

**WORST CASE SCENARIO:
ELECTION NIGHT**

By

D a n M c C r o r y



Authorunit
Printing your dreams

WORST CASE SCENARIO: ELECTON NIGHT

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WORST CASE SCENARIO: ELECTION NIGHT

by Dan McCrory

The following is a work of satirical fiction with all the true fear and paranoia intact. The portrayal of real persons living or dead is purely coincidental.

CNN reporters were saying it was too late to call the winner. “Due to the large number of mail-in ballots, we probably won’t know until Thursday how much President Trump has won by.”

“That’s right, Shannon. We can show you why, right now, we’re calling the election for Trump.”

The camera pulled back and there were two vigilantes, one of each side of the dais, hidden in the shadows till now.

“What we’re seeing, Carl, is a takeover of polls by even more vigilantes.”

“This just in. Citizens in Detroit, waiting to vote, decided to rush and subdue armed vigilantes. We go live to Chris Steel in Detroit.”

“Shannon, things have gotten out of control. It seems some Democrats also came to the polls armed and returned gunfire after a vigilante shot and killed two protestors. The death toll stands at three vigilantes dead and two protestors dead and five wounded.”

The armed vigilantes in the newsroom cried, "Fake news!" and shot the anchors. The screens in millions of homes went to a test pattern.

Alan turned to his wife. "It's happening. Get my Glock and ammo out of the closet."

"It has to be an isolated incident," Denise said.

Alan went through twenty more channels. Chicago, LA, Boston, buildings burning, gunfire everywhere.

Denise was crying in fear, just barely holding it together. She came back with the gun.

Alan loaded it carefully. "Remember how to use this?" he asked calmly.

She nodded and looked at her husband, still in the grips of terror.

"Good. Lock the door till I come back." He grabbed the baseball bat they kept by the back door.

"Can't we just wait here together till the cops come?"

"At this point we can't say whose side they're on. They're probably rounding up everybody with Biden bumper stickers or lawn signs. Stay here. Keep the lights off and I'll check out the neighborhood."

"Be careful!"

As soon as Alan had closed the door behind him Denise slammed the deadbolt home. She went to the window and tried to peer out without disturbing the vertical blinds.

She could see vague forms running up and down the street, the occasional flashlight played on the walls of her neighbors' homes.

She watched as a police cruiser pulled up across the street. The couple that lived directly across from them, normal people they saw every day, walked with rifles slung over their shoulders and embraced the cops. Denise couldn't hear what they were saying, but the neighbors were gesturing to the home next to theirs. Frank had a Bernie bumper sticker he had slapped on in 2015. A minute later, he was dragged into his driveway. Martinez from down the street pulled out a 45 and shot him in the head.

Martinez then picked up a bullhorn. "THIS IS WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO EVERY SOCIALIST, EVERY MUSLIM, EVERY BLACK LIVES MATTERS TERRORIST! WE ARE NOT SURRENDERING OUR COUNTRY!"

Denise was distracted as the TV roared back to life. It was Trump.

"This is your president. As we predicted we have uncovered large amounts of mail fraud in this election. Illegal immigrants, voting by the thousands using the IDs of deceased Americans, were hired, it is reported, were hired by Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer working hand-in-hand with George Soros through actions directed by QAnon. This is worse than even I could have predicted, and the corruption runs so deep. Democrat leaders in the congress and senate are being rounded up. Their attempt to overthrow our government and hand it over to Socialists has been stopped in its tracks. Currently Socialist ringleader Bernie Sanders has fled the capital and is considered armed and dangerous. Well done, America!

"Law enforcement is going through a similar purge in our major cities and will be moving on city halls to round up corrupt mayors and governors. The only way we can make sure this never happens again is by cutting out our infection. It is clear these terrorists will never work with us and will, in fact, stand in our way as we make America great again! They pushed us! We are going to finish that wall now and they will be on the other side."

Denise thought of Josh on campus in Berkeley and Candy at Harvard. She called Candy first.

"Mom! Are you and dad okay?"

"We are. What about you? Where are you?"

"In our dorms. There were some gunshots, and we were told to hide till we get the 'all-clear.'"

"Stay put! Let me know if the situation changes."

"Okay. Mommy, I'm scared."

"Me too, honey. I'm going to call your brother now."

"Tell Josh I love him."

"I will, honey."

Josh's line was busy. There was a tap at the back door that made her jump. A glance revealed it was Alan.

"There's not enough cover out front," he explained.

She brought him up to speed on the kids. He pulled out his phone. "Let's try Josh again."

"Dad!" Josh was whispering.

"Where are you?"

"Hiding in the basement of Sigma Pi. Some military vehicles and some soccer mom vans drove onto the quad by guys dressed in military gear without patches or insignia."

"Have we been invaded?" asked Denise.

"Are they armed?"

"They might be using rubber bullets. Hang on. A couple of them are chasing a black guy."

There was silence, then, "Oh my God! That's real blood! They're picking him up. He's not moving. They're throwing him in the van."

"Josh, is there any way to get out of there safely?" his mother asked.

"I don't know; I could try."

"Then, no." Denise said.

"Honey, he has to get off campus." Alan insisted.

"And I'm not going to wait for them to come get me," Josh replied with more bravado than he felt. "I've got to find Savannah and make sure she's safe."

