

Minnesota Madness

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Chapter 1

Snow again so at least I know what I will be doing at work this morning. I don't mind working outside even in the winter. It's usually much better than being inside around all those kids. Sometimes I wonder if I should quit this job before I end up going to jail. I'm pretty sure sooner or later I am going to punch out one or more of these kids.

I work in a high school in the suburbs of Minneapolis/St Paul in Minnesota. I'm not a teacher or anything. I am like a janitor. I was hired as one of the grounds keepers but they have me doing more and more inside work all the time. I have worked here for over three years now.

The pay is fine. I don't have a problem with the pay unlike ninety percent of workers. It is so common for workers now to think they are worth way more than they are getting paid. But for the most part that is not the case. I suppose somewhere there is a worker or two that deserve to make more money than they are getting paid but the vast majority gets paid what they are worth to their employers.

People who say they are worth a lot more money I have found usually are not college educated or if they are they chose worthless degrees. And they are lazy, which is likely why they picked a stupid major in college. Most often the pay complainers have no skills at all. They are just common workers. Like me. They are the civilian version of an Army grunt.

I have no marketable skills and I have never been to college. But I can work and I am not afraid to work hard. I show up every day to work on time and I don't come in drunk. When I am told to do a job I don't tell the boss no and I don't complain about it. From seven in the morning until three thirty in the afternoon they own me. I am their slave. If they tell me to empty garbage cans, that is just what I do. Mow the lawn? Consider it done. Mop the floor? Sure, I'll get the equipment needed. That is what you do when you have a job. You are trading your time for money.

When I get off work I drive to my apartment building to go home. I don't spend every night in a bar. I don't do drugs of any kind. I don't even smoke weed like so many people my age or even any age commonly do. I am a boring guy.

I'm young at twenty five years old but I think I act much older in some respects. I don't have a new smart phone. Instead I have an old looking flip phone. I don't play video games. I don't do the bar scene every weekend. I don't follow football or baseball or basketball. I don't care about the latest trends.

I do like girls but I don't have a girlfriend, at least right now. I have had several girlfriends so I must look okay to them. They go out with me but then they find out how boring I am and they dump me. But there are plenty of girls and I do go out on dates often enough.

So what do I do with all the money I make you might very well ask? I can tell you that between paying the rent and keeping my old vehicle running there is little money left over every month. In the summer I do like to fish and usually I drive up to northern Minnesota and camp near one of the almost countless lakes to fish.

In the fall I sometimes hunt and that requires another trip out of the city to hunt. I also target shoot for enjoyment sometimes. In the winter I do nothing except

wait for spring to arrive. I do have something very few millennials have; a savings account with a few dollars in it. I also have something else that almost no one at any age has; no debt.

I do have internet at my apartment and a laptop computer I use to surf the net. I don't do facebook or other social media sites. And unlike most people I am fairly content with my life. Sure I would like to buy more stuff or have a new truck but overall I am fairly happy with my life just as it is now.

So mostly I just work. I work my forty hours every week with occasional overtime. I get two weeks vacation every year that I often spend up north camping and fishing by myself. I do enjoy my own company and I do not require the company of others to be happy. I sometimes interact with many people and I get along fine in crowds and large groups. I just don't need that to be happy.

I watch television but I have no favorite shows because while I do watch some more than once I am never addicted to them and mostly lose interest after a couple of episodes. I would never be a slave to the TV. I don't keep track of what show is on when, so I can make sure I'm home to watch it. Mostly I am happier going for a walk in the nearby park rather than watching some stupid show on the television.

I watch the news but I am not addicted to that either. I do watch the weather, especially in the winter so I know when we will get dumped on with snow. But my apartment is close enough to work so I could walk back and forth with no real hardship. I drive though even in the winter. Or maybe that should be especially in the winter.

It was during the winter that they had the really big earthquake near New Zealand. I honestly paid little attention to it. Only what I could not avoid because the news made such a big deal out of a simple earthquake. So a bunch of people died. Well people die every day.

It was only a couple weeks later that a big earthquake hit the country of Chile in South America. Again it was a big deal on the news and again many people died. Well I looked it up on the internet and a major earthquake hits more than once a month in the world on average. So like I said, no big deal. Next month there would likely be another big earthquake and the month after that and the month after that too. That's why they say there are a couple larger ones every month; because it is the average.

When a big earthquake hit both Japan and off the coast of Alaska within hours of each other the news people were going wild. Many TV shows were pre-empted to bring us 'special reports' about these earthquakes and the rash of recent earthquakes. The news stations brought in several 'experts' that said this or that about earthquakes in general and their opinion on the recent series of earthquakes around the world.

I knew that you could find an expert on anything with an 'expert' opinion on some event or potential event and usually it was way more difficult to find two experts that would agree about what was happening or what was about to happen. I did watch a couple of the special reports but I was not impressed. Watching the shows was just something to pass the time.

I was not concerned at all about the earthquakes and just went about my life like always. When a couple weeks went by and there were no earthquakes that made the news I think most people just forgot about them. What many people don't know is that there are hundreds of earthquakes in the world every single day. Actually thousands of quakes. Of course we only hear about the big ones. And even fair sized quakes often cause no deaths.

Then there were two earthquakes in Europe. They were pretty good sized quakes and Europe is pretty well

populated so there were many casualties. Again the news made a big deal out of it. And I had to agree that there did seem to be many more major quakes than normal or at least because of the news coverage it seemed that way. The trouble with saying anything is more or less normal is that big ups and big downs still even out to make the long term normal when you talk about anything. Like normal snowfall or normal temperatures. Sometimes you get a lot and sometimes you get very little but they still average out to the normal amount each year.

And like rainfall or even floods, earthquakes happen fairly regularly and like rain sometimes you get more than normal. Sometimes you get a flood. So it was with quakes this year apparently. We were apparently getting a flood of earthquakes worldwide this particular year.

People I know would often bring up the earthquake happenings when we would chat. Some people were very worried about us getting a quake here. I told them that indeed Minnesota did have its own fault zone just like California. This would always get them excited. I would tell them the fault zone ran from Duluth northeast. Then I would tell them that the biggest earthquake ever recorded in Minnesota measured just over four on the earthquake scale. That would usually end that line of talk when they found out how minor the earthquakes were that did happen here in Minnesota.

We just had nothing to worry about here in Minnesota. Well at least as far as earthquakes anyway. We did have tornadoes and blizzards and such.

So what if I was wrong about worrying about earthquakes? Well I wasn't really wrong. We still never had a big earthquake here in Minnesota. It's just that sometimes things can happen a long ways away and still have a big impact on where you live.

There are many examples of this. Like let's say we get a really big snowfall over winter here in Minnesota and

then heavy rains come in the early spring and melt all that snow. While the rest of the nation enjoys 'normal' winter and spring precipitation amounts. Well even though we are a long way from the southern states they can get flooded by the Mississippi River because of the massive runoff from way up here. It's happened before and likely will again.

So yes things can have a major effect on where you live even if it happens a long way off.

Chapter 2

When the day came and the earth shifted around the whole world even people living in Minnesota said they felt it. I didn't but maybe some of them did feel it. Who am I to say what they felt or not.

The event all happened in less than twenty four hours. And I would say it was definitely an epic or historic or monumental or even maybe a biblical event. The earth moved or shifted almost everywhere. There were huge earthquakes all around the world on the same day and most all of them left severe devastation in their wake. And it was not just the earthquakes themselves because many caused huge tsunamis or as some called them tidal waves. Some of these waves were like nothing any living human had ever seen. These gigantic waves would hit the shores and travel miles inland, destroying everything in their path of destruction.

Many of these tsunamis had their height measured in meters instead of feet. They were very big, very fast, and very tall. And there were many of them. Almost every coastal area in the world felt the effects of one or more of these giant waves. Many thousands of people around the world were killed by these giant waves. The waves would spend hours to travel long distances in the deep ocean only to rear up to a massive height when they finally hit a shoreline.

Of course many thousands or maybe more accurately many millions maybe even billions died directly from the earthquakes. There was no way to know but it is likely between the tidal waves and the quakes maybe a few billion people lost their lives in that first twenty four hour

period during and just after the event. Of course the deaths did not stop just because the earth finally stopped moving. Just as many people or even more would lose their lives from the after-effects of this monumental event as from the event itself.

