boxes of ammunition on top of the cigarette shelf. And in a cabinet in the lunch room he had his Winchester Rifle locked up with a couple boxes of ammo also. “Fuckin ‘Eh, this should do for now! We need to grab some stuff like Meds too!” they grabbed a bit more food and Myles loaded up on cigarettes and lighters, Chris didn’t smoke. The Pharmacy part remained fairly intact, they made sure to grab some basic stuff like antibiotics, antiseptic wipes, band aids, peroxide, gauze and wrap.

“Alright now let’s get the hell out of here, we don’t need any more close calls tonight” Whispered Myles as he threw the bag over his shoulder. They had to keep moving , it wouldn’t be long before the patrols would be around. They set off again into the nearby woods. After about 3 miles of walking, they found a spot to rest for the night, a small clearing by a creek. The sound of the water running kept it from being silent enough to hear the action off in the distance. This was another chance to sit and think ...Chris thought about the dying man’s warning.

### Chapter 3

Daylight came fast, Myles already was up eating some crackers. "We should get ready to leave soon, make our way north, aim for the mountains for now...". Neither of them really knew what was going on or who they could trust, or even where they could go safely.

Chris wiped the cold from his eyes, "I'm starting to think Canada doesn't sound so bad, we have to be prepared to do something drastic...I have a feeling this thing is far from over."

"I hear ya, for now we don't trust anyone, stay to ourselves and stay alive. Stick the back roads that we know, whoever invaded doesn't know these woods like we do. Bring it bitches!" Said Myles as he stood up in a fighting stance.

"Ha, Easy tiger, we'll take it as it comes, for all we know we'll get to Boulder and things will be back to normal somehow."

They loaded up there bags and began heading back to the Pipeline, and started travelling North. After what felt like 50 miles of walking on this hot muggy day, with very little actual food in their stomachs. They reached a point where the pipeline bends east away from the mountains, but was intersected by a side road. Normally a less travelled road there was very recent and quite a few sets of tire tracks. There was still dust kicked up in the air, you could taste and feel the sand in between your teeth.

"We're not the only ones heading this way...keeps your eyes peeled stick to the side of the road." Myles yelled ahead to Chris.

*Who was up here?* Chris wondered. The road had a few rolling hills, so really there was no telling what was just up the road. It gave the illusion of being in the desert at this point, so hot and dust in the air. The rocks underneath were starting to irritate their feet in sneakers. After conquering the first big uphill hike, they finally reached a downhill slope with relief. They made it to the bottom of the hill and started the climb on the next one, looking up in despair and exhaustion Chris saw a glimmer of light. It looked like a mirror, maybe a piece of metal or something? "Hey do you see..." The first shot was fired, hitting a rock just below Chris' feet and shattering it. Both boys dived to the right side of the road, and dashed into the woods being chased by 6 shots. Myles trailing behind could feel a warm stream of what he thought was water hitting his face. "Agh! Fuck my arm !" Chris yelled. A bullet grazed through his shoulder exposing flesh, and splattering the bushes surrounding him in blood spatter. Maybe it would have been cleaner if it just went through his shoulder but it grazed enough to rip away a flap of skin, *worst case scenario* he tried to laugh to himself.

"Keep moving! You'll be fine, we'll check it out up here. I don't know who the fuck that was!"

"They stopped shooting, fuck was that a hunter maybe? Did they think we were deer?"

"Pfft, not a chance...I don't know who that was but they knew what they were shooting at, and they almost had us. Hopefully they keep moving up the road. We should wait it out down here, we can't go back." Myles stated trying to sound calm.

"Shit I don't feel so good.." Chris started to feel flush in the face, after looking at his skin dangling on his arm. "I gotta lay down man." Myles pulled Chris' good arm over his shoulders, and began carrying him further into the woods. Stopping in a small clearing, he laid him down against a downed tree. Chris was out like a light, Myles began pouring



Peroxide on the wound to clean it. Chris woke up screaming in pain.

"Shit shut the fuck up ! There goes any hopes of them thinking we're dead. I know it hurts man, but it has to be done. Survival!"

"I know..." Chris said apologetically but still in pain, sweating profusely and shaking.

Myles had time to stitch up the wound as best he knew how, and wrapped his shoulder up. "Oh no...I think we're in trouble.."

The sounds of Branches breaking and and Dog's barking started coming down the hill. They were coming through the woods, and they didn't seem too friendly so far.

"Shit, Lets try and get back to the road, head to the other side and throw them off.." Chris suggested.

"Well we have to try now don't we? " They started running towards the road. Stopping in their tracks, twenty feet ahead stood two men with rifles drawn, and more with dogs flanking them.

"That's far enough assholes ! Put down your guns and put your hands up where I can see 'em!" Shouted a man wearing Hunting camouflage , who had shoulders as wide as a bear. Game over, what would they do without weapons now?

"We're just trying to be on our way...not looking for any trouble!" Chris yelled.

" Yeah that's not the first time I've heard that today boys, your coming with us." They were now surrounded with some ferocious German Shepards and a rottweiler who almost looked rabid. You would think they have been living like this for years, but it was only a few days. Amazing how things change when the rules are thrown out the window. They finally made it back to the dusty rock infested road, made the up hill climb. A convoy of three trucks headed down the hill towards them, stopping just ahead of them.

"Get in the truck shitheads! Haha" Laughed another crazy redneck looking fellow with a shotgun in his skinny, veiny arms.

Hopping in the back of the rusty old Ford, they did a U-turn and headed back up the hill, everyone was armed, was this a militia? After driving for a couple miles they suddenly came to a squealing stop. There were trucks parked across the road, forming a roadblock , and it was heavily armed aiming both directions. They were waved through and started heading to what looked like a base camp. There were surprisingly some women and children, was this an actual safe place? Or something more like a murderous Religious Cult?

They were pulled from the box of the truck, and thrown to the ground. Chris landing almost right on his injured shoulder, of course. " Fucking asshole" Mumbled Chris. They were both dragged to an old cube van that was parked just outside the camper. The door to the van was rusty, and already had blood stains on the handle and door. The door rose up with a creaking metal on metal sound. There were two other people in there already, mouth's gagged and hands tied behind their backs. Badly beaten, and bloody. Myles and Chris were thrown in, hands tied, and gagged also.

They shut the door behind them, sealing them into darkness. The van smelt like blood and feces, there was no telling how long those other people had been locked in here. Only one made a sound since Chris and Myles were joined. They both sat in silence, listening to the noises outside, trying to figure this place out. It felt like hours since they were put in the van, it sounded like they were starting to party. Beer bottles clanked, music was loud, a couple gunshots and bottles exploding every so often. A true

carefree redneck party, hopefully they don't draw the wrong attention, idiots. The party raged on until the early morning, eventually Chris and Myles just slept through it.