Alan turned to Denise. "Get in touch with Candy. I'll drive to Boston if I have to."

*

The president was impressed with the smooth transition America was making to this new form of government. He knew with a cold certainty that the Democrats had been trying to overthrow the U.S. government

with these fake elections. But as long as he held the reins of power, the glory of these United States was assured.

“Get me Putin on the phone,” he commanded a faceless sycophant who rushed to do his bidding. “Did they catch Acosta yet?” he asked the underling.

“I’m not sure. I’ll find out.”

Trump smiled to himself, recalling the CNN reporter’s quick exit from the Rose Garden. It was just a matter of time till he was caught. He was going to make him lick his shoes before they sent that uppity asshole to the re-education camp in Bethesda.

Melania was looking at him with new respect, maybe even fear. Fuck her. He didn’t need to keep up appearances anymore. It had always been Ivanka. He had created her to rule beside him. He had already promised that pussy Jared to some Christian biker gang. Hell, he’d probably love it.

“Where’s that Putin call?” He loved it when people jumped and scrambled to serve.

“Here you are, sir. President Putin.”

Putin was in a good mood. “How are you, Mr. President?”

“That plan you sent me worked beautifully. It was a very, very beautiful thing.”

“How does it feel to have real power, Mr. President?”

“Amazing, Mr. President. If Iran fucks with me, pfft. If North Korea tries to embarrass me again, boom, boom, boom,” laughed Trump.

“All I ask, you brilliant, handsome man, is a courtesy call before you go after one of my neighbors. We don’t want all the power of nuclear war going to the heads of your stupid generals.”

“I don’t think they’d take a shit without running it by me first.”

“Still, just to be working together...”

“That’s what I like about you, V. You get me.”

“Of course, I do, Donald. I respect you and everyone else must respect you because you are the most powerful man on the planet.”

"Now you're just trying to feed my ego."

"Yes, but is it not true, Mr. President?"

"Yes. Yes, it is. Come visit soon. I have to go now. I have a country to conquer."

"I understand."

Ivanka stuck her head inside the oval office. "Daddy, are you busy?"

"Never for you, cupcake. What do you need?"

"I can't find Jared anywhere. Do you have him off on a secret mission again?"

"Yep, that's it. But don't be too upset if one of these days he doesn't make it back."

"Can he take Melania with him?"

"Sweetie, she's the First Lady."

"I could be your First Lady, daddy."

"Would you wear your skirts a little shorter, maybe get a boob job? Oh, what am I thinking? I can only push those bible thumpers so far."

"But, daddy, aren't you about to become premier...?"

"We haven't settled on a title yet. I need our little snake charmers and the rest of the holy gang to become the new Supreme Court. Get it, Supreme?"

"They'll love that!"

"Let them get a little blood first and they'll give me a pass. Then we can bond. But I may keep Melania around just to spice things up occasionally."

*

Candy heard the pop pop of distant gunfire.

She and several others had decided they were going to make a mad dash for the nearest parking lot from the library.

"Run like the devil!" Professor Ingram advised her. "They always target the pretty ones. And the fact that you're articulate and intelligent..."

“I’m fucked,” she offered.

“You’re fucked.”

The group of five made it to the alley before they were stopped by self-appointed fire marshals. There were three of them, brandishing a variety of firearms.

Their apparent leader appraised Candy before announcing, “That’s my girlfriend. She’s with me.”

One of them, looking much the weary surfer, said, “What’s her name, man? You know you can’t just pick somebody to save.”

Candy made a quick decision. “No, I’m his girlfriend.” She stuck out a hand. “I’m Brenda. Trump all the way.”

The leader pulled her to him, holding on tight. “Thank God you’re safe, Brenda.”

He reached out to grope her, sure that he had assuaged all doubt. She stopped him with a hand on his wrist. “You may get what you want now, but I promise you, one night you will die unpleasantly,” she hissed.

He pulled back his hand and grinned. “I’ll grow on you.”

“I need to get home.”

“Where ya headed?”

“San Francisco.”

“I’ve got a Bentley, a gas card, and a Trump/Pence bumpersticker. That should get us to California.”

“Great. I’ll let my parents know I’m on the way.”

He stopped her mid-dial. “How do you know you won’t become a Republican in the next few days?”

“I’ll still be related to them.”

“But maybe you won’t be so interested in joining them in a re-education camp.”

She studied his face, looking for humor and decided he meant every word.

Cotton wraparound masks for COVID-19 had been replaced with masks that ranged from whimsical to terrifying. Every time they

reached a checkpoint on their way west, they were stopped long enough to determine they were young and white. The bumpersticker was merely a clincher.

They drove through the night, only stopping for gas just to have the tweakers in the middle of nowhere marvel over the car, the girl, or the clear passage to their intended destination.

They finally pulled the Bentley into a hotel parking lot just outside Richmond.

“No more excuses,” he told her. “Tonight, you’re mine.”

The hotel was a dump with sheets that would tell a sordid story if subjected to a blacklight screening. Their air conditioner worked well enough to stir the dust in the room.

“Take off your clothes and lie down,” he ordered.

“No!”

He pulled a gun from a fanny pack around his waist. “Remember the old days when no meant no? That ‘no’ doesn’t exist anymore.”

He waved the gun from her to the bed. “I’m going to take it any which way I want it.”