The United States was not spared. The west coast was maybe the worst hit. From California north all the way to Alaska there were major earthquakes. Then when the shaking finally stopped this whole coastal area was hit with more than one major tsunami. Millions of people there lost their lives and the whole coastal area for thousands of miles was rendered uninhabitable.

The east coast was hit with more than one tsunami also with the largest of them reaching miles inland. Again millions died in the densely packed east coast areas. But that was not the end of the devastation for the United States. The state of Hawaii was almost wiped clean from multiple tsunamis. But it was not just those living near the oceans that suffered.

Most people knew about the fault lines in California. And some knew about the big fault line in Oregon and Washington and even in Alaska. But most people had never heard about the New Madrid Seismic Zone. This was not a straight line but instead was shaped more like the letter y. It covered several states in about the center of the United States.

The states mainly affected by this major fault included Iowa, Missouri, Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, and Tennessee. Seven states in the center of this country to be added to the devastated coastal states. So with the all the coastal states and these central states it meant that well over half of all states had suffered pretty extreme damage. Or in some cases the event basically totally destroyed the whole states. Hawaii, Rhode Island, Florida, California, and a couple others were basically just a complete total loss.

Some states had little damage done during the event. Minnesota was one such state. So we were safe, weren't we? We certainly were safe for the time being but that would soon change. While we suffered no immediate physical damage from the event we would still be negatively affected in many ways.

The United States as a nation was just about destroyed. The nation would maybe recover to some extent but not for decades if even then. The nation was almost ripped in half because of the New Madrid Seismic Zone. We now had ocean front property way north from the former beaches of the Gulf of Mexico. Lower areas of some of the southern states just sunk under the ocean waves.

Here in Minnesota we still had a couple bridges over the Mississippi River but there were no longer any standing bridges over this great river anywhere south of Minnesota. If you were in Alabama and wanted to drive your car to Texas you would have to drive to Minnesota just to get across the Mississippi River. Of course you couldn't make that drive anyway because almost all the roads and highways were wrecked and impassable. Think of all the highway overpasses and imagine all of them collapsed. And that was just part of the highway damage.

There were countless creeks and rivers that all the highways crossed and those bridges in many states were all collapsed. Road travel as we had become used to for many years was now over. Then just add the fact that many airport runways and almost all railroad lines were now unusable also.

Shipping of any kind came to an immediate halt. Ocean shipping around the world came to a complete stop. Almost all ports were destroyed along with most of the ships. Inside America (and other countries) train tracks and trestles were destroyed in many areas making rail shipments impossible. Highways and roads were

impassible making trucking mostly impossible. Many airports were damaged making air travel impossible or an iffy situation.

Pipelines of all kinds were ruptured or completely destroyed. Natural Gas, gasoline, water, sewer, and oil pipeline flows stopped completely. That meant that fuel supplies almost overnight were depleted and would not be refilled for a long time or maybe ever.

Electric power stopped over huge areas. Hundreds of miles of electric lines were now lying on the ground. Many dams were busted open and huge areas were flooded and no longer had any hydro power generating capabilities.

Fiber optic lines and telephone lines were down over huge areas. Almost all long distance phone calls were now impossible anywhere in this, the most advanced country in the world. The internet was still operational in a few areas but a very large number of the websites were now off-line due to the damage.

The whole world was suffering together. Massive earthquakes had destroyed large portions of Europe, Asia, Middle East, and parts of Africa. Russia, China, India and most other countries were now in shambles. Every country in the whole world was now at best a third world country and at worst had been knocked back at least a couple hundred years.

Like most everyone, I was at work when the event happened. The school went into immediate lockdown. Now what was the point of that? The sun was shining, it was a nice day, and there was zero threat to any kid in the school. But we were in lockdown. I really didn't care one way or the other. I was set to work until half past three anyway.

Large screen televisions were set up in the gym and the cafeteria and the TV's already in the classrooms were

turned on to all news channels. Everyone even the unruly kids had their eyes glued to the screens of the TV's.

News helicopters were soon in the air and some enterprising news companies sent up crews in airplanes so they could venture over larger devastated areas. Some eye-in-the-sky scenes were also instantly on the TV screens.

Soon government announcements were made but this early in the game they had little information other than that this was a worldwide event. There were warnings made that massive tsunamis were fast approaching the entire nation's coastlines. In some cases these giant waves would take many hours to arrive but in most cases there would be several waves and some had already hit certain areas.

Some satellite TV channels were apparently off the air but there were plenty to choose from and the school administration had no problem finding channels with live footage. Because of the scope of the disaster all these TV stations were running without any commercial breaks. But we only watched for a short time and then it showed just the test screen, then our power went off.

It was daytime and there were plenty of windows plus the emergency lights came on automatically so there was plenty of light. People milled around, except for me because I went to make sure it was an off-site problem which of course it turned out to be.

I told those in charge it was a city problem and then everyone including me did nothing. It was getting close to release time when the power returned. We watched the televisions until school was released at the normal time as always. The school sent notes home that tomorrow school would be closed so families good spend the day together during this tragic time. I was told not to come in tomorrow too.

Not much had changed on the news during the time we had the power outage. I watched until three thirty rolled around then I was out the door. While I watched the news I was also planning. By the time I left the school I knew exactly where I would go and what I would do.

Chapter 3

The first thing I did was stop at the gas station. There was a short line but it moved fairly quickly. I topped off the tank and drove to the grocery store.

In the store I made a beeline to the bank outlet there. I closed my savings account and took some out of my checking account; all in cash. While I was in the grocery store I grabbed a cart and filled it up with cheap easy-to-cook or no-cook foods that would store awhile. I did include a couple big bags of rice, something I ate quite a bit of normally anyway because it was cheap, easy, and good food.

I strolled up and down most of the aisles of the store tossing in seemingly random items. When the cart was full I checked out and put it all in the back of my old SUV. I was thinking as I pushed the cart to the cart return corral and turned at the last second and pushed the cart back into the store where I mostly filled the cart up again. This time when I emptied the cart into the back of my rig I left the parking lot.

Instead of driving home I drove to the closest big sporting goods store. I parked, locked my rig, and walked in where I grabbed a cart. Like the grocery store I walked up and down most of the store aisles. I had been camping quite a bit and I had some pretty good gear but now I expanded on what gear I already had and bought extras of many things.

I had guns and ammunition but I bought more of the ammo. I bought many things like there would be no tomorrow. When I checked out I was somewhat shocked at the price. I had all that cash in my pocket but I put

everything on my only credit card. The card had a low credit limit and this one purchase almost maxed it out. But that was totally acceptable to me.

I hoped I had done the right thing. I had spent quite a bit of money on just a hunch. Well basically I had spent just about all of my money on a whim. But if I was totally wrong I would still be okay. I had the money to pay the credit card off when it was due and the stuff I had bought I could always either use or just store for later use. But I think I did the right thing.

I drove the short distance to my apartment and only brought just a few of my new purchases up to my second floor apartment and left most in my Jeep. What was left in my old Jeep Cherokee I covered with a well used tarp I kept in there for emergencies. The vehicle was well used and far from new so anyone looking inside would expect only to find worthless junk under that old tarp. That is what I hoped anyway.

In my apartment I turned on my TV and my computer. I watched the TV first for about an hour when they just started to repeat everything because no new information was coming in to the news room. Then I switched to the internet.

Right away I found problems. Many websites were down. From the news I figured those websites were likely based in some of the destroyed areas. But there were still plenty of sites to choose from and I surfed from site to site to find current information. I also read about what many thought would likely happen next and the overall outcome of what had already happened. I was glad I had done all the things I did when I got off work today after finding many people's comments matching my own thoughts.

I broke from the computer and watched TV again while making and eating my supper. When done I went back to the computer again. That is what I did for several

hours, just switching back and forth from TV to computer and back again.

Finally I shut everything off and went to bed. In the morning I was back doing the same TV and computer thing again. With daylight the TV news channels (those still on the air) had many pictures of some of the areas. In the light of day the devastation was I guess you could say amazing or frightening, or maybe overwhelming and heart wrenching.

There was going to be no fixing much of what I saw on the television. And then I tried to imagine the scope of what had been destroyed. Like about half of the whole country had been ruined. Maybe as much as half of the entire nation's population had been killed already in just one short period of time.

There was no video but the news said most of the world looked the same as the devastated areas in the United States. It was worldwide! I wondered if half the population of the world was now dead. If not many more would be dying in the next few months.

I sat and tried to think about what would be the result of everything that had happened. At first it was mind boggling but I switched and just tried to think what it would mean to the people of this state and what would happen right here.