With a heavy cringe, the door to the van unlocked and began to slide open. The bright morning sun shone around a man's silhouette, nearly blinding the both of them. "Good morning" Myles said trying to be a smart ass.

"Get moving punk! Or I'll give you a mouthful of teeth to chew on." A man who must have been in his late teens at best, pushed them from behind with the butt of his rifle. They were led to a small Camper that someone turned into a makeshift office. Inside they met a man with a long white ZZ-top style beard, wearing a white wife beater and camo pants.

"The names Ricky boys, You guys causing some ruckus I hear?" Asked the Man who looked to be in charge.

"No sir, we're just heading north towards Boulder, have family that way hoping to get there by tomorrow at the latest.." Myles spurted out, Chris knowing all the while he was full of shit.

"Your family is either in a prison camp or dead boy, Hate to tell you. But the world has gone to shit, but we're staying right here and no one is going to mess with us. We got guns and ammo for days, and we will start a new America! There is bound to be more like us out there.." Ricky stated with a smirk that Myles despised.

"Well what harm can letting us be on our way do? You have our guns." Chris asked pleadingly.

"Well loose lips sink ships sonny, and if I let you go whose to say there won't be troops here tomorrow? I can't risk that, you can stick around here and help out, we will need some labourers to build." Ricky winked.

"Fuck you! We're no ones bitch!" Myles yelled and spit in Ricky's face and beard. The young guy standing behind them smashed Myles in the back of the head with his gun knocking him unconscious. Following up by hitting Chris in the face and breaking his nose.

"Take them to the woods, get rid of 'em!" Ordered Ricky.

"Yes sir, bury them or leave them?"

"Take them to the river, I don't want their bodies rotting around here.

Leaving the camper, Chris' vision was blurred and he could only taste the thick sweet blood. Through his teary eyes he could see a small convoy of troops in Hummers pull up to the road block. He swore he saw the Red,white and blue flag being flown on them. *Rescue!* He thought, "Help! Hellpp!!" He yelled towards the road block, before being struck again in the ribs.

"Keep moving asshole, no ones here to help! This whole place is going to shit! Keep going, the rivers down this hill!" The young man pushed Chris, while the Burly Bear shaped man carried Myles who was slowly starting to come to. Halfway down the hill, you couldn't see the base any longer, but you could slightly hear some yelling and shouting going on. Then it happened, sounds of firecrackers exploding, and then you could hear big guns firing. A women and two children began running down over the hill, trying to escape the carnage. Screaming and pleading, they couldn't run fast enough, they were cut down with bullets like cows heading to slaughter.

"Maria!! Nooo!" The heavy set man yelled, dropping Myles like a sack of potatoes.

"Let us go man! We can help!" Chris yelled.

"No fucking way! Shut up!" The man yelled while he was swinging his rifle again for

another blow, Chris grabbed the rifle and began to struggle with the Young man who was not much older than himself. Chris slammed him against a tree, and head butted his face breaking his front teeth out. Feeling as though the teeth were implanted in his forehead , but he had no time to think. Chris was outmatched suddenly and fell to the ground. They started rolling around , someone trying to get an advantage. Then the fight ended abruptly, the man lay knocked out and bloody. Myles stood with a rock in hand stained with blood.

“Keep going, I can see the river from here, get up let’s go!” Myles shouted.

“Thanks, I owe you one “ Chris tried to force a laugh, clearly adrenaline filled.

They looked back still hearing a fierce gun battle. Grabbing the guns and knife that man had on him they started down towards the river. Still spitting out blood and dripping from the nose, Chris struggled to avoid branches and tripping or falling. Reaching the bottom they both just collapsed from exhaustion and lack of strength, drifting to sleep as gun fire continued as almost background noise like rain on a metal roof.

## Chapter 4

Feeling like he just blinked and woke up, Chris shook awake. “Myles, you okay? You think it’s over? How long have we been out?”

“Ughh, I’ve had better days..can’t wait for the weekend..” Myles joked. “Sounds like it’s over, I’ve been awake for about 20 minutes now, haven’t heard a peep. It’s 6 : 30 now, been a few hours. We should head up and check it out..soldiers could still be alive or injured.”

“Yeah, if we can make it up there, need some food and water.”

“Well if we get to the top maybe we can find some.”

They headed up the hill, passing over the body that they both murdered. *It was self defence though, survival...*

Further ahead the bodies of the woman and children laid, with her husband nearby laying flat with a bullet through his head and chest. The big burly man was apparently a family man also. Now crawling along on all fours they snuck up to the crest. Smoke filled the air, not just camp fire but something else burned creating a putrid smell. You could taste the scent, the awful stench. On the opposite side of the camp there was a big bon fire, looking closer you could see bodies burning. Hands, feet, and faces stuck out from the fire, half charred. Myles gagged. “Oh my shit, who is burning? The Americans still have their trucks here.” Truck doors closed and they saw a couple soldiers in each Hummer start to pull trucks out of the road block to open the road. Chris let out a full exhale. *Had they murdered all these people? No the Rednecks must have opened fire first, the army was defending itself, doing the right thing. Right? Were these even American troops? They flew the flag.*

The door to the camper swung open, riddled with bullet holes. Ricky stepped out, rifle in hand, looking to the hill he saw Chris and Myles. “Boys get the fuck outta here! They aren’t here to...” A bullet flew through his forehead, almost comically giving him a third eye with the sun shining through. A pair of soldiers came over from the roadblock, checking to make sure he was dead and alone in the camper. They rolled his body over and carried him to the fire. *Why are they burning them?*

“All clear” The soldier said over the radio. They headed back to the Hummer and got in, carrying on northbound up the road like business as usual.

“What...the..fuck man?” Chris muttered

“I don’t know but they are gone for now, lets get our shit and get the hell out of here!”

“Yeah well lets have eyes in the back of our heads..” Chris followed holding a pistol in hand. The place smelt of gunpowder, sulphur and blood. Not too mention the melting flesh and camouflage clothing. Eerily silent, and much less active than it was mere hours ago. Something seemed very wrong about it all, and strange. “Why did they burn them, these aren’t zombies we’re dealing with..”

“All I can think of is to hide their identities or evidence of something, maybe things didn’t go according to plan...wartimes anything can happen.” Myles hoped to answer the question and be done with it, not being sure what to think.

“They took no prisoners...that’s not like them..women and children...gone”

“Yeah well our families are gone, and we might never see them again, so the way I see it is Fuck the world, we need to survive!” Myles started getting frustrated and clearly upset with the situation. “Look for our bags, and see if theres any more guns and

ammo kicking around we need to move out.” Inside Ricky’s camper everything was cleaned out , Myles always had a gun stashed under his bed in his Uncle’s camper, and Ricky’s was no different. At least they both had a rifle now, the more the merrier especially after today. Myles also grabbed a couple tarps.