The door flew open toward them followed by a Native American, solid, but his full head of hair was almost totally gray. He buried a tomahawk in the other man’s skull with a solid thunk. Candy’s bloodcurdling scream seemed to go on forever and reverberate throughout the little hotel room.

“Any more of them?” the biker asked.

“No. He was the only one who could get me past all the checkpoints and into California to my folks.”

“Can you sound a little more grateful? I risked my life to protect your honor.”

“That ship sailed a few frat parties ago.”

They both looked at the man lying dead on the floor.

“I didn’t even know his name,” she said.

“I’m Ronnie. Are you from around here?”

"I'm not sure I want to answer your question."

"If you're a local, everybody is going to know your politics and if they know your politics, they're going to make some deadly assumptions."

"What's your part in all this?" she asked him.

"Mattaponi tribe. We're taking out the militias."

"This guy wasn't militia. He was just a one-percenter, a student at Harvard like me."

"The Trump administration is counting on militia support especially from the south to help put down any resistance."

"What about the military? Isn't it their job?"

"The police and military have been compromised. In Flagstaff, a few hours ago the pro-Trumpers killed all the decent national guard who were trying to desert."

"So, how am I going to make it to California?"

"You should probably come with me."

"Why would I do that?"

"Because chances are you won't make it to California, especially alone. Have you ever shot a gun?"

"Occasionally. But I need to get to my family."

"We really could use you. We're all brown so we're immediately suspect. A blonde Aryan-looking woman like yourself would provide some cover for us."

"Are you saying because I look a certain way, I could make them think I'm one of them?"

"You could be. I'm new at this. Who did you vote for?"

"I could say Biden and be lying. You would never know until it was too late."

"True. That's why we need you."

"Who's 'we'?"

"The Mattaponi. At least those who left the reservation before they rounded us up. We're working with the Rappahannock, some Cherokee, Black Panthers..."

"The Black Panthers? I didn't know they were still around. Who's on their side? Do we even stand a chance?"

"Trump's still in the White House acting like it's just another day in America. They have the Republican members of Congress and the conservative judges pretending we still have a democracy. They've got most of the military though some got away before the purge and took some firepower with them. It's hard to hide a tank, though, so it's mostly RPGs, AR-15s, stuff like that. Most of the police are Trumpers. Should have seen that coming."

"So, they've got most of the guns, the heavy weapons, the illusion of law-and-order. Can we leave soon? The body is starting to attract flies."

"We're meeting down the road in a gas station."

"I can drive the Bentley, but you should probably hide in the back."

"You know, I'm very impressed. Most women who look like you would be crouching over the body, practically catatonic."

"And most guys like you would be passed out in front of the TV. Stereotypes are *their* thing."

"Still, impressed. What's your name?"

"Brenda for now."

"Okay, Brenda. What was your major?"

"Pre-law with a bachelors in poly sci."

"A budding politician. I figured you for pre-med since the sight of blood didn't seem to faze you."

"Shouldn't we be leaving? Do we take him with us?" she asked.

"Leave him to rot. This is war."

Ronnie had her park the car around the corner from the Ecco service station in case the army had come, arrested everyone, and left a couple of decoys to arrest or kill any other people of color who came to serve.

Ronnie texted ahead to announce their arrival. A little white girl stood on the path leading to the rear of the station.

"Follow me."

One solitary figure in coveralls was in the working bays with cars on both hydraulic lifts. He looked at his phone and raised one of the lifts. There were six under the body of a Jeep Wagoneer.

Another man about Ronnie's age climbed out first and looked at Candy with open hostility.

"Who's this?" he asked.

"Brenda somebody. She's trying to get to California to check on her family."

"Then why did you bring her here? She looks like one of *them*."

"She was about to get raped by one of them. I think I presented a compelling case to throw her lot in with us."

"You didn't leave your weapon at the scene, did you?"

"He buried a tomahawk in the guy's head. I think it was well-lodged in his skull," Candy/Brenda said.

"Shit. There goes our element of surprise. I'm Reggie, Ronnie's brother."

"Is this it? Is this the extent of your army?" Candy asked.

"No, we're keeping the size of assemblies deceptively small and communicating by text message."

"You can't rely on technology too much. I'm willing to bet the Russian bots will figure out a way to shut us down. Either that or they'll do what they did in 2016 and the last two years: disinformation blitz."

"I've got a plan, and you can play a major part," Reggie said. He turned to Ronnie.

"We're going to need reinforcements and allies."

•

In California the situation didn't seem less dire in the light of day. The TV occasionally roared to life to announce every little victory. McConnell said, "These Democrat criminals will be rounded up and dealt with." The screen showed perp walks of known lefty celebrities in handcuffs. "Hollywood has been dismantled, the leftists controlling

the media were found guilty of treason for broadcasting fake news and undermining the authority of the US government.”

“Governor Newsom turned himself in and was attacked by an angry mob in Los Angeles. California for all intents and purposes has been locked down. Resistance has failed. In a matter of hours, we will see a peaceful transition to power. God bless America. All hail, Donald Trump!”

Alan’s phone buzzed.

“Josh, are you okay?”

“Coming home, dad. There are checkpoints on every road out of Berkeley. The local sporting goods store had been ransacked. Idiots took all the guns and left the archery stuff.”

“Are you alone?”