I decided in one or two days gasoline would be impossible to buy. Within a week it would be the same for food. Winter was just barely over and it would be getting warmer every day now. That would save the lives of many people, at least temporarily.

I tried to think what people would do. First responders would usually be sent to the stricken areas. Likely from here they would go south to Iowa to help out. But even that was iffy because by the time they packed up to leave here, fuel might be impossible to get. So they

would be stranded if they left and might not even reach their intended destination at all.

The National Guard, all of them in the country, would be called out but I could see problems there too. Transport would be the biggest thing. And also maybe many of the troopers would just not show up because they would want to stay home with their families to help, to protect them, and care for them.

Just the thought of what needed to be done in so many parts of the country was overwhelming. Maybe a better use of the National Guard would be to move those troops into the cities that were not destroyed. Write the millions of people that may still be alive and needing help in the stricken areas off and just use the Guard units to keep the peace in the large cities that were not damaged. Because when food and fuel shipments stopped there would certainly be rioting like those cities had never seen before.

In the past riots were always for some social justice reason but now the riots would be about getting food to stay alive. I would say starving would be a much bigger motivator for a rioter. I'm not even sure if armed troops could stop the riots that I envisioned would soon take place in the cities.

All electrical transmission lines that crossed the Mississippi River south of the Minnesota border all the way to the Gulf of Mexico were down and would not be coming back for a very long time. Many electrical transmission lines would be down all over the country. Natural gas pipelines were mostly all broken and shut off all across the whole nation. This would shut down all the gas fired electrical generating stations in the nation.

Many railroad tracks had been destroyed in many parts of the nation. This would mean many coal fired electrical generating stations would have to shut down due to lack of fuel. Many dams had broken open and this would

mean many hydro-electric generating stations would go off-line. When workers could not get fuel for their cars they would not be able to go to work at the electric generating stations. Electric power would be an issue in many parts of the country right now and that would continue to get worse and worse.

Here in Minnesota we might be okay on that power front. The gas fired and coal fired plants would shut down because of lack of fuel but the coal plants would have a supply of coal on hand to last at least a short time. The gas fired ones were likely already off-line. But we had two nuclear power plants and some hydro-electric plants here in Minnesota that could keep working I would think. It might be enough to keep our lights on here.

So let's say we will keep the power on. That means the water supply and the sewer will keep working here. These apartments have all electric kitchen appliances. So cooking will not be a problem. I don't know but I bet the water heaters are likely gas fired for economical reasons. I know we have no water heaters in the individual apartments because the heaters are all centrally located. Gas fired ones would be cheaper to operate, more trouble free, and offer faster recovery so fewer could be used in the building. That means there will be no hot water here for the foreseeable future. I can maybe live with that I thought to myself.

So logically I will just stay put right here. I have what I need to survive here so why leave until that situation changes. I have food, water, and shelter. If I didn't like cold showers I could heat water on the kitchen stove and take baths instead of cold showers though that thought just did not appeal to me.

I looked out my window and I could see my old Jeep sitting down below me. I always parked in the same area so I could keep an eye on my truck. Now I decided that fact would be more important than ever.

I wondered how soon the things here would get hairy and dangerous. I guessed maybe three to five days before things got bad but that was just a wild guess. On one hand things should stay pretty normal. But people are not normal and that's why I think it will deteriorate rather quickly into anarchy.

Chapter 4

I called the school in the afternoon to see if I was needed at work tomorrow. Someone was there to answer the phone. The local news had already said all local schools would remain closed until Monday. Today was Tuesday. That was a long stretch for any school to have an unplanned closure and I assumed this was all Twin City schools. I was told that I could come back in on Monday. If they needed me earlier they would call.

So I had almost a week of unpaid vacation. I decided to go for a walk after a light lunch. I knew things would be calm yet and I thought I would just check out a couple of the stores close by. I put on a jacket and out the door I went. From my apartment windows I could see where I parked and some of the side street but not the larger, busier front street.

Once outside I could see the main street was quite busy. I wondered if people realized just how valuable a commodity that gasoline they were using really would be in another day or two. I had no real destination in mind and I just wandered. I walked past a grocery store and it was swamped with customers. There were also two police cars parked near the front door with their lights flashing. I just kept walking.

I noticed the hamburger joint and the pizza place were closed. Then I realized that likely the natural gas lines were down so those places could not cook any food now. There would be more places like that all the time I thought.

Other stores were open and some like the local Target store were doing a thriving business. But then I

remembered that Target also sold food so that was likely the reason they were busy now. That would not last long and they would run out of food like all other places that were selling groceries.

I wandered into a couple stores but was not really looking for anything. I did buy a few small items in each store. Then I walked back home again with my bags of purchases. I noticed the two cop cars were still at the grocery store as I walked back past there on my way home. The cops would be really busy in one or two more days I expected.

Back home I removed the window screen from the window overlooking my Jeep. I expected no trouble for a couple days but I thought I might as well get ready now when I had the time. I also loaded a couple rifles and set them near the window. Again I was just getting ready for the future that I expected. Now with the loaded rifles nearby and the window screen removed it would only take me seconds to open fire on anyone down below. If there was ever a valid reason to do so which might or might not ever happen.

The rest of the day I watched the television most of the time. I tried the computer but many more web sites were now off-line and while some were still available I did not spend much time on there. It also was running slower than usual, way slower.

During the daylight hours the news crews were all up in the air filming the devastation in different parts of the country. The center section, what the news was now calling the New Madrid Seismic Zone had many news choppers. The scenes from there were mesmerizing to watch on the screen.

The government would now only allow the choppers into the area if they were there to help so the news choppers went in and showed scenes of them picking up stranded people. The roads were all impassable and

helicopters were the only mode of transportation that was viable. The few people picked up and transported out of the areas seemed to be a drop in the bucket compared to how many people lived in those devastated areas. How long would the aviation fuel for the many helicopters be available I wondered all of a sudden. They must use a lot of fuel and there were many of them in use.

I switched over to watch the local news when the normal news time rolled around. They reported that local grocery stores were running low on food due to all the people buying up and hoarding what food had been available. Like hoarding was supposed to be a bad thing. To me those so called hoarders were just the smart people who were thinking ahead.

And the news reported on several altercations at some of the stores. One resulted in a death. That would only be the first of many I figured. The news also stated that several gas stations were now out of or running low on gasoline. Again they blamed hoarders for the problem. So the hoarders pushed the problem up by what, one day? What real difference would that make in the long run I wondered? The fuel did not disappear when purchased. It was just transferred from the stations' tanks to car gas tanks instead.

The news did say that most of the stores expected further food deliveries tomorrow and that was likely true. There must be food warehouses in the area and it would take little fuel to move those supplies the short distance from the warehouses to the many stores. But those deliveries tomorrow would very likely be the last ones or maybe one more day before local supplies ended. Maybe those would be last deliveries forever. I listened to the weather report then switched back to the national all news stations. One more of them had now gone off the air, I noticed.

I remembered that I still had the old alternator in my apartment that I had forgotten to return for the core charge when I had to change the one in the Jeep. Now I decided it might be useful. I grabbed it out of a closet and took it down and laid it on the tarp in the back of my Jeep. The old obviously well used alternator would just add to the effect I wanted for my Jeep. The Jeep would now look like maybe it was there waiting for parts. Camouflage comes in many different colors you might say.

After supper and with it now being dark the news stations had no fresh video and were just showing scenes from earlier. I switched over to the computer for the remainder of the evening,

On the internet I was able to read what many different people thought would be happening next. And what was happening currently in their locations or at least what they said was happening anyway. Some people also told of what preparations they had made and were still making in some cases.

Most had reacted about like me. Most all had bought at least extra groceries. Many had bought extra gas which was something I did not do. I would have had to store the gas inside my Jeep and that would have been bad. It had a full gas tank now and it got fairly good mileage so I was not too concerned about only having what was now in the full gas tank. Would there really be much advantage in having five more gallons so I could go another hundred miles? Where exactly would I go to anyway?

I stayed up a little later than usual. Before bed I checked the TV news one more time but I learned nothing new. I checked the Jeep but no one was anywhere in the parking lot so I went to bed.

The next day was more of the same for me. I even went for a walk again in the afternoon. The grocery store was closed when I walked past it. A couple more places

were also closed. I stopped and read the note on the door of one of the small closed shops. It read that they were temporarily closed so their workers could spend time with their families during this time of grieving for the whole nation.