Chris found their bags in one of the tents , they had been gone through a bit but most of the stuff remained scattered on the floor. “Fuckers...”. Packing them back up and carrying them over to Myles they loaded up. “Let’s stay off the road for a bit, we’re still heading North”.

“Sounds like a plan, roads have only been trouble so far.” Myles shrugged.

The Sun was starting to set in the West, getting low on energy they needed to stop soon for the night. A brook ran through a thick area of forest, finding a small clearing near by they set their gear down. Myles started collecting firewood and Chris started setting up a makeshift shelter using the tarps and some twine. Wasn’t long before they were laying down eating dry bread and nuts, Myles dreaming out loud , “ Did you pack a fishing rod?”

“Ha nope, Bread and nuts not doing it for you?”

Hypnotized by the flames licking the air, and the events that occurred earlier that day. Silence ensued , and seized the night. Chris’ brain wouldn’t shut off, memories flashing by. Thinking he will never see his family again, won’t actually get to graduate high school. Feeling all the years he spent waking up early to catch the bus and studying for exams went to waste. None of that helped him now, no real life knowledge is taught anymore. Where was the survival class? The self-defence class? The how to kill a man class? He may not ever have another girlfriend again, no more parties, he still wanted to go to Vegas and party his life away. So many things he had yet to do , and unfinished business. On the flip side, there are no more rules right now, all bets are off. There was no more concern about what he wanted to when he “grew up” , he was forced into a do or die role in life. Decision was made for him, maybe that was a blessing in disguise. Myles surely felt the same, although he lived a bit more of a wild care free lifestyle, growing up with a wild broken family.

The sun was barely up, and it started raining. The coals from the fire steamed , still glowing from the long night. Embracing the fact they were about to get soaked, trying to think positive it’s a chance to maybe wash themselves off. They were starting to stink already.

“Fuck I’d love a shower..” Chris sighed.

“Yeah and I’d like some fresh pizza and beer, but it’s not happenin’ bud!”

They started packing up their bags and tarps. A helicopter flew overhead, then another followed.

“Wonder where they’re headed?” Myles asked.

“Seems like everyone is heading North, I’m not sure if that was American or not.”

They were coming up on an area filled with large clearings in the woods, easy to be spotted. They had to be careful, sticking to the edge of the fields staying under the cover of trees the whole time. Upon crossing the 3rd field they could see a couple men standing guard over what looked like a large group of civilians surrounded by tents. These troops looked different, foreign. They dressed in mainly black with shades of light and dark blue mixed in, not really good camouflage but they could tell they weren’t American troops. The loud thumping of rotors whipping through the wind appeared in the distance. Chris and Myles moved further along the forest edge until they found a big

tree to hide behind and watch.

A helicopter with strange markings, unlike any either boy had seen before, landed near the group. Another soldier got out, and they filled the chopper to capacity and the some it looked like, but there were still a couple remaining. The helicopter began to take off and disappear into the distance but before doing so starting firing at the people left behind. Bodies fell like toys, and the chopper vanished over the horizon. Chris began running and Myles was close behind, they ran to the bodies. "Hello? is anyone still alive?" Chris began yelling.

"Yes! Please help! Argghh" A man yelled in the distance. The others still silent.

Chris hit the ground with his knees beside the man. "What the fuck happened? Who were they?"

"I don't know, we've been out here for a couple days, they found us this morning. They told us to wait and we would be evacuated to a safety area, and..."

"And they fucking lied!" Myles finished for him.

"Where are they from? Russia?" Chris asked.

"I thought so at first, but I couldn't pinpoint the accent or crest...sorry"

"It's ok, stay calm, where were you hit?"

"My back and arm...I should be able to move."

"Whats your name?" Myles asked while checking his wounds.

"Troy...Troy Marsh..."

"Well Troy you should be fine to move, we'll get you to the woods and then we can take a look at you..lets get out of this damn field!" Chris said as he knelt down to help Myles lift Troy. "This is going to hurt.."

"Yup, FUCK!" He coughed up some blood and shrieked with pain. The forest neared.

With a thump they let him down, Myles broke out the medical supplies. Peroxide bottle was going to be empty after this for sure, "Never thought we'd be running through this shit so quick! Good thing it was free!" Myles said as he tended the wounds.

"We need to figure out what's happening, who they..." Chris was cut off by the sound of approaching Aircraft. Two transport planes flew over head, one opening its hatch. Bodies began falling, in synchronized formations.

Parachutes deploying, the paratroopers were aiming for the very field they sat beside. After half an hour they were all gathered in the clearing, some already having their tents setup. Chris' mind ran wild, *If they're setting up base camps, there must be a lot of resistance out there still..*

The rain was still pouring down, giving them the perfect cover of sound to start moving through the woods. Troy was able to walk on his own, which was good or he may get left behind. No one really knew who to trust but clearly these men had no interest in taking prisoners or making friends. Chris knew the next city wasn't for nearly 50 miles from Sterling, they had made some progress but needed to stop for more supplies again. They walked through the woods avoiding the roads deep into the night. Finally stopping when Troy couldn't move any further, again setting up shelter and fire for the night.

"I need some meat, something with some substance, enough of these fucking crackers and water." Myles stated with disappointment in his voice.

"What we really need is to figure what's going on, where we're actually heading, and what caused all this? They just dropped reinforcements, so obviously things aren't

totally over.” Chris shook his head.

“They struck us when we were vulnerable, the dollar was getting weak, there was unrest throughout the country..” Troy coughed and hacked, “Heck most of our Army is based overseas right now, I don’t know who is defending!”

“National guard, military, probably some hardcore redneck militias!” Myles said half excited. “What were you guys doing in that field anyway? Camping out?”

“ We were actually out camping the night this all went down. We heard the noises of aircraft, then not long after it sounded like fireworks, but we were all half drunk so didn’t make much of it.” Troy was exhausted and his voice was getting shaky. “ We packed up in the morning and made the hike back to our vehicles, they were all disabled, flat tires, wires cut and full of bullet holes.” Troy propped himself up from where he was laying. “We had no idea what was going on, but we figured it was best to stay away from Gunshots and explosions. So we headed into the woods further and found what we thought was a nice clearing to camp in. Clearly not the smartest idea I guess”

“They really wanna keep people on a leash huh?” Said Chris while hunching over to start the fire. “You thought we had rules before, I can’t wait to see what comes out of this”. Small talk continued and then they succumbed to silence.