“Nah. I’ve got Savannah with me, my roomie, Curtis and his girl, Lisa. We’re going to have a short training session on the bow-and-arrow and be on our way. We’ll see you around nightfall.”

“Be careful, Josh. This is a helluva way to meet your girlfriend.”

“Dad, Savannah is African American and so are Curtis and Lisa. We’re going to Oakland first to check on Curtis’ mom.”

“Son, I hate to say this, but your group is going to attract a lot of unwanted attention.”

“Look at it this way, dad, we’re headed into friendly territory.”

There was a loud roar outside that even Josh heard on the phone.

“What was that?”

Denise was looking out the window. “It’s a biker gang! They’re wearing swastikas!”

“Josh, call us when you get to Oakland or if there’s any trouble on the way. Keep your phone on vibrate so if I call you, it won’t give away your position.”

“Good idea, dad.”

“Oh my God! They’re going house to house!”

“Talk to you soon, son. We love you.”

"Me too. What about Candy?"

"We'll call her as soon as we deal with these bikers. Hang up now!"

One of the bikers was pounding on their door. "Open up in there!"

Dennis Tanner across the street, wearing a Nazi arm band, yelled, "It's okay! They're white!"

"They could be sympathizers!" the biker shouted back.

"Concentrate on the colored ones. Then we'll worry about the others!"

"Who are you to tell me how to do my job?"

"Block Captain Tanner."

"Fine! If I don't get to hurt somebody soon, it's going to be you!"

They heard the sound of splintering wood as the biker kicked in the door next door. They watched as he pulled Grace Oh to the curb by her hair. She was crying. Her husband Jack was either not home or had been dealt with.

"Hey, Tanner! What are we supposed to do with her?"

"What do I care? Is she white?"

"She's Chinese or something."

"Then do what you want!"

"Hey, Cal! Give me a piece of that!"

"What the fuck, Tommy? You didn't get enough of that in Nam?"

"Best I ever had!"

Cal tore off her clothes and lay her face down across his bike.

"Yo, Tommy! Dinner is served!" Tommy dropped his pants to his ankles.

A silver Mercedes came tearing up the street and slammed into Tommy, the bike, and the neighbor. A distraught Asian man jumped out of the front seat with a .38 and started shooting. One of the bikers pointed a sawed-off shotgun at him and shot him point blank in the face.

Alan pulled himself away from the gruesome scene outside. Denise was curled up in a corner whimpering and crying. He thought about something similar happening to the women in his life. Denise, for the moment at least, was relatively safe. But where was Candy? Was she all right or was she facing something equally horrific?

•

Candy, still hiding behind the name Brenda, listened to Reggie's plan, and doubted.

"I can give you a list of tribes between here and the west coast. There will be other groups you will encounter who will ask to join our mission. Some of those will be vigilante plants who will kill you as soon as they know the plan. Others will be sincere. You and Ronnie need to determine if these groups will help or hinder our mission. Tell them as little as possible before you size them up. If you think they're ill-equipped to provide any sort of help, walk away."

"That's a little brutal, isn't it? Especially if they are POC," said Candy.

"The objective is quick and decisive action. You'll be moving fast so we don't need stragglers or the weak. If you're attacked, you'll be utilizing the "fight or flight" method to determine your options. We need to strike before these militias get their shit together and coalesce into an army."

"Let's go!" said Ronnie.

"We're packing you with some basic camping gear. And you're going to need to rest up and leave after dark. There are eleven tribes in Virginia alone. We've been in touch, but we need a commitment on troops and weapons. We can only get that in person."

"What if they want to gauge our ability to fight? What if they want to know how big our army is or what kind of weapons we have?" asked Reggie.

"You can't tell them what you don't know. Tell them this is the time for the white man's lies to end. That we wish to claim our sovereignty and revoke all treaties. Tell them we are kicking the white man off our

lands and taking them back. Tell them all former claims of individual tribes will be adjudicated by the United Tribal Government.”

“What about other countries? Are they doing anything to help us?”

“Mexico has offered, but before they’ll assist they want to know that after the war Texas and southern California will be ‘returned.’ I was hoping for a positive message from France, but we’ve heard nothing to date.”

•

Commander Trump had opted for a title that summed it all up, as the commander of everything. He was getting tired and cranky, and the revolution was taking much too long.

“How long does it take to round up traitors who don’t believe in the second amendment? Obviously, they don’t have guns.” he asked the joint chiefs.

He looked at the lot of them, eagerly waiting for his next command. His eyes narrowed as he studied them all and discovered one had a nametag that read “Rodriguez.”

“Where are you from, general?”

“El Paso, Texas, sir. Born and raised.”

“And your folks?”

“Dad was born in El Paso, went to Zacatecas to visit, and fell in love with my mother.”

Trump was still eyeing him suspiciously, then slowly smiled.

“That’s a beautiful story. Just beautiful.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“Which one of these guys is your boss, general?”

“Well, you are, Mr. President.”

“It’s commander now, General Rodriguez, just commander. Tell me, if I wanted to fire one of these other generals, how would I do that?”

“We serve at your pleasure, Mr. ... Commander.”

Trump turned around and beckoned to two guards. “No offense, General *Rodriguez*, but you’re fired.”

Rodriguez had expected that decision to have played out somewhere else at another time, not in the conference room adjacent to the oval office.