I wondered if some were closed because the owners had just bugged out for someplace else. I knew at some point I would likely have to leave too. I wanted to stay as long as I could because I had a comfortable place to stay with food and running water. I figured I could stay here maybe a week or two. Who knows maybe even longer. I would stay as long as I thought I was safe. I just did not want to stay too long and then maybe get trapped here with no way to leave the city. All it would take is something to happen to my Jeep.

That evening the internet stopped working. I hoped it was just a temporary thing but I feared I would never use the internet again in my life. Oh well it was great while it lasted. That was maybe our first of many steps back in time to an era when life was much simpler. And much more dangerous.

The TV still worked and I watched for a little while then shut it off. It was fairly late but I wasn't tired yet. So I just watched out the window for awhile. I could hear sirens in the distance but that was not necessarily something new at night. I was in a major metropolitan area after all and things happened every day and night even in the normal times.

Then I saw someone up to no good in the parking lot. He was pretty obvious walking up and down the row of parked cars looking inside each of them. He walked past my Jeep with hardly a glance inside. That is just what I wanted to see. Eventually he did break into one car. It looked like all he took was the radio. The radio would be worthless for the thief and the owner both very soon I figured. It would take people awhile to realize what things

had value and what did not. The valuable things would change and be quite different than they were a week ago.

I went to bed and right to sleep.

Chapter 5

It was Sunday before there was real trouble. Saturday night I had heard scattered gunshots but all were at a distance. The local news said all grocery stores in the city were now temporarily closed until they restocked. On Sunday morning the news gave a list of stores that had been looted or at least broken into last night. There were several stores and that was just in the one single night. I wondered how many stores it would be the next night and the night after that and when it would start happening during the day and not just at night. Not very long I thought.

The news said all police reserves had been called up and all vacations had been canceled. I wondered just how many no shows they had. The cops would know exactly what was coming and they would want to get their families to someplace safe. And that place would not be inside the city, if such a place even existed anywhere anymore.

I stayed inside and it had been a two days since I had left the apartment. The last time I was out I had carried a pistol. I had no permit to carry but that would never stop me again. I decided the pistol would stay on my hip from now on, even inside the apartment.

Sunday afternoon I took a nap. A first for me but I thought I would try it. I might be changing into a night person out of necessity. The local news said area schools would remain closed. They did not give a reason or a timeline but there were two obvious reasons. It was too dangerous for the kids outdoors now and fuel for the school buses would be a very real issue.

When I woke from my nap on late Sunday afternoon I cracked open the window a little. It was fairly warm outside anyway. I had the news on in the background as I watched and listened to what was happening outside. I heard gunshots off and on even during daylight now. I kept an eye on my Jeep but it looked unharmed so far and I needed it to stay that way.

I made a simple supper and ate it while looking out the window. I would call work in the morning but I knew it would be pointless. I would never be going to work there ever again.

I heard shooting from the front area of the apartments but saw nothing on my side. It was a flurry of shots from at least three different guns judging by the sounds. Then it was quiet again. I glanced at my watch when I heard the shots. It was an hour and half later when the cops came. Apparently they were pretty busy and/or shorthanded.

I don't know when the cops left but I doubted that they stayed long. I bet they had many locations they needed to go to. I watched the parking lot for a long time but there was no action there. I wondered if it was because the stores were being looted and that was much more attractive to the bad guys. Sooner or later every store, truck, car, apartment, warehouse, and house would be broken into and anything worthwhile in them would be stolen.

I slept late and the first thing I did was look at the Jeep. It looked fine. I had placed a pair of binoculars on the window sill so I looked things over better. With those I could see the Jeep had not been broken into.

I had breakfast and took a cold shower. I had unfortunately been right about the gas water heaters here. There had been no hot water since that first night. One more thing that people will miss but not have for a long time if ever again. I guess those with electric water heaters

would still have hot water. But at some point that would end too. Like everything else.

There was only one all news channel left alive on the television. I watched that most of the time during the day and switched to the local news at the times it normally aired. The national news no longer had helicopters in the air or at least no footage from them. They actually had little firsthand news of the stricken areas.

On the local news they said the Mayor had instituted a dusk to dawn curfew. Great for her but that could never be enforced. I would guess by this time it was open season on the cops. The cops had stuff people wanted. Like guns, ammunition, bullet resistant vests, and other goodies. I would not want to be a cop now. If I was I would throw away all my uniforms and leave my cruiser parked well away from my house after I emptied it of everything useful to protect me and the family.

I never heard a siren all afternoon or evening on Monday. I heard plenty of gunshots though. I loaded magazines while it was still light out. I would no longer be using any lights in my apartment that could be seen from one of the windows. When it got dark I shut the TV off also so the light from that would not show.

Late Monday night I saw two guys enter the parking lot. They started at one end and were breaking into every car and truck. When I saw them doing that I did not wait. I switched on the reflex sight on my rifle and shot both guys. Two shots and both were down. I was very tempted to go out and see if I could get anything from the bodies but then I thought better of it. It would be way safer to just stay inside.

I watched after that for a long time. One of the guys I shot crawled for about thirty or forty feet before he stopped and never moved again. Neither guy was near my Jeep which was perfect.

There was no further trouble during the part of the night I was awake. When I woke up it was approaching noon. The weather had really warmed up and we were in the middle of an abnormal heat wave. The weather guy said it would last most of the week.

After I got up I looked and both the guys I had shot were still lying where they had been last night. Again I was tempted to check the bodies but quickly decided against it for safety sake. I ate and took another cold shower. Man, I hated those cold showers.

There was very little movement outside anymore. I saw no moving vehicles on the side street and I heard very few from the open window. I bet it got up to eighty today. Way above normal. By dark the two dead guys were still there. I bet they were stinking pretty badly by now. Good, that would deter people from the parking area.

There apparently were no police anymore. Just to see if the phone worked I tried calling the school. The phone did work but there was no answer at the school which is what I had expected.

Almost all the food and other gear I had bought was still in the back of my Jeep. That was my plan so it would be ready if I needed to bug out quickly. I also did not want to make a dozen trips to carry everything down to the Jeep when I decided to leave. So far things were okay around here. I felt safe enough up here in my apartment.

During the afternoon while I had light I washed two loads of clothes and started packing up what I would bring with when I left. I watched a little TV but most of the spare time was spent at the window. When it got dark I was ready for another long night of watching. It was still quite warm and I left the window open a little.

It was around two in the morning when I heard the ruckus that sounded like it was heading my way. Finally a big guy appeared dragging a girl or small woman behind him like she was a sack of potatoes or something. She

was screaming and thrashing around but it was having no effect on the guy. They entered the parking lot and were heading towards the entrance.

When the guy stopped and hit the woman hard enough so I heard it plainly way up here I grabbed my rifle. I flipped on the sight and made one shot. I was careful so if the bullet happened to go through it would not hit the woman. The man dropped but was not dead. I shot again, something I did not really want to do. One shot is a surprise to anyone around in the area but the second shot can pinpoint your location.

The man was now still. The woman or girl was stunned from the man striking her hard. Soon she got up and obviously a smart woman she took what she could from the dead man before leaving the scene. That was the only excitement all night. Like the last two I felt nothing after the killing. I just did what I had to do. I felt nothing more than if I had stepped on a bug.

Chapter 6

The next afternoon there was a knock on my door. I ignored it. Then there was more knocking. I looked through the peep hole. There was a girl out there knocking on my door. I did not think I had ever seen her before. She looked like she did not want to be there which did not really make sense to me. Why was she knocking if she didn't want to do it? But I am a guy and she did look pretty, at least she did through the peep hole.

I moved the chair that I had propped under the door knob and unlocked and opened the door. The girl looked up at me. She was short and I am tall.

“Thank you for saving me last night.”

“I don't know what you're talking about.”

“But you're..... I see. Well someone saved my life last night and if I found him I would thank him.”

“Anything else?”

“Take me with you.”

“I really have no idea what you are talking about now.”

“You seem like you are ready and I bet you plan on leaving. Take me with you. We both know if I stay I will die. And I will be ...hurt before I die. You saved me once and you should do it again.”

I just stared at her. She stared back and neither of us said anything. I looked up and down the hallway. And then back at her. Then I just turned and walked back into my apartment. I did not shut the door and she followed me inside. She was the one who shut and locked the door.