In the morning they packed up and readied themselves for the road. Both Chris and Troy checking their injuries, both with similar disgusted looks on their faces. Troy was a pretty fit man, balding but in good shape, so he was looking like he would be fine to keep up.

They again headed North, using an old compass Chris always kept on him. The mountains were actually in sight! These past few days they had seen what seemed like endless death and suffering, but finally Earth’s true beauty still shone through. Seemingly unaffected by the chaos around it, like a dog shaking the fleas off. “You see that? Everyone shut up!”. It seemed that everything stopped including whatever Myles had seen. Adjusting their eyes they could see it was a big Buck deer.

POP. A shot rang through the air as a crouched Myles aimed for the neck of the deer. The deer made a grunt noise and started running away. They followed slowly knowing it would be a matter of time before they discovered the dying Deer somewhere ahead. Myles hunted for years, he knew when he made a hit or not. “We’re setting up camp here soon, no way were letting this to waste, I’ll gut it and clean it myself, we are feasting tonight! “ His eyes were almost drooling over this prize. No one argued with that.

“Yeah well we’re committed now” Chris said sarcastically. “Hopefully no one heard that..”

“Ah we’ll be fine, we’re far away from anyone now” Myles said as he sliced open the belly of the deer, exposing all the insides. “ Get some rope out , tie it around it’s neck, this is a good size I’ll need a hand lugging it .”

“I’ll run ahead and find a place to setup camp” Troy started forward.

“ Think we can trust him?” Chris asked of Troy.

“He hasn’t given us a reason not to yet, we saved his life, he owes us!”

“Yeah, I suppose..”

“Here grab this, let’s go!” Myles acted like he was a kid at Christmas.

Up ahead Troy had started tying the tarps up to form a shelter. Myles immediately hung the deer up on a nearby tree, and began skinning. The dull knife he had barely

doing the trick. Chris began collecting firewood, preparing for what everyone was hoping to be a delicious feast. Making a makeshift rotisserie over the fire, deer meat cooked and sizzled as they waited patiently knowing what parasites lie in the wild game. They looked like a pack of wolves circling dying prey, waiting to pounce. These are savage times.

Speaking of blood and flesh, Chris' arm was still beyond sore and itchy. Peeling back the dressing, he had to tug at the last bit, it had stuck to his skin. It was really red, showing it was trying to heal but also infected. Grabbing the last of anti-septic wipes, he cleaned it as best he could. Gritting his teeth he bared the pain, knowing it was for the better and had to be done. Never had a class on this stuff in school, thankfully his family showed him the ropes for survival and wilderness. There lay a pile of 4-5 wipes all soaked in blood, in a ball on the ground. Chris wrapped his arm back up, and laid back trying to forget the pain and will his arm to heal.

Darkness soon rolled around, Myles had finally finished off butchering the deer. Tossing away the carcass, and rack which he would normally keep as a trophy. "Of course this is the biggest Buck I've ever shot, and it won't be going on the wall."

"Who knows, maybe this time next month we will all be back home. Seems like there will be lots of deer left still." Said Chris reassuringly.

"Bullshit, this is far from over, we saw more troops just coming today even! We're f-

"Um guys, am I crazy or do I see an airport off in the distance?" Said Troy who was returning from taking a piss.

"What the...?" Chris grabbed his rifle which had a scope and looked off towards the mountains. In the foggy night air there were bright white streams of light poking out over the horizon of the forest.

"I don't know what that is, but we're heading that way in the morning. We will find out." Myles dismissed it, still overwhelmed by the whole situation they were in. Frantically trying to prepare to smoke some more meat so they could preserve it and have something on the journey.

*What if that's where they were taking everyone? I wonder if Mom and dad are there? Anything with those lights on at this time is functioning for a reason.*

Chris hardly slept, mind racing about the possibilities of what lies over the hill. Myles carefully wrapped and packed up all the meat he could, like a drug addict with his stash. Troy and Chris packed up the tarps and tried to disguise their campsite in case anyone came along after. Slowly making their way towards the lights they had seen last night. It was still a fair amount away, but couldn't be ignored.

They reached the top of a hill somewhere close to where they thought they needed to be. "Are we there yet?" Asked Myles trying to sound like an 8 year old.

"I think so" Troy said as he pointed to a dirt road off to the right. You could tell this road had been well travelled lately, it had to be it, there wasn't another road for miles. Sticking to the treeline along the roadway, they made good time trying to take advantage of no one being on the road. A truck approached in the distance, they ducked off behind some fallen trees for cover.

A U.S Military transport truck passed by, the back covered by a tarp on the sides. Through the back there was an opening, the truck was filled with civilians. The truck slowed to a creep as it passed over a wooden bridge that looked like it was more for



someone's lake cabin, than a Military base or airport.

The tarp slung open as an older man, probably in his 40's jumped out the back. A soldier yelled something to him, he ran without hesitation, hands zip tied behind him. The soldier took aim with his rifle, and shot the man in the neck twice. He got out of the truck, checked the man's pulse, lugged his body to the side and returned to the truck. They kept driving, just like they did before at the roadblock.

"This just keeps getting more and more fucked up.." Chris whispered through the branches they currently had their faces buried in. "Maybe he was for the enemy...who knows, we can't just guess."

"No we can't , lets keep moving " Insisted Myles.

Deciding the coast was clear for at least a couple minutes they darted onto the road, and over the wooden bridge. The boards moaning in pain from clearly being overloaded these past couple days. The water below rushed quickly, tempting to go for a swim or a fish. Once over the water they had one last hill to climb. "Here take this." Myles handed Troy a pistol, it was the only other gun they had , better than nothing. It was ironic how lifeless the surrounding area seemed, when finally they were around wherever the government was taking people. No animals seemed to be around, not even birds. They reached the top of the hill, and what they saw seemed fake as much as it was real.

## Chapter 5

The chain link fence surrounding the compound stretched at least 30 feet high, and must have been a half mile wide. Lights were hung every 20 feet , with Guard towers posted every 50 feet. The top of the fence was lined with Razor wire. *Razor wire? Is this a refugee camp? Or a prison? Can people leave? It didn't seem like that so far...*

There had to be 5000 people here, if not more , the whole place was packed, you could clearly see where the place was sectioned off for prisoners or refugees whatever they were, and the military. It almost resembled a football stadium, or some large event. *Was this America's way of preserving whatever they could of the people? Protecting them from the bad people?* That's what Chris hoped.

People stood in formations, rows, it looked like headcount was being taken of the people who just got dropped off. There were pairs of Soldiers patrolling with dogs the exterior of the compound.

"Um, guys what are those ?" Troy asked , pointing down the hill to the left. There was a clearing, filled with stacks of black ...things.