“Yes, sir!” he snapped to attention and saluted Trump. Turning smartly on his heels, he left with his head held high.

After he was gone, one of the other generals asked, “Why?”

“I like him, but in a pinch, I need to know where his loyalty lies. I was a successful businessman because I could always smell a rat and knew how to handle them.”

An aide approached him. “How’s it going out there?”

“Sir, overall, the liberation of the U.S. has reached about 50 percent.”

“Fifty percent! Do I have to go out there and stomp on these cockroaches myself or can you get it done?”

“We’re meeting pockets of resistance.”

“Armed with what? Spears?”

“A few armories have been broken into. It doesn’t look like they got their hands on anything like a tank or missiles.”

Another aide entered.

“Bad news, Commander. Some Mexicans have been spotted coming over the wall.”

“Fucking Democrats! That wall would have kept them ALL out!””
Trump was seething and ready to throw something in anger.

•

Evidently, the local citizens of Tijuana and Ciudad Juarez had not received the administration’s memo. In Juarez, Adolfo Ramirez had officially retired immediately as a coyote and was going after his piece of the American Dream. A dozen had joined him with ladders as he advanced to the border wall.

With the ladders in place, two men climbed briskly to the top, silhouetted against the moonlit night. A shot rang out from the dark

and one of them dropped on the American side, Dead on Arrival. The local Border Patrol was still on duty, probably at heightened alert.

Ramirez dropped unseen on American soil. His great grandfather had no doubt stood upon this very spot in 1845, trying to prevent the soldiers from seizing his homeland. A spotlight from a Border Patrol Humvee blinded him.

“Drop the pistola, wetback!” a voice yelled from the darkness. Suddenly a shot rang out.

Silence, then a voice in Spanish.

“Bienvenidos, primos.” Welcome, cousins.

•

Lieutenant McManus of the RCMP, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, had the duty at the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel. He was accustomed to gamblers in buses coming over to hit the casinos, but this bus was filled with frightened women and children begging for political asylum. He picked up the phone. This was a problem for somebody at a higher pay grade.

•

“THERE IS NO NEED FOR PANIC. WE ARE RESTORING LAW AND ORDER. KEEP ...”

Trump was in mid-tweet when another aide had the audacity to interrupt.

“Sir...”

He exploded. “Goddamn it! Can’t you see I’m trying to communicate with the American people? Do I have to do EVERYTHING around here? Can’t you report to somebody else?”

One of the generals walked over. Trump checked out his name tag. “Patterson, can you take care of this?”

The general turned to the waiting aide. “Report.”

“Possibly in another room? I’m trying to concentrate,” Trump complained.

The general gestured for the aide to follow him out the door.

“Okay. Shoot.”

“The Canadians are reporting floods of Americans at their borders requesting asylum.”

Patterson decided that, yes, he could “take care of this.”

“Let ‘em go. What’s your name, son?”

“Mendez, sir.”

“I would suggest you join them, Mendez. There’s nothing left for you here.”

“Are you questioning my loyalty, sir?” Mendez bristled.

“No, Mendez,” the general responded wearily. “I’m questioning mine.”

•

Alan’s phone buzzed. “It’s Josh! Are you in Oakland yet?”

“Are you safe?” Denise asked.

“Mom, yes! Militias are teaming up with some local cops and military and are claiming neighborhoods, even cities for so-called Patriots. It’s so weird that we thought everything was normal just 24 hours ago.”

“Sorry, son. Things have not been normal for the last four years.”

“When he called himself the Law and Order President, I guess he meant he made the law and everybody would be following his orders.”

“I know things between races are a little tense right now. Are they treating you okay?” his father asked.

“For the most part,” he said. “But somebody has always been there to vouch for me. You can’t blame them for being suspicious.”

“What’s the plan?”

“We’re a little worried about coming to Sausalito. Remember how the local cops hassled us when we were kids? I told everybody to stay here where they’re relatively safe, but Curtis promised her to get me home safe.”

“Josh, we’re coming to you. Stay put.”

“But, dad...”

Someone pounded on the front door. Alan peered outside. It was Martinez and, as usual, he was armed to the teeth. He pounded again.

When he opened the door, Martinez brushed past him and sat on his recliner.

“Sit down, Knight. I got me some ‘splaining to do,” he said, Ricky Ricardo style.

Alan sat on the sofa next to Denise and put a reassuring hand on her leg.

“What’s up, Felix? Do you know what’s going on?”

“Did you see what those fucking bikers did to our neighborhood, Knight? We don’t need that kind of lowlife shit around here. We take care of our own. Am I right?”

“Are Grace and her husband dead?” asked Denise in a quivering voice.

Martinez just gave her a look of disdain. He turned back to Alan.

“You’ve lived here about five, six years, am I right?”

“Yeah.”

“No loud parties, except that one time with your son’s friends. Keep to yourselves. No *politics*.”

“Yep, that’s us. We grounded Josh for two weeks for that stunt.”

“That’s the first time I heard that hip hop bullshit on *my* street.”

“Sorry. Won’t happen again.”

“That’s not why I’m here, Knight. I need to know where you stand.”

“What do you mean?”

“Are you with the President, our Commander, and the loyal patriots of this country? Are you ready to put down any Communist, socialist, queer, nigger, Jew, and anybody else that stands in the way of the second American Revolution?”