She looked over at the window that was open. She looked at the two rifles next to the window. Then she looked at me.

“I can shoot. My Grandpa taught me how.”

“How old are you? And I will want to see your driver’s license to verify.”

“I’m nineteen.”

She reached into a back pocket on the jeans that were so tight that I am surprised there was room for the thin driver’s license. The jeans looked nice that way I admit.

The license said her name was Marjorie Larson and if my math was right she was indeed nineteen years old and had been for about two weeks. I gave the license back.

“If I was going someplace, why on earth would I take anyone and especially you with me?”

“Like I said, I can shoot. And I bet right now you regret not having someone here to help you keep watch. You have to sleep sometime don’t you?”

Again I just stared at her. She was smart enough to figure out which apartment the shots had come from last night. And she was smart enough to know what I had been thinking about as far as keeping watch on my Jeep. Or was I just rationalizing a decision to myself because she was so pretty.

“You would have to do what I say. No arguments at all.”

“If you think this will be a ride for a ride I might as well just stay here.”

I felt myself turn red.

“That is not what I was thinking.”

“I saw you looking.”

“I am a man so naturally I was looking. And if this works out I will likely always be looking. I will not touch you though. The door is there. But if you stay you will have to

do what I say with no arguments and me not having to explain everything.”

“I am smart. I will make suggestions but you will be the boss.”

“And I will listen to any suggestions and act on them if they have merit.”

“Deal.”

She stepped forward and extended her hand. We shook and I guess we were now partners.

“Do you live in this apartment?”

“Yes. I live with two girl friends.”

“Our deal was for only you.”

“And that is fine. They are both nice people but they don’t stand a chance of making it through this. I was caught last night helping one of them. And she ran away when I was caught. Some friend.”

“Go back to your apartment and bring whatever stuff you need back here. You will want all your clothes or at least all your sensible clothes including any winter wear. Sturdy shoes and any boots you have. And any other gear that might prove useful.”

“You have a car right?”

“I do have a vehicle and there is some room for gear but don’t bring any stupid stuff. Don’t make me regret this offer.”

“Deal. I’ll pack up and move in here. I might have to make two trips.”

“Go now while things are quiet.”

“Um, you will let me back in won’t you?”

“We have a deal. I keep my word.”

She nodded then turned and left with no more talk. I wondered what I had got myself into. You can bet she had no food. So in one quick, not very well thought out decision I had just cut my food supplies in half. And what did I get in return? That was the big question. She was a girl and a pretty one. She would be a magnet for trouble.

The girl made two trips to bring all her stuff to my apartment. When she said she was done I moved from my spot by the window and walked over to her. I walked completely around her and looked her over. She had long blond hair. She didn't like me looking.

"I have a knife and I will use it. I forgot it last night but I have it now. My Grandpa taught me how to use it too."

"You are a very attractive woman. You look athletic too. And you are not too busty. Would you consider cutting your hair?"

"What?"

"This is not an order but I would like to request that you cut your hair much shorter."

"Why, do you like girls with short hair?"

"I like all girls. But we are talking about you and we are both trying to stay alive. I want you to look like a teenage boy if possible. Looking like you do now makes you and therefore me a target."

"I can put my hair up. I can wear a hat and hide my hair under it."

"Yes you can do that. But you still might want to consider cutting it. While it is very beautiful and makes you even more beautiful and you likely are rightfully very proud of your hair, things are different now. Keeping your hair clean would be easier if it was short. Hiding the fact that you are a woman would be easier if your hair was short. But it is your decision to make."

"Can I think about it?"

"It is only a request. Think as long as you want and make your own decision."

"So you think I am beautiful?"

"Do not be coy. For this to work we'll have to be honest with each other. And we have to trust each other. The trust might take awhile but will never happen if we are not honest. It is a simple fact that you are a beautiful

woman. Something that was likely great just a week ago. Now it is something that is very dangerous to both of us.”

“Sorry. And I will think about cutting my hair. I see your point.”

“Do you really have a knife?”

“Yes.”

“Let me see it.”

She did nothing for a moment then she produced a folding knife. I held out my hand and again with just a little hesitation she handed it to me. It was a good knife, a Buck one ten. I opened it and it was fairly sharp. I handed it back.

“That is a well made knife and it is fairly sharp. Before we leave I will sharpen it for you. Do you have a sturdy belt?”

“Yes. And I do have the leather sheath for this knife.”

“It is a good knife but a folding knife is seldom equal to a fixed blade knife. I’ll give you a good fixed blade that you should keep on you at all times. Maybe keep both knives on you with the folder hidden.”

“Okay. Do you really think I will need a knife?”

“Did you need a knife last night?”

“Touché!”

“It would be silly to think we can get away from here and find a safe place and never be bothered. There are about four million people here in the city and the suburbs and there is now no food left to buy anywhere. The police seem to have disappeared or have all been killed.

It is now just the survival of the fittest, smartest, and the most heavily armed. People will now take anything they want unless someone is there to kill them first. You just barely got a taste of that last night. In a week or two girls like you will be a commodity that are commonly bought and sold.”

“Are you always this cheerful?”

“Just being honest. There are many people that will die because they will be slow to adapt to the new world around them. I don’t plan on being one of those people. And I hope you won’t either.”

“Will you teach me?”

“For both our sakes the answer is yes I will teach you what I know but this will also be a learning experience for me and everyone else.”

Chapter 7

The girl who told me to call her Marj, wanted to talk and so we did for the remainder of the day. She had no food. What little bit was in her shared apartment she left for the others. I had expected that and I made us an evening meal. She ate it with no complaints. She said she did decide it would be best to cut her hair. So I helped her cut her hair after our meal and before all the sunlight was gone.

I told her to not turn on any lights. The only exception was in the bathroom after you shut the door completely you could safely turn on that light because there was no window. She understood but said it was possible she would turn on a light out of habit. While a real possibility that either of us could make that mistake I told her that our old habits could get us both killed.

She did know how to shoot and while she had never shot the exact guns I had she understood them when I pointed out how they worked. She handled them safely and with some assurance and no bravado. This just might have been a good decision on my part to bring her in with me.

I told her to get some sleep and I would keep watch. I had showed her my Jeep down below. She seemed unimpressed and I told her that was a good thing. Low profile was the answer about how to stay alive.

I sat looking and listening by the window. After about ten minutes I heard her breathing change and guessed she was asleep. I kept watch the rest of the night

until she woke in the morning. We ate breakfast with me by the window. Then I went to bed and quickly fell asleep. I knew it was a risk sleeping when a stranger was inside my apartment but at this point I had to trust her.

I woke up in the afternoon. She was by the window looking out when I got up. I took a very fast cold shower and then joined her by the window. I did try the television but I could not find any channels that were broadcasting. Like the internet I thought it likely I would never watch TV ever again. I hope I am wrong but I really did not care about TV that much anyway.

I liked the fact that Marj talked very quietly like I was without me having to tell her. We talked some and she told me things had been fairly quiet outside. She had seen about a total of maybe twenty people. The largest group was only three. Some had been in the parking lot but none had showed interest in or touched the Jeep. There had been gunshots but nothing close. She said she did hear what she thought was a woman screaming but then it quit.

When I made supper she said she was really hungry. She had not eaten since breakfast because I was not awake. I told her we were now partners and she was welcome to my food just like it was hers. That evening and before she went to bed someone came into the parking lot. The person broke into a couple cars and then searched them though they appeared to take little or nothing from the cars. It was a man and he was heading in the direction of the Jeep. I readied my rifle.

“You’re just going to kill him?”

“Did it bother you when I killed your attacker?”

“That was different.”

“No it wasn’t. That Jeep very likely means life or death to us.”

“So you are going shoot to warn him off?”

“That would be a very poor idea. It would only serve to warn him about our location. Enough talk.”

I sighted and when the man stopped for a moment I fired one shot. He went down while still some distance from the Jeep. He moved for a bit then stopped.

When the man fell after the shot Marj made a noise that is difficult to describe. She said nothing and went to the bedroom and shut the door.

She came out in the morning and we had breakfast which she got ready and brought over to the window for me. When I was done eating she took over my spot. And I went to bed.

When I got up in the afternoon she was still by the window where I joined her after my cold shower.

“Why aren’t we leaving?”

“Because for right now we are relatively safe and comfortable. We have running water and a regular functioning kitchen and bathroom. We should cherish this time.”

“Do you have a plan about where we are going?”