Reaching within a stone's throw of the stacks, they could see these were plastic coffins, disposable coffins. Nerves barely settled from what they had just seen, trying to decipher it in their own minds, Myles pointed and started running. A piece of paper blew with the wind just ahead of him, he was chasing it like a dog after a ball. Maybe it held important information, who knows, Chris and Troy looked back to the Stacks of coffins.

"What do you think these are for? Emergency? or just just to dispose of the bodies that are surely going to be littering the land after all of this?" Troy asked while choking up.

"Not really sure, I'm sure we will find out soo-" Chris was cut off by a scream from Myles who was now out of sight, in his quest for paper.

After the scream, Myles fell silent. Just before they rounded the bend around the stacks, they could smell it. Troy looked at Chris, they knew the smell, both hurrying to reach Myles now.

Myles stood ahead, dwarfed by the sizeable pile of human corpses, Flies were abundant, almost forming a wall when you got close enough the mound. Myles fell to the ground, kneeling facing the bodies. He wasn't crying or sobbing, just staring. He held a piece of paper in his hands, but was staring directly at the face of his brother Tyson. Tyson, 23 years old, laid amongst the bodies like cattle at a butcher shop, he was maybe a day or two dead.

"Myles, I'm so sorry man.." No words could help right now, and Chris knew that but tried anyway. " We shouldn't be here Myles, we should I-" Myles cut him off.

"Read this paper, it's like a pamphlet for a summer camp, rules and other shit.."

Chris ran up and grabbed the paper , nearly choking on the odour now. The paper was just that, a list of rules and an explanation of why this was necessary. Some of the top and bottom was missing, but the guts of it were still readable.

*This is a matter of National Security. The Nation is currently defending itself and it's sovereignty against terrorists on our own soil. We need everyone's cooperation to insure us the best chance of securing the Area and Country. Border's have been shut down on either side, and family or relatives will be returned when this is over.*

*Citizens will be protected in secure areas, illegals will be deported as such. No one is to leave the grounds without special permission, those who disobey will face serious repercussions and punishment. There is zero tolerance for un-cooperation, we need total control to keep us all safe.*

*Rules and Regulations:*

- 1. No radios, cell phones, cameras, music, electronics*
- 2. No drugs or prescriptions that aren't reviewed by our personnel*
- 3. Absolutely no weapons or anything that can be used or considered one*
- 4. Curfew/lights out is 11 pm each night, Roll call will be held at 7 am each morning*
- 5. No religious practices*
- 6. No fighting, yelling, running, or playing*
- 7. No outside food or drinks*
- 8. No outside clothes, only those provided.*

There appeared to be more but the rest was missing. Chris handed it off to Troy to let him read, while Chris put his hand on Myles' shoulder. "Come on Brother, we have to figure out our next move.." Myles stood up. "I don't think we want to be in that camp though that's for sure, we'll have to be careful around here. We shouldn't stay in this area long, looks like they use this area for...storage."

"I just wish I knew who killed him and why, was he killed and found? Or did our own army shoot him for some reason? Did he try and escape? What was it.." Myles just couldn't comprehend.

"The amount of rules on that paper, who knows.." Chris replied.

"This sounds like P.O.W camp more than anything to me.." Troy said. "Uniforms, no music, no electronics, no weapons or playing. Let's just hope this all ends soon"

Voices appeared up the hill, they were heading near their "storage" area.

"Shit let's get out here!" Chris whispered, the others followed. Seconds after Chris finished saying that Troy's neck was grazed by a bullet. Having no time to think, just react, they all ran into the forest. Ducking behind the pyramid of corpses, bullets riddled the pile. Spraying a foul dark red mist into the air, like it was a pile of garbage. Myles could barely keep himself together, just seeing his brother dead, and now having his body further destroyed. Like cattle heading to slaughter, dogs barking echoed over the hill of bodies.

"Shit! The river! We have to lose the scent" Chris yelled as loud as he could without letting the soldiers hear him. Troy and Myles followed, crashing down the hill. Dodging fallen trees and logs, with rocks jabbing the soles of their feet underneath. The river was near, only another 20 feet. Looking back the soldiers and the dogs had started into the forest to give chase.

Chris stopped aiming his rifle up the hill, letting Myles and Troy hit the water first. Chris shot 4 rounds up the hill side, not really trying to hit anyone, but trying to scare them back for more time. Chris then jumped in the water, it came up just past the knees, it was cold fresh water running down from the mountains. Almost shocking their bodies as they entered. As fast as they went in they got out on the other side, and started running East. A couple bullet's flew their way, just missing Myles, and ripping leaves and bark from the trees.

After there were no more signs of bullets being shot or dogs barking for more than

20 minutes, they stopped for breath. Legs now feeling like rubber, they got lucky and the chase had stopped. Myles dropped to the ground, still trying to digest and absorb what he just saw. He panted, frantically as if he couldn't breathe.

No one said anything at this time, just shared glances and time to rest. Troy was still bleeding, not heavily but enough to stain his shirt, the sweat from the run made it even worse.

"Let me look at that" Chris said as he motioned to Troy's neck.

"It's fine, I just need to wrap it for a bit, it just grazed me thank Jesus."

"Here" Chris threw him what was left of their wrap and gauze. Not only did they need more medical dressing, they needed clean clothes. Wearing the same clothes for days now. Myles stood up, wiping his eyes. Chris had never seen him cry before, although nothing like this has happened before. He put on a strong face, took some deep breaths and walked over.

Chris pulled out a map they stole from Myles' Uncle's store. Boulder was just north about 20 miles now, by his estimations of where they were. They could head there for supplies, and refill on much needed items. "Boulder is just north now, about 20 miles..I figure we can head there and grab what we need, maybe get some more information somehow.."

"Yeah good call." Troy agreed. They kept East this time, trying to flank around the ...camp or whatever it is to be called. There wasn't much conversation after that, just more walking, 20 miles at this point might as well have been 100. The hours passed by, as the sun moved across the sky. Seeming to show different scenery every hour in the forest, nature was still beautiful. The moon was starting to come up. Still light enough to show off in the distance a clearing in the heavily wooded area. A big white house seemed to glow through the trees. Weapons drawn they ran up to the tree line to scope out the area. Just seemed like nobody was home, nothing but silence echoed from the house.

"I need to sleep in a bed, and have a shower...we are going to check it out!" Myles said as he rose.

"Take it slow Myles, we don't need any more surprises" Chris reminded him.

"Shit yes, lets check it out." Troy chimed in.

Approaching the house feeling like the Green Berets, they all had guns drawn while trying to be as silent as possible. The house was older, must have been built 100 years ago. There were two older barns in the back yard, crops of corn growing in the field. The steps to the front porch squeaked, as if trying to warn people of their presence. The front door had an Orange X with numbers beside it. The house had been searched already, but they couldn't be sure it was empty.