“Trash!” growled Denise. Alan knew she was angry at his use of brutal slurs, but Martinez thought she was on board.

“We’re packing up to leave in a few minutes. We lost contact and want to check on the kids and make sure they’re all right.”

“Where they at?”

“College. Josh is at Berkeley and Candy’s at Harvard.”

“Then there might be a problem or two. They’re rounding up kids at those lefty schools and sending them for re-education.”

Alan and Denise exchanged looks. “There’s a bigger problem,” said Martinez.

They looked at him. He held their attention for a few seconds longer just to heighten the tension.

“You can’t go.”

“What?”

“Martial law. We’re all on lockdown. You know, like COVID? Except this is real.”

“We have to go. Our kids could be in danger!”

“What kind of danger? They’re young and white. Unless they’re consorting with criminals or terrorists, they should be okay.”

Martinez gestured for them to sit down again.

“Now that we got the unpleasant business out of the way, there’s just a couple of things to address. What’s your political affiliation?”

“I don’t think that’s...”

“Believe me, Mrs. It means everything now! You folks seem very nice, but I protected your asses when those filthy bikers were sniffing around. I think you owe me.”

“Libertarian,” said Alan.

Martinez smiled. “Well, that’s almost Republican. I think we can register you with a simple loyalty pledge.”

He pulled a folded sheet of paper from his back pocket and carefully unfolded it.

“Raise your right hand.” They both complied.

“Repeat after me: I pledge allegiance. To our Commander in Chief Donald Trump, Anointed by God. Blessed by the Church. Protector of All. Amen.”

“...Amen,” they mumbled.

Alan’s phone buzzed. It was Candy.

“Let me get that,” said Martinez.

“Hi, sweetheart.”

“Who is this? Where are mom and dad?”

“Right here. Just a quick question, darlin’. Who did you vote for?”

Candy/Brenda was in a nondescript safehouse on Cherokee land, bunking with three other women her age. She could feel the tension over the phone. She remembered Creepy Cortez.

“I usually vote like my mom and dad,” she answered.

“Smart girl. What party would that be?”

“Which party is President Trump? That one.”

“Are you still on the campus?” Martinez asked her.

“Of course. Where else would I be?”

“Good girl. Here’s your folks. They’ve got a bit of bad news.”

Denise grabbed the phone. “Candy, honey, are you okay?”

“I’m safe, mom. How about you guys?”

“We’re good,” said Alan. “You know how we were talking about coming out to get you? It looks like we’re not going to make it. At least not right away. So, we’ll be here if Josh makes it home.”

“Where is he?” she asked.

“Can’t really say.”

She understood she wasn’t to press for more information. Martinez indicated he wanted the phone back.

“Candy, honey?”

“Yes?”

“Check out the buses. They’re there to give you guys a ride to camp where they have all sorts of activities lined up for you. A little bit of education and a whole lot of fun!”

“Okay. I’ll go check it out.” Ronnie rolled his eyes.

“Be careful, honey. We love you,” Denise said.

“Yes, we all love you,” added Martinez.

Candy hung up the phone and turned to the dozen young men that had silently entered the room.

“I should have saved my tomahawk for that guy,” said Ronnie.

“I really wish you would have.”

It was a short drive to the Pamunkey reservation.

“The elders are waiting for you,” one of the young men announced.

Ronnie to her. “We’re on, Candy or Brenda or whatever your name is.”

The conference room was dark cherry wood, something suitable for the offices of a high-priced lawyer. Six of them sat at a table with microphones and other tribal members ringed the small room. One of them bounced around the room with nervous energy while the others looked on stone-faced.

“Sam Shaw,” the antsy one introduced himself.

They rest introduced themselves.

“We are here to alert the tribal nations. We’re here to call in our chips, to cancel any and all treaties with our occupiers and if they refuse, to declare war on the lying white man, this white man, the king of all liars.”

“War?” Shaw guffawed. “We’re not ready to fight any wars! Do you see any heavy artillery, any armed and trained militia?”

One of the young men standing against the wall spoke up. “I’m Army Special Forces. I love my country. This is treason.”

One of the older men seated at the table raised his hand.

“This *used* to be our country. We were given little pockets barely able to sustain us. But Shaw is right. What chance do we stand against the infamous American war machine?”

“We need to move with force and move quickly,” Ronnie spoke over the noise and crosstalk.

He turned to the soldier. “Will you stand with us, brother, or with your white masters?”

“I joined the army because it was more than white. It was every shade, every culture, fighting together for freedom and the flag.”

“We have word that military vehicles are coming to enforce martial law on the reservation. My tribe has already been pushed from our land. Where is your freedom now, brother?”

Shaw stood and stared at the soldier. “Will you stand aside while we take up arms against our oppressors or will you stand against us?”

“I will make my own decision when the time seems right. Until then, I will leave you to conduct tribal matters.”

“We ask that you also leave the room while we confer,” said the elder.

“What is taking so long?” Candy asked an hour later.

“In their defense, this is the biggest decision they have made in a very long time. There are only 34 families here. And we’re going up against the friggin’ US military.”

There was officious knock at the door. The soldier walked in and saluted. “Corporal Songbird reporting for duty.”

“What changed your mind, Corporal?”

“I just received word my uncle was shot dead as the troops rolled onto the reservation. He wasn’t moving out of the way fast enough.”