“North. I have a loose plan. My hope is to find an empty furnished summer cabin on a small lake and take possession of it.”

“That’s it, your whole plan?”

“Yep. Took me years to get it all figured out.”

“I guess it is as good as any plan. At least it is someplace to start. When do you think things will get back to normal?”

“Marj, they are never getting back to normal. You will never watch TV, surf the ‘net, go shopping at the mall, or take a plane ride. That world is gone and will not come back.”

“That is what you really think?”

“Yes I do. In the old world I would never have considered shooting anyone. Oh I do hope I’m wrong but I don’t think I will be. I want things back like they were but wishing for it won’t make it so.”

“Then I have a suggestion. We should leave sooner rather than later. The reason is what you just said. Actually the four million reasons.”

“Maybe you’re right.”

“Do you have a plan for food? You don’t have much left.”

“Yes. The back of my vehicle is full of food.”

“You just left it outside!”

“Yes. And it is safe there as long as we keep an eye on it.”

“Now I see why you always sit looking out the window.”

We talked a bit and then I just sat by the window to think for awhile.

“Get any clothes that you want washed and we should wash them. I’ll get mine ready too. I think we should leave just before dawn tomorrow. This will likely be our last chance to use an automatic clothes washer. We better take advantage of it.”

She washed clothes and made our supper with me watching the Jeep. She also washed the bedding which both of us decided we should take with. We both sat by the window while we ate and talked and planned. Two people make better plans if they both have an open mind and are looking to make improvements.

After we were done eating, the clothes were done, and the dishes were done, Marj watched out the window while I packed. Most all my gear was already packed. Now I packed the remaining food. I filled all water containers, gathered up the pots, pans, and dishes, bedding was packed, and finally linens like towels and such.

Then I took my spot at the window and Marj went to sleep. She slept until about two and then took my place so I could get a couple hours of sleep. Sunrise was at about six thirty and it was light about an hour before that. I hoped

to drive away about five thirty. That would mean we would have to start loading shortly after five. Marj woke me up at four thirty.

We had laid out a meager breakfast. We ate and did what last minute things needed doing. Then Marj watched out the open window while I made several trips down to the Jeep. I always left the back seat laid down so that was already done. I stacked and rearranged some and got everything in place.

With the last load I took one of the rifles with me and when everything was ready I motioned Marj to come down and I started the Jeep. As soon as she got in I took off. We had planned our route last night and Marj had the map open and on the seat between us. One rifle was next to me and the other was next to her.

It was barely light enough to see but I left the lights off so we would not draw any more attention to us. The Jeep had a good muffler but I think we were the only vehicle on the road so it was easy to hear us coming. I drove as fast as I dared on the surface streets and soon was going up the ramp that led us to the north bound interstate. There were a few stalled cars off to the side but that did not slow me down. I took it up to seventy and held it there.

Once well out of the city I slowed to save fuel and after almost two hours on the interstate I pulled off and we started our search for a place. In all the time on the highway I had only seen three other moving vehicles. But it was still very early to be on the road. Luckily I had spent some time up here around where we now were. I came up both hunting and fishing so I did know my way around the area some.

Maybe better than that was the fact that I had a few detailed maps of the area. So we switched from the highway map to the detailed maps. Marj seemed to be able to read and understand the maps. That is something

few can do anymore. I admit that impressed me more than most things I had discovered about her.

We drove all the way around a couple small lakes without finding some place that seemed right. Many were permanent homes and likely had occupants. That was not something we were looking for at all. I would never chase someone else out of a place. There would be an empty summer home; we just had to find it. I did not want a big lake because that would just mean more people. More people would always mean more trouble.

Chapter 8

We had found nothing by about two so we stopped for lunch. And we both wanted to get out and stretch our legs. The temperature surprised both of us when we stepped out. It was much cooler up here. We were at a wayside rest and we relaxed and ate our lunch. There was a bathroom here that we both used and spent a little time looking at the map together.

There was another lake about four or five miles away and we would try that next. Wanting to accomplish more today we got moving again. The next lake was a dud also. As was the one after that and we drove to another. For anyone that has been up in northern Minnesota or even looked at a detailed map of the area most would be very surprised at the number of lakes. Minnesota has way more than the ten thousand lakes they brag about. So believe me we had plenty of lakes just in this area to look over to find what we wanted.

It was close to six and we had not really found any house we thought would work for us. We were driving along a small lake and when a for sale sign came up I pulled into the driveway next to the sign. I couldn't see the house from the small road we were on but I thought if it was for sale it would likely be empty and would do for us to stay the night anyway.

When we got to the house we could see the lake just down the hill from the house. There was a detached garage and one shed. As I pulled up I looked at the driveway and saw no tire tracks. I thought that meant it was very likely empty and I stopped in front of the smaller-sized house.

“Stay here but slide over and be ready to tear out of here if there is trouble.”

She nodded and I got out. I walked up to the door and knocked. There was no answer and I expected none. I walked around to the back and knocked on the back door with the same response. I went back to the front and waved Marj over. She shut off the Jeep and got out carrying the rifle. Smart gal.

We tried the doors but they were locked. I was able to get inside the garage and the shed because they were not locked. Inside those we both looked for a spare key hanging from a nail. It is a common practice and we were eventually rewarded for our search. The key we found fit the house and we finally got inside.

The house looked fine and the electric was turned on when we checked a light. Marj tried a faucet and we also had water. The place was furnished and we decided to stay the night. I drove the Jeep into the garage and took what we needed out of the vehicle then I locked the Jeep and I locked the garage after finding the house key fit the garage lock also.

It was late enough so we had a quick meal and by the time that was done so was I. There were two bedrooms and we each took one. I was out like a light as soon as my head hit the pillow with my rifle alongside the bed and my pistol under the pillow.

I woke early in the morning and just lay in bed listening. The birds were already singing even though the sun was not quite up yet. Other than that I heard nothing. I got up and used the bathroom. Marj was still asleep and her door was closed. I dressed and put on a jacket then carrying my rifle I went outside.

The sun was just rising in the east and brightening the day. There were steps going down to the lake. There was also a boat house down there and a short dock. The boathouse had a canoe hanging inside and there was a

small fishing boat that had just oars and no motor. There were several fishing poles in the boat house and on a shelf was a couple of tackle boxes.

I left the boat house and looked over what I could see of the lake. From right here I could not see any other houses but there would obviously be some. I went back up the steps to the house area. On the back side of the garage was a lean-to full of firewood. I had seen the woodstove in the house last night.

I unlocked the garage and went inside for a closer look than I gave it last night. There was a work bench on one side of the garage with many tools hanging over it. There were several cabinets that I did not bother to open. On one side there was some stuff covered with a big tarp but I never looked under that either. Then I went back outside.

There was a big propane tank and I lifted the lid to see that it had about seventy percent in it according to the gauge. There were trees all around the place which could be good or bad. Done outside for now I went back in the house where I now found Marj up and around.

“Things look okay outside?”

“Yes it looks good. We seem to be alone here. There is a small row boat and a canoe in a boat house down by the lake.”

“This seems like a nice place. I slept like a log last night.”

“Me too. I was pretty tired. I think this place might be just what we were looking for.”

“It looks fine to me to so if you think that it’s okay.”

“I say we hang out here for a few days or a week and see how it goes. Leave most of our stuff in the Jeep in case we need to make a rapid departure.”

“Sounds like a good plan.”

“Also I think I will see if we can have fresh fish for lunch.”

“This I have to see.”

We had a quick bite for breakfast and we brought a few more items in out of the Jeep. We both looked around inside and outside some more. I checked the propane tank and the valve was turned off. I turned it on and then lit the pilot light on the water heater in the house. I also checked the gas stove to make sure it worked. By then I thought it was time to fish.

I just used a rod and reel from the boat house and used tackle from there too rather than digging out my own stuff from the Jeep. I didn't feel like digging for natural bait so I used artificial lures. I just fished from the end of the dock. I caught several but only kept the two largest crappies. They were really biting and it made me look good in front of Marj. Not that it mattered at all to me.

I cleaned the two fish and brought them in the house. There was a small gas grill on the little deck behind the house and I decided to use that for cooking the fish. I cleaned the grill a little (after I checked the tank to see if it had fuel) then I started it and ran it very hot to finish the cleaning job.

I doctored up the fish using what I found inside the house and grilled them. We sat down at the bistro table outside to eat.

“Not bad for a lonely old man.”

“I'm the next thing to a master chef.”