With a click the very old Doorknob opened the door, nudging it with his rifle Myles aimed and poked into the living room. Chris and Troy followed, the house looked fairly clean. Troy cleared the upstairs bedrooms, while Myles and Chris cleared the main floor and then moved to the basement. Finding nothing except, a smashed and raided gun rack in the basement, they decided it was safe to stay the night.

"We should sleep in the basement, that way candle light won't be seen by others outside. Who knows if there will be patrols out here or not." Chris suggested. "There's a barbecue outside though, got any of that deer meat left?"

"Fucking rights I do!" Myles yelled, finally happy and excited about something.  
"Chef Myles on the way"

They cooked and ate supper. Leaving the dishes knowing they would be moving on, and no parent's to say otherwise. They lugged down a couple mattresses to the basement, setting up beds for the night. The house had an eerie silence to it, as though there was a family growing and running around here just a few days ago, and now suddenly nothing. True to the old Farmhouse basement ways, there was indeed mice. You could hear them scuttling along inside the walls, chewing and squeaking.

Finally about ready to head to bed, there was a CRASH sound upstairs. Troy was the first one up the stairs running with his pistol in hand. There was some thumping around, and then two gunshots. Then silence while Chris and Myles ran up the stairs. They stepped out into Troy's blood, he lay on the floor motionless. In the moonlight of the kitchen stood a silhouette of a man with a pistol in his hand.

## Chapter 6

The man stepped back into the kitchen behind the wall, after seeing Myles and Chris both armed. "I want no trouble! I'm just on the run , trying to survive! I d-didn't know anyone would be here...I swear." He stuttered. "I had no choice this guy was going to kill me, he tried to shoot me! I had no choice.."

"Who the fuck are you! Put the gun down!" Myles shouted.

"Myles there are men with flashlights running through the field...towards us." Chris said over his shoulder.

"There after me! I escaped from prison! I'm not out to hurt anyone!" The man yelled . " My name is Curtis. I was only in jail for selling dope, nothing violent I fucking swear!"

"Give us your gun and we might believe you!" Chris shouted back.

"Okay shit, but they are coming here, they will shoot us all!"

"Who are THEY?" Myles asked.

"The US army, I escaped, knowing all the shit was going on outside. The prisons are all still fully functional, like nothing has changed, except no power or signals. I knew the services outside were suspended so I thought it was now or never, at least I thought there was no cops to chase me once I got out of the yard. They had a patrol of the army nearby who got on my tail.."

"Wow..well I don't think we have much time to think and discuss, we have to move or act."

The lights got closer, they could now hear voices outside. Everybody went silent inside, crouching in the darkness. Myles shut the back door gently, then moving back to the living room with Chris and Curtis. Heavy boots moved up the front steps, the front door swung open slowly. Two men waited outside while two went in to search the house. Both soldiers entered through the front door, gently closing it behind them. Curtis arose from behind an end table and grabbed one from behind and brought a knife he took from the Kitchen to his throat, immediately cutting through his neck. Myles held his rifle at the other man, while Chris brought his rifle to the back of his head and with a click.

The man stood silent knowing he had nowhere to go. " We're just doing our jobs... they told us to find an escaped prisoner, w-we have jobs to do y'know"

"Shut the fuck up!" Curtis said, while picking up the fallen soldier's rifle. "Tell them I went out back !" He let the soldier shout out.

"He's in the back yard!" The two men waiting outside started running to the back of the house, Curtis went out the front door and followed. Aiming carefully down the Honey Badger's scope, the silencer muffled the shots and both the men went down. He dragged the bodies off to the side of the yard in some bushes. Grabbing knives, guns, ammo and even some boots and different clothes. *Anything but bright orange* he thought.

Curtis walked back in the house, which now reeked of blood. "What the fuck is happening out here?" He asked the Soldier who was now seated on the floor with both Myles and Chris watching him.

"I-I don't know...all I know is there was an invasion a few days ago by some terrorist group. Not the typical terrorists who plot and train in caves, these guys had

aircraft fleets, helicopters, heavy weapons, and uniforms.” He tried to calm himself to tell the details. “Don’t know much other than that, I know their was supposedly some economic terrorist attacks that same day, hurting the US dollar, and freaking out people who were in the know. Whoever they are, they knew America was vulnerable...our forces are so spread out throughout the world right now also. Just everything worked against us. They wouldn’t tell us much more than that”.

Myles and Chris both looked at each other, finally some information. Still puzzled as to what was going on . Would the dollar even hold any value after this? Did it ever really? Or was it just some digital number made up, with interest tacked on from the get go. Lending money that never really existed, breaks the basic Contractual law, of having whatever it is your lending. Had this all finally caught up? Or did someone just expose that flaw. All of that was a little irrelevant at the moment, survival was number one.

Curtis was now wearing a wife beater and green Military issue pants and boots. Troy was now just one of the dead bodies in the house, it seemed like the never had time to think or even react properly to his death. Curtis could have killed them both if he wanted to, and he didn’t, so maybe his intentions were only to survive and not to harm unless he had to. They now all had Military issue Silenced M16 carbine’s, 9mm pistols, knives, 6x grenades, and body armour. They also had rain jackets, rations, first aid, binoculars, and water. It wouldn’t go to waste, Chris also snagged a radio.

Curtis broke the awkward silence, “Sorry about your friend, I only did what I had to do..he made it me or him, and I’m all about surviving right now. I’ll do all I can to help you or anyone else”.

“Yeah well were getting used expecting the unexpected. You seem like your heads in the right place..” Chris spoke up. “We weren’t planning on staying here long, we wanted to head to Boulder tomorrow for supplies”

“Well I don’t really have anywhere special to go, I figure there is so much chaos out there they will just stop looking for me. If I can come with you I’ll do my share to help out , and I can hold my own for sure” Curtis was right, he stood at least 6’3” , 240 lbs, he was as wide as the door. Being in prison for the last few years , working out is almost the only fun thing to do, he was built.

“Unit 24, whats your position? over” The radio crackled. “Unit 24 , have you located target? Repeat, have you located target? Over”

They all looked at each other, confused at what to do next. Myles grabbed the radio, “ Unit 24 here, target has been located, we are returning now. Over”

“Copy that Unit 24, keep us updated”

Radio silence. Curtis grabbed the radio from Myles, running to the bathroom and throwing it in the toilet. It sparked a couple times , then nothing.

“What did you do that for? Maybe we could have learned something from that!” Myles shouted.

“It’s 2015 , you don’t think they have a gps tracker in these things, I wouldn’t be surprised if their boots were tracked. That radio can only bring trouble.” Curtis replied.

“Calm down, he’s probably right. We’re better off without that.” Chris tried to justify Curtis’ actions.