“I’m sorry,” Candy offered.

“I do have a few things up my sleeve.” Corporal Songbird. “I was a demolitions expert and have some knowledge about where a small army might procure the necessary ingredients to wage war. There’s a survivalist group about twenty miles from here. They’ve been collecting

AR-15s, RPGs, all sorts of army surplus shit ‘forgotten’ by the local PD courtesy of the DOD.”

“That’s too many acronyms for me,” laughed Ronnie.

Songbird explained, “The Department of Defense sells surplus weapons and other stuff to local law enforcement for pennies on the dollar through the 1033 Program to fight the war on drugs. Some of it ‘falls off the truck’ only to end up with the neighborhood amateur gun nuts.”

“We really can’t stick around much longer,” said Ronnie. “The troops are likely to start going house to house confiscating weapons. And they were worried about the Democrats!”

“We can leave anytime. There’s a back road out of here.”

“Where is everybody? Are you it?”

“Everybody else has family. They’re saying goodbye. We’ll meet up later.”

•

The military had not set up checkpoints yet, so their exodus was not observed by anyone other than a bored helicopter pilot. He wondered what a Bentley was doing in the back roads of the Pamunkey Reservation and figured it was purchased with casino money.

The America First compound was on high alert since the announcement by Commander Trump on TV the night before. The camp was divided on joining the fray or waiting for the fight to come to them. The excitement was palpable, like Christmas Eve with Santa Claus for target practice.

Some two dozen troops occupying the reservation left in a Humvee and a truck to investigate a tip they’d received about some Indians masquerading as a militia about twenty miles away.

Behind the trees surrounding the compound was the newly promoted General Songbird and fifteen brave warriors. When the militia in the compound rolled open the gate for the troops, the warriors opened fire from the rear of the compound, making it appear the shots were coming from inside. The troops, of course, “returned” fire.

The Native Americans cut the rear fence into the compound and found renewed appreciation for the silent bow and arrow.

The compound's leader ran out, crying, "We're surrounded, boys!" before he was cut down by a soldier. The fire fight was over in ten minutes with twenty dead soldiers, all of the militia dead minus half a dozen who had run for the woods and every single warrior accounted for. The remaining six soldiers were offered the chance to join. Four refused and were quickly dispatched and two said, "Fuck Trump" and were welcomed.

They rounded up hundreds of pounds of ammunition, two Rocket Propelled Grenade launchers, a flame thrower and fifty AR-15s.

Ronnie turned to Candy. "Where did you learn to shoot an arrow like that?"

"Summer camp."

•

In the bunker, aides were trying to find ways to avoid a conversation with the Commander.

"Get me another general!" he screamed at a passing lieutenant. "And a Pepsi!"

"Can I help you, Commander? I'm General Sutherland."

"Yes, General. You can fucking explain to me why we've got Mexicans invading our southern border and Indians on the warpath in Virginia!"

"Permission to speak freely, Commander?"

"Sure."

"You're pissing off the wrong people."

"Fuck you, general! That kind of talk is insubordination and treason."

The general shrugged his shoulders. "You asked."

Trump stopped the lieutenant again. "You! Shoot this guy in the fucking head!"

The lieutenant froze. “For fuck’s sake!” Trump said, reaching into his holster. He pulled the gun and shot the general. He turned to the lieutenant and shot him.

“That’s for disobeying an order!”

He turned to another aide. “Get this mess cleaned up!”

*

Alan and Denise had fallen asleep on the large, L-shaped living room sofa. Alan lay there for a moment wondering what had awakened him. Denise was still sound asleep, her back to him. Then he heard the sound again, a quiet scratching at the back door like someone trying to pick the lock.

He grabbed the baseball bat that was now always within reach and crouched down behind the kitchen island, alert to the slightest sound.

The lock clicked and the door swung open at the same moment Alan stood up to confront the intruder.

“Dad!” It was Josh and his friend, Curtis.

They embraced fiercely and suddenly Denise was there, too. Alan turned to Curtis and hugged him also. “Thanks for bringing our son home safely.”

“I didn’t. We had each other’s backs.”

“The last thing anybody needs right now is coffee, but...” said Denise.

“Who can sleep now?” asked Alan.

“The trip here was harrowing and exhausting,” commented Curtis, “But I’m in.”

“Tell us what happened,” Denise asked.

•

After dinner, Curtis and Josh left the girls in Oakland with their protective families.

“We took 80 south, pretty much hugging the ditches where we could. We circled past three checkpoints going into San Francisco. It

didn't look like they were letting anyone in. But it was the weirdest thing, the BART was running back and forth with no riders," said Josh.

"After watching a couple of cycles, we crept aboard, Josh in one car, me crouched down in another, and rode the blue line from Fruitvale and resisted the urge to jump out once we hit the Embarcadero," added Curtis.

Josh picked up the story. "We rode to 16th Street and almost walked right into the hands of two National Guard. The African American guy distracted his partner as we ran across the street into an alley."

"We found a guy sitting on a boat just under the Golden Gate bridge. We gave him a hundred bucks each to bring us into Sausalito."

"You probably weren't his first fare for the evening," Alan commented.

Josh smiled. "That's what we figured, but here we are."