“So what's on the agenda for the rest of the day?”

“I think I will take a walk and see what's around here nearby.”

“Maybe I should hang around here and keep an eye on our gear.”

“Sounds like we have a plan.”

I took my rifle and a bottle of water and left after our meal. I walked about three miles maybe along the lake and then walked back on the road. There were two other

houses but both were empty of people. I never tried to get inside either of them.

I saw no one and heard no man-made sounds on my walk. I got back to the house fine and I found Marj inside doing some cleaning.

“I just thought I would clean up the place a little just in case we did decide to stay here.”

“I can help. I don’t mind cleaning.”

“Not a big deal. You find anything?”

“I walked about three miles farther down the road. There were two more houses that were empty. I neither saw nor heard anyone.”

“I found some garden seeds in one cupboard. I have no idea how old they are or if they are still any good. But if we leave we should take them with us.”

“Yes we certainly should. I like this place better all the time. We are well off the beaten path here. The propane and the firewood should keep us for a year maybe I figure. If I can catch us enough fish we might be able to stretch the food we have that long. Longer if the seeds still germinate and we can grow a garden, it would stretch the food even farther.”

“You have that much food in your Jeep?”

“I bought a bunch of stuff including two twenty pound bags of white rice. Just the rice alone will go a long ways and we can add fish or something to the rice to make it stretch even farther.”

“I’m glad I brought you with me.”

She said that with a smile and it almost took my breath away. She was so pretty when she smiled. The short hair she is now sporting has done nothing to detract from her beauty.

“I’m glad you did too. I can also go hunting and very likely bolster our food supply with wild meat. I often hunted up in this general area in the fall.”

“I can hunt.”

“Let me guess. Your Grandpa taught you.”

“As a matter of fact he did.”

“I think you had a very wise Grandpa.”

“Yes he was and he taught me many things. Not so much into book learning but hands on real life learning experiences. The kind of things that stick with you.”

“I wish I would have had someone like that. Most of my learning was at school. The school of hard knocks, that is.”

Chapter 9

The next morning I decided to leave early and bring water and a couple of energy bars with me and travel farther away to check things out around this place that looked more and more like it would be our new home. At least for awhile.

Marj wanted to stay and keep cleaning which was fine by me. I walked off and kept walking. The day turned out to be longer than I originally expected but I still came in sight of our house in the early afternoon with plenty of daylight left. The day was fairly warm and I decided to drop down and stand on the dock to enjoy the cool air from the lake for a bit before going inside for the night. I never made it to the dock though.

Just past the house I could look down and I saw a strange power boat tied up to our dock. I instantly went on alert and ducked back close in to the house wall. I hugged the wall and peaked into the first window I came to. A quick look and I saw nothing out of the ordinary. I still ducked under that window as I continued along the house wall.

After a quick look first I rounded the house corner with my rifle at ready and the safety off. I was now at the back of the house and I could see the open back door. This door opened into the kitchen/dining area. I now moved even more carefully. When I got to the door I eased close enough so one eye could see into the room.

I did not like what I saw. A man was holding Marj and two others were looking on. She did not look at all happy. I could now hear what was being said inside and that did not make me happy either.

“You are quite a prize little lady.”

“You are all going to find out that is not true.”

“We took your knife. What are you going to do nag at us? You will be able to provide us with weeks of fun entertainment. Then maybe we can even use you for trade goods after that.”

“Enough talk I want some of that right now.”

“Me too.”

I peaked around the corner again and all eyes were on Marj. The man holding her had moved his hands and they were now around her neck. As I watched I saw one of her hands go into a back pocket on her jeans. I was pretty sure I knew what was in that pocket.

I pulled my head back and took a couple deep breaths. I double checked that the safety was off and the reflex sight was turned on and then I was just about to step in and end this when I heard the man scream. It was my cue and I stepped inside.

Two very fast shots went into the man closest to me and then I swung and fired two into the body of the second man before swinging the barrel at Marj’s attacker. It was only then I saw the blood pouring out of the man’s leg. The bloody knife was in Marj’s hand. He had let go of her completely but she was not stopping.

She was using the man’s leg as a pin cushion and repeatedly stabbing it with the four inch blade on her folding knife. And she was putting all her strength into each stroke too. Then her blade must have lodged in his leg bone and she stopped after trying unsuccessfully to pull the knife out. The knife was sticking prominently out of his leg.

“Stop!”

I yelled, though my rifle shots had been so loud in the room I don’t know if anyone could hear me. Marj stepped back and away from the man she had stabbed.

“Kill him!”

She shouted and then was silent. The man finally turned to face me. The blood was draining out of his leg like a fire hose. I stepped forward and kicked the man as hard as I could in his good leg and he went down. I then grabbed Marj's knife and wrenched it free from the man's leg. This caused him to let out a howl.

I held the very sharp knife against his neck and he stopped moving and was very still.

"Is there more of you"

"What are you talking about?"

I made two quick moves with the knife and blood started to run from each side of his neck. The cuts were very shallow but had the right effect.

"Is there more of you"

"No there was just the three of us."

I dragged the man outside, out the back door. By the time I got him outside I looked down and the blood flow was diminishing greatly from his leg wounds. His heart was stopping. The amount of blood he had lost was more than I ever imagined a person had inside them. One or more of the stabs must have hit the man's femoral artery. I just left him and stepped in to check on Marj and to see if the others were dead.

Marj was still just standing still there, where she had stopped. I stepped over and kicked each of the other men where I got no response. Then I went to Marj.

"Are you hurt?"

She did not even look at me.

"Are you hurt?"

I asked much louder this time. But she still did not respond. I made sure the safety was in the on position on my rifle and then I gently brought Marj into a hug against my body so I could also keep an eye out the back door and see the man lying still out there.

This hug was almost the first body contact we had ever had other than a handshake. She didn't resist or hug me. It was just like hugging a lifeless doll.

"It's all right now. You are safe. I'm here. You're safe now."

I just kept whispering in her ear. I didn't know what else to do. I'm not sure how long we were like that, just standing there. Then she moaned quietly and started to cry. A few moments later I felt her arms wrap around me. She cried and we held each other. I didn't care how long I had to stand there. She was safe now. That was the only thing that mattered to me.

At some point her crying tapered off and she was quiet. But she still held me tight to her. I just held her and waited. Then she finally spoke in a voice so quiet that I could barely hear even though her lips were almost against my ear.

"Are they dead?"

"Yes you are safe. I am here now."

Again she just held me for awhile longer. Then she eased back slowly. It was almost like she did so very reluctantly.

"Safe?"

"Yes you're safe now."

I moved her slowly out of the kitchen and into the living room and eased her into a chair.

"Are you okay?"

I had to repeat the question again.

"I'm okay."

"You are safe now. I am just going to step away for a minute. I will be right back."

She moved very fast and grabbed my arm. I stayed and just laid my hand over hers. After awhile when I started to move away she did nothing to stop me.

First I checked on the man I had dragged outside. He was dead as I knew he would be. Next I dragged the

other two out of the house. I moved all three away from the doorway and around the corner of the house so you could not see them from inside.

Next I did some rudimentary cleaning to get the bulk of the blood removed from the floor. I stopped a few times just to check on Marj. She seemed to be out of it and I took advantage of that and kept on cleaning for awhile longer. When I was done it didn't look so bad. I also washed all the blood from Marj's knife. Then I went back in the living room and gently moved Marj to the couch where she laid down. I covered her with a light throw blanket.

When I checked on her a minute later she was sleeping.

Chapter 10

I kept an eye on Marj off and on all evening until well into the night. I did finish cleaning until all traces of blood I could find were removed from the kitchen area. I thought it likely I would see some in the daylight but I had done what I could for now.

When it got late I locked up the house and moved a couple small night lights into the living room so if Marj woke during the night there would be some light and she would know where she was. I went to bed but left the door to my bedroom wide open.

Even though I was up late I rose early the next morning. After I was done in the bathroom I double checked the kitchen to make sure it was clean. I thought it looked fine and made some breakfast. When it was ready I very gently woke Marj. I told her breakfast was ready and for several moments she must have forgotten what happened last evening. When she did remember she grabbed me and held me for a minute.

“Marj, everything is fine. You are a very brave woman. Your Grandpa would be very proud of you.”

Me mentioning her Grandpa seemed to help. I helped her up and she went into the bathroom. When she emerged she looked much better.

“Let’s have some breakfast.”