“Yes, we are. But now we should probably get the fuck out of here, they don’t hear back from their guys soon, they might just come through their last known location, if you get my drift.” Curtis said. “I’m laying down for a bit though, I’ve been running for the last few hours. My legs are like rubber.”

"Yeah, maybe we should stay outside, that way we can keep our ears open." Chris suggested. "That and hopefully not spell all this death." Bodies still laid spread around the room.

Myles and Chris each grabbed a wicker chair on the front porch and sat themselves down to sleep, Curtis laid right on the boards of the deck. "My bed was never much softer in Prison, I'm used to this " He laughed.

What a mess this was turning out to be, not too mention how things were to be afterwards. Would the dollar hold any value? Or would all the business's , homes, cars and savings that people have invested in over the years be worthless and non-existent. Would anyone still own anything after? Or would it be a free for all. Money really did the best job at keeping things in order , keeping people busy working to survive. It wouldn't be so easy after this.

What about the people in that camp? Were Chris' parents in there? Myles' maybe? One has to wonder how many other "camps" are spread across the country, and how many people are alive period. The borders are shut down, so that must mean that Canada and Mexico are still somewhat stable, and are trying to keep it that way. It would be nice to be able to just whip out a cell phone and google what is going on. But there are no signals in the air, for normal people anyway.

Myles and Chris both received a personal face slap from Curtis, waking them up from their short nap. "Get your shit , lets fucking go, no time to talk"

"Uh, okay" Chris said as he stretched to get up.

They ran in the house grabbing their bags and guns, they could already hear the helicopter approaching. "Come on!" Curtis yelled through the kitchen in the back. They ran out to meet him, in the distance there was a helicopter with it's searchlight already on scanning below. Curtis ran to a barn in the back, the boys followed. He lifted the board in the front, unlocking the barn doors. Inside there must have been 5-6 horses, Myles and Chris each had some experience riding before thanks to their redneck roots. Apparently Curtis had as well , they each grabbed their own saddle. Before mounting up, Curtis released the remaining horse's, letting them run free to maybe survive.

"Giddy up! Lets get out of here, head north for now" , Myles yelled.

They started riding heading to the right out of the barn. Almost in the woods , the helicopter floated over top , lighting up everything underneath. The guns started firing towards the front of the house, they could see one of the now free horse's being chopped to bits by 50 caliber bullet shells. There was a giant pink mist appearing in the spotlight. Almost like they shot it for sport, but they must have thought it was a target. Using the distraction to keep moving , they kicked their horse's , picking up speed down a ravine into the woods.

The three of them sat in the distance , waiting, watching. The helicopter set down in the middle of the front lawn, causing all of the surrounding trees to shake and whip furiously. Vision was impaired by the forest , and the high winds blowing it around, but they could make out flashlights moving into and around the house. They must have found the bodies of their comrades. Would they call for back up? Brings the dogs to search the area? The men couldn't be sure, they had to get out of that area though. They got back on their horse's, before they could turn and leave, the Farmhouse engulfed in flames. Troy deserved a proper burial, but at least this was along the lines of the Viking's tradition of burning the dead. It was the best they could do it this time.

The next hour consisted of twigs and branches whipping their faces, and the three



of them looking into the sky constantly. The helicopter seemed to go in a different direction, giving them time to readjust to riding a horse.

"We need to find a clear trail soon, these branches are pissing me off!" Myles finding getting fed up.

"I'm sure the horse doesn't like it much either, or you sitting on top of him." Chris replied with a smile.

"Boulder should be close, we should keep going, if anyone is around there they should be either sleeping or not paying attention." Curtis suggested.

"Hopefully anyway" Myles said back.

"We'll do that, then we need to find an actual place that we can stay for more than a couple hours." Chris chimed in.

## Chapter 7

They rode for another half hour, it felt like more like three. At the outskirts of the town they tied the horses up.

The town was dark, no street lights, just nothing. "We should split up, the quicker we're in and out of here the better, I don't have a good feeling about this place. It's too fucking quiet." Curtis said.

"Um okay." Chris replied.

"Ha you guys can stick together, I'll head to the pharmacy, and stop by the hardware store if I can." Said Curtis as he headed through the field. "We'll meet back here, if I'm not back in a half hour just get out of here, and same for you guys!"

Myles looked at Chris, "Well lets find the grocery store, I'm starving" as he shrugged. The field had waist high weeds, and was marshy, each step soaking up some water in their boots. The horses glowed in the moonlight when Chris looked back. Curtis was way out of sight now, but the grocery store appeared just down the street. Front windows were smashed and shopping carts laid thrown around the middle of the street. People's lawns were way overgrown, everything looked so unlived in. It looked like a scene out of the movies, hopefully everything wasn't ransacked by raiders. You have to wonder how many people are out there , doing the same thing, trying to survive at any costs.

Approaching the store, guns drawn, Myles led the way. Smashed glass crushing beneath their feet with each step they took. As they got close to the doors, they automatically opened, must still have backup generator power. The store was dimly lit, it seemed only 1 out of every ten lights was still working. It smelled like a fridge that hadn't been cleaned in 20 years, no doubt some food was bad, but hopefully there was still some good stuff. They decided it was best to clear the store before going shopping and letting their guard down. Their wet boots squeaked on the floor and they tried to stealthily approach the far aisle, Aisle 18 CLEANING SUPPLIES. Single file they rounded the corner, nothing but the strong scent of cleaning agents. Coming to the end, Myles peeked around the corner sticking the barrel of his gun in the open. There was a body, laying against the "clearance" bin, in a pool of blood. He looked beyond dead, so they approached the next aisle, clearing that also. They proceeded clearing the 3 aisle's finding nothing. The warehouse entrance curtains were on the right hand side. Through the curtains Chris could hear what sounded like a dog whimpering.

"Do ya hear that? Is there a dog in there?"

"Weird, let's check it out." Myles pushed on the curtain, making the dog start barking madly. It ran around the corner , stopping in it's tracks. It saw Myles and Chris and stopped, almost as if it knew they meant no harm. It was about a 4 year old German Shephard, big, healthy looking dog. The dog had blood all over it's face and mane. It ran back to where it came, the boys followed. There laid a young boy, he may have been ten years old. He had been shot, he was barely responsive.

"KID! Are you okay? Talk to me? What happened!" Chris ran up , dropping to his

knees by the boy. Myles stood behind.

"I was outside, when I shouldn't be...My arm hurts.." The kid was there for it looks like a couple days, bleeding. "Can you w-watch my dog? I-I can't take care of him anymore.." He coughed up blood.

"We're gonna get you out of here kid, just hang on!" Chris shouted as if to convince himself that this kid wasn't about to die. The boy never replied, slowly his chest stopped moving. Myles checked for a pulse, there was nothing.