She seemed somewhat reluctant to enter the kitchen but finally did and I saw her look around. Then she sat down at the table and I set her breakfast in front of her. She seemed to eat a little mechanically but she ate which was the main thing. When we were both done I did the few dishes and then I was unsure of what to do next.

“Let’s take a little walk.”

I mostly led her outside (we went through the front door) and we walked out down the driveway. After awhile she took my hand. I commented on how happy all the birds sounded with their constant singing. She even agreed that the birds sounded happy.

I then made small talk with me asking her questions so she would speak. Gradually she opened up and I turned us to start walking back again. By the time we got back to the house she seemed almost back to her normal self.

“Thank you for saving me and for what you did just now. I’m fine now.”

“You’re welcome. Plus I’m getting used to saving you. We are a team you know.”

“Yes we are.”

I said nothing.

“They busted in and I did not have a chance to stop them.”

“You did just fine.”

“When they grabbed me I was so scared.”

“When I heard you speak you did not sound scared at all. You warned them to let you go and then they paid the price for not heeding your warning. You were fantastic.”

“You killed all of them?”

“No, we defended ourselves from evil men and we triumphed over that evil. And that was thanks to you.”

“But I did nothing. I was so scared.”

“I was scared too. Naturally anyone would be scared in a situation like that. But you did not let fear incapacitate you. You spoke with confidence to scare them and then you attacked.

“You were very brave and you were a hero. You kept them busy and saved me from getting hurt. We make a good team. But they are gone now. I don’t think there

are any more around here. We are safe but still must remain vigilant. I will not leave like that again. We will stay together because we are a team.”

“That sounds like a good plan. And thank you for cleaning up the mess.”

“Like I told you before I don’t mind cleaning. I have to like cleaning with how messy I am.”

Later I dug a shallow mass grave quite some distance from the house and dragged the three dead men into it. I had gone through their pockets and taken everything from them that was of any value at all.

The next day Marj and I took the dead men’s power boat and made a circuit of the lake. She enjoyed the outing and we were able to see that the lake was fairly small and there were not many houses along the shores.

We talked about checking all the houses to look for things we could use and to see if anyone was living in any of the places. Over the next several days we did just that along with plenty of fishing. We started to eat fish for one meal almost every day.

We found additional gas for the boat and my Jeep. I filled the gas tank in the Jeep and there was even some fuel stabilizer we found which I used in both my Jeep and in all the remaining fuel we found.

We did make a small garden and planted a few of our seeds. I watered the garden using water from the lake which I thought might be better than well water. When it got warm enough we both started swimming a little each day. It was good exercise and fun besides.

Marj in a bikini was a sight to behold. I honestly tried hard not to look at her.

In the other houses we did find a fair amount of food which we brought to our house. I also moved some firewood from other houses to our house. The bad thing was we did find out where the power boat came from. The thugs had killed a man and wife and trashed their house.

Then when the three men ran out of what food was there, they used the boat to look for more.

The thugs' car was almost empty when I looked at it. The summer went by quickly for Marj and me. It was almost like a summer vacation for each of us. Our garden produced a little but not very much. Neither of us knew anything about gardening. The plants did come up because we had carefully read how to plant them on the back of the packages. Luckily we used few of the precious seeds. We had better luck with apples.

Several of the places had apple trees and we picked all of them that we could. The electric power was still working and we froze a large amount of apples besides both of us eating a lot. There were also wild raspberries in many spots nearby and we fought the birds for them and picked what we could.

One house had a fair sized strawberry patch that produced well. In that house we did find more garden seeds too. We also collected books and brought to our house. There were many books. Like how-to books and fiction books of all kinds.

We had a radio and tried that fairly often in the hopes of hearing something. We also tried the TV at first but both of us thought that was a lost cause so we stopped even turning the TV on anymore.

I turned Marj into a good fisherman. She loved to go fishing now even more than me. We always did everything together since that attack. When we went out fishing we mostly took the little row boat. I never took a fishing rod with for myself. I was just the motor and rowed the boat to where Marj told me she wanted to fish.

I had a tough time learning to row the boat and Marj laughed at me a hundred times I think. That was okay and I enjoyed her laughs and her smiles. I also got better at rowing. Though I never bothered to take a fishing rod for

myself because I knew Marj would catch plenty of fish, I did always take a rifle.

I always carried my pistol and now Marj carried one also. Two of the men had pistols on them so we even had a spare now. We also found a couple rifles and shotguns in the nearby houses along with some ammunition. We now had plenty of firepower but things seemed fairly safe now.

Chapter 11

Fall came like it always does. One end of the small lake was full of cattails and reeds and ducks hung out there all the time. It was a short walk from our house and I would sneak down by the water and shoot a duck with one of the twenty two rifles we had now.

The duck meat was just okay to eat. We both kept trying new ways to cook it in the hopes of making it taste better. There were grouse in the nearby woods and both Marj and I loved eating grouse. For those that have never tried Ruffed Grouse it is all white meat and the taste is amazing.

There were snowshoe hares or rabbits here too and when they changed to their winter white coats they stuck out like a sore thumb because we had no snow yet. And they were fine eating and we were able to bag them almost whenever we wanted. Marj thought they looked cute but that did not stop her from making clean head shots on them.

There were many deer in the area but so far we had not taken any of them. In the houses and with what I had brought from my place we had a lot of plastic freezer type bags. We also had some plastic wrap but we had no genuine freezer paper. When it got a little colder I did shoot a deer.

I had processed a deer once before so I did know something about butchering one. Marj helped and we deboned all the deer meat and cut it into pieces. Neither of us knew if what we ended up with were steaks, chops, or roasts but neither of us thought it really mattered much.

We had the most of the plastic wrap so that is what we used to wrap the meat and freeze it. We also ate some that first night. It tasted fine but we both decided that we could do better cooking it with practice.

The power boat was now safely in the boat house up on the boat lift. The row boat was inside and leaning up against one wall. We had never used the canoe during the summer so it was still hanging in the same spot.

It was cold enough now so we were using the wood stove for heat, especially in the mornings. We also cooked on the wood stove too so we could save on the propane use.

One evening after our meal we were sitting in the living room where we usually hung out because that was where the wood stove was and it was the warmest room in the house. Marj stopped looking at the book in her lap and shocked me with what she said.

“I love you too you know.”

“What are you talking about?”

“I know you are in love with me.”

“I’ve never even kissed you!”

“But that doesn’t matter does it? I know you love me, don’t you?”

I just stared at her but she stared right back at me. And she had that little smile that I like so much.

“I never even thought about it. But we seem to get along pretty well don’t we?”

“I’m not talking about getting along. You love me and have for a long time.”

“I’m not sure if I do or not.”

“Well I can assure you that indeed you are in love with me. I’ve known it for some time and I knew I liked you but I couldn’t decide if what I felt was love or not. But I’m sure now and I wanted to tell you that so you know.”

“So you love me?”

“Yes.”

“Are you teasing me?”

“No, I’m not teasing you. I love you.”

“People in love kiss you know.”

“I am fully aware that is usually the case.”

“I might come over there and kiss you right now.”

“You are scared to do that because you thought all this time that I did not love you. That’s true isn’t it? You have been afraid to show me that you love me.”

“I don’t want you to get mad at me. Yes I have always been attracted to you.”

“You told me that when we met but this is different. You love me don’t you?”

“I- - don’t know that for sure.”

“Well you’re lucky then that I know that you do love me. One of us at least knows what is going on around here.”

I put the book down that I had been reading and got up and walked over to her. She just sat there with her little smile and watched me. I bent down and kissed her lightly on her lips.

She did nothing and said nothing. But I liked that little kiss so I did it again. This time it was different. When I kissed her lightly she reached up and pulled my head down tight. And she kissed me back and it was no longer just a light kiss. Then she released me.

“Are you still scared to kiss me, now?”

“No. And I just might do that all the time now.”

“Are you all talk or is there some action there too?”

So I bent over again and this time I really kissed her. And she kissed me back. And this kiss did not stop right away.

“I told you that I knew you loved me. And that I loved you.”

“I guess maybe you just might be right but I think it will require more investigation on my part.”

She had a bigger smile on her face now. She was even prettier with that bigger smile. That night we only used one of the bedrooms. The other bedroom was just a spare room after that night.

Neither of us knew what the future held for us but from that night on we both knew that whatever the future would bring we would face it together.

The End

Minnesota Madness

By

Hiwall