"He's gone Chris, there's nothing we can do, it was too late.."

"Fuck, I know, I just can't take much more death..he was just a kid."

"Well something tells me we're going to have to get used to it." Myles Replied. "We should get going, we have to grab some food and meet back in the field. I guess we'll bring this dog with us?"

"Rocky, we'll call him Rocky. Cause of the mountains.."

"Ok, whatever, Rocky it is haha" Myles shook his head as he walked back to the grocery store. Chris and Rocky followed. They began stocking up on canned foods, breads, beef jerky, crackers, spices, silverware kit, and sunglasses. Rocky barked, "I think he wants us to grab him some treats haha, at least he's straight forward."

"Okay , well let's get out of here, the sun is starting to come up." Chris replied. They grabbed two boxes of treats for Rocky, and a small bag of dog food. Their bags were now heavy with food, but that's a good feeling in this situation. They grabbed a couple jugs of water on the way out, and headed back to the field. Checking the road quickly before heading out into sight. The road was still silent, and no sign of Curtis yet. Rocky was invisible once he started running through the field. All you could see was the high weeds parting ways, looking like some creature moving through the field. Ahead the horses stood, still no Curtis.

Chris looked at his watch, it had been almost 30 minutes now. "He said to leave if he wasn't back in a half hour.."

"Yeah well, we can give him a couple minutes."

Ten minutes passed by and they could see someone running down the street with a bag in each hand. As he got closer it was Curtis, Rocky snarled and let a couple barks out. "Shh! Its our friend!" Chris smacked Rocky on the head to quiet him.

"You guys still here? Haha your making me blush!" Curtis yelled.

"Where did you go? Stop by the bar?" Myles asked.

"Ha no, got some meds, first aid shit, and stopped at the hardware store, got a couple hatchets, a shovel, fishing rods, and a shitload of seeds for food." He put down the bags, now out of breath. "Thinking ahead!"

"Shit, I'm impressed." Chris said, honestly.

"I'm not just a pretty face y'know!" laughed Curtis.

"I'm almost excited now, so uhhhh where we goin?" Myles asked.

"Well not really sure yet, I think for now we should stay clear of the populated areas, if we were on the coast I'd say head for the water, but here, I think we should head for the mountains." Curtis began loading his bags up on his back. "It will be a lot easier to hide from whoever it is we have to hide from up there too."

"Yeah well we should head there, hopefully find somewhere today."

"Who's dog? or should I bother asking?" Curtis asked.

"Rocky, we just found him." Chris said.

"Whatever haha hope he doesn't get in the way that's all."

They began riding along the tree line as far north as they could before heading back into the thick forest.

"There's a river up this way, once we reach it we should follow it west toward the Mountains." Curtis yelled back.

Myles and Chris nodded in agreement, nothing really needed to be said. Everyone was too tired at this point to shoot the shit. The sun lit up the wet morning grass, making everything gold for a small amount of time. Also creating a blinding glare off of the river in the distance. The sunglasses came in handy already. Myles hopped off the horse, and grabbed a fallen branch. He approached the rushing river, and stuck the branch in stabbing the mud below. "It's not very deep, we can ride through this!"

"Why are we going through it?" Chris asked.

"There's a service road my Uncle's used to hunt on just on the other side, most likely some hunting cabins along that way. Best shot at finding a good solid place to stay I think." Myles explained.

"Sounds like a good plan, lets do it." Curtis shouted as he started the crossing. The horse's swayed a bit upon entering the water but stood strong, they were probably malnourished from the past days on having no one to feed them. Chris grabbed Rocky and threw him up on the horse, wrapping his arm around him. Trying to avoid getting the little boy's blood from the dog on himself. The service road was undisturbed, the dusty rocky road was completely lit up. Ahead in the ditch there was an old Chevy pickup. In the truck there were two men, both shot dead, with bullet holes in the rear window and red splatter on the dashboard. Besides that, there wasn't much going on here. Scenes like this were beginning to become the norm sadly. This was a new time.

Rocky sniffed around the truck, marking his territory on the rear tire and coming back to the horses.

"Looks like they got run off the road. Probably heading to their own camp. Town's the other way." Myles pointed out.

"Shit, we should see if it still runs." Curtis added. Myles was already popping the hood, reaching down by the dead man's leg, trying not to breath in the stench. The old hood popped, there was a bullet hole in the radiator, Curtis turned the truck over, and steam poured out. "Shit!"

"Yeah this thing's toast" Myles yelled.

"Well let's keep going, we're not getting any rest until we do." Chris shouted. The road curved around a bend until they could no longer see. The heat from the sun was even making the horses tired. Myles stopped ahead, grabbing his rifle. Taking aim into the trees he took his shot. A pheasant fell out of the trees, falling to the ground with a thud.

"Gotcha Bitch!" Myles yelled as he hopped off his horse, running to the feathered corpse. "We're eating good tonight!". Chris shook his head, it was good to see that Myles still had his sense of humour, which is a good sign he was holding up alright.

Myles got on his horse and began leading the way again, he actually somewhat knew this road at least. They rode for a few miles, the mountains getting even closer. The incline of the road and forest started increasing greatly. Giant rocks exposed in the ground and woods. The river got further and further away, but Myles knew it connected to a few nice lakes in the area. Sure to have cabins skewed around the water. Ahead on the road, there was a small old camp sign, leaning over in the ditch. It read 'Harvey Lake- A Family tradition'.

Myles recognized the sign, "We're getting real close guys, Harvey lake is one of first lakes that start getting into the mountains. Keep heading this way, we're not far".

"Good, 'cause I'm not sure how much further we can go, including the horses". Chris shouted.

The afternoon Sun was now in full view, cooking down on them. Rocky was panting and hot, everyone was. Finally Myles shouted, "Here we are!". There wasn't even a sign, just a stake in the ground with a couple pink flags flying. They were now firmly on rocky terrains, way up hill now.

"There's a lake up here?" Curtis asked puzzled.

"Haha well not up here, this road takes us down to one though. No one finding us up here!"

They started down the rocky trail, Myles grabbing up the property markers as he passed by. A sign said "Private Property: No Trespassing", it must have been 40 years old. The trail seemed to just ride the mountain side until suddenly it came to a bend south. It became so steep even the horses took their time, strategically moving step by step.

"What is this a dirt bike trail?" Chris asked, almost annoyed.

"Keeps everyone we don't want here, out, my family loved this shit!" Myles yelled back.

Suddenly the glare of the sun reflected off an almost picture perfect lake. It sat still, hardly any waves, bright blue, surrounded by forests. This could be a postcard, but hopefully for now it would at least be survival.