•

Armando, his wife Serena, and their two boys shared their two-bedroom apartment in San Ysidro with a gruff man in his thirties, a long-timer with a gruff voice that sounded more like a growl and frightened small children. He had always kept to himself. Tonight, though, Ramon was positively loquacious, going on and on about that pendejo Trump.

"At first," he said, "I didn't know which way I was going. If I went home to Ensenada, I wouldn't have to worry about getting picked up for being brown. But if El Pendejo won, he would finish the wall and I could never come back. My family is there. My work and money are here."

"It's a decision many of us make on a daily basis," said Armando.

"What do you have to worry about? You have your whole family here."

"We have parents, sisters and brothers, cousins and a slower, quieter life back there," said Serena.

“And I fear for their safety in both places for different reasons,” said Armando. “Here are the gangs and everybody has guns, and they look at us with disgust. There just the police have guns, and they wave them around while they work for the drug cartels.”

“Very true. So, do we flip a coin?” asked Ramon.

“Do you think there’s any chance we could make it to Canada?”

“There are no crops there for us to tend and harvest,” Armando reminded her.

“You could be a handyman. You’re very good with your hands. The boys are still young. It’s not too late to start over somewhere else.”

There was a knock at the door. It was Ernesto, Armando’s older brother. He was bleeding and could barely stand.

Serena fetched a bottle of isopropyl alcohol and some rags and had him sit in Armando’s recliner in the living room. She dabbed at the cuts on his face as he winced.

“I think they broke some ribs.” He hesitantly pulled his t-shirt off over his head. One side of his chest was turning purple.

“Who did this to you?” Armando asked.

“White assholes in a pickup truck,” said Ernesto. “They told me to go back to my country. Now! Then they started punching me. I fell down and curled up into a ball so they might leave me alone. Then they kicked me until the police came. As soon as they were distracted, I ran away.”

“That’s it!” growled Armando. “We’re going home!”

The boys were excited and jumping up and down. “We’re going home!” The older one, Pedro, 8, stopped. “Daddy, where is home?”

•

Kenny and his wife Diane were being grilled at the Windsor, Canada station.

An obviously flustered captain of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Larry Campbell found himself in new territory. “Where are we

going to put these people?” he asked when he got his superior on the phone.

“We’ve cleared the Dew Drop Inn for some. They have twenty rooms. We’re filling every hotel in the area. I’ll keep you posted. The worst is probably over by now because people realize that things aren’t going to change.”

“I hope you’re right. In the meantime, I’m interviewing folks who seem a little suspicious.”

“You’re not racial profiling, are you Captain?”

“No, but this mass exodus is not like the hippies in the sixties; these are families, people of all different colors and ages. I had better get back to the couple down the hall.”

“It’s about time!” said Diane a little shrilly.

“Sorry, just going to wrap up. Here’s an obvious question: You dress like you have money. Why are you political refugees?”

“I can level with you, right? I mean fear is fear, right? And if we’re in fear due to the political climate, that makes us legit, right?”

“Why were you in fear, Mr...” He glanced down at the man’s passport. “Trump? Any relation?”

“No, but those BLM folks don’t care. They’ll hurt me, us.”

“Does everyone know you, Mr. Trump?”

“No, but.... Show him, Honey.”

Mrs. Trump’s jacket had TRUMP emblazoned across the back. Campbell stifled a laugh.

“So, you’re ready to capitalize on the name when it suits you, but now it doesn’t?”

“Don’t send us back!” begged Diane. “They’re big and they’re brown and black and they’re ANGRY!”

He stamped DENIED on their passports and called for an officer to process their return.

Commander Trump was livid. He turned on the TV to see how the transition was progressing and he watched the segment on the couple named Trump who had tried to flee the country.

“Just look at the reporter with that smirk on her face! Call management at FOX. I want that woman, Roberta Ping or Pong, fired this afternoon. Otherwise, we’ll take care of her after the transition!”

He looked around to see if anyone was listening to him. Somebody always was.

“Yes, sir. Right on that.” A prim woman in a floral print dress left the room in a hurry.

Another aide approached him.

“What do you want?”

“Commander, there’s a lady named Emily Grant waiting to speak with you. She says she’s your spiritual advisor.”

“Okay. Yeah. Send her in.” She was in her forties, hair perfectly coiffed, her pantsuit a shade of lavender.

“Hello, Emily.”

“Good morning, Mr. President. There’s a breath of fresh air blowing across this God-fearing nation this morning. Jesus says hello and he blesses you.”

“Good, Emily. That’s good. By the way, it’s Commander now. Have you set up your Supreme Court yet?”

“Almost there, Commander. We had some resistance from Justice Thomas of all people.”

“The one that scared me was that little witch Ginsburg. She would give me that look. I half-expected to burst into flames.”

“She’s in a better... She has passed now. May she rest in peace.”

“So, what’s up?”

“I’m reporting we’re already moving on our agenda. *Rove v Wade* has been eliminated. Capital punishment has been fully reinstated everywhere with only one appeal, praise the Lord. Our lords and ladies of the Court will be meeting further with Congress to put together our

wish list for future cooperation. As my NASCAR friends put it, we're going to be firing on all cylinders."

"I like it. I like it."

"May I pray for your success?" Grant asked.

"Sure."

"I mean now."

"I'm kinda busy..."

"It will be good for the country if folks turn on their TV tonight and see you praying for the peace of the nation."

"You're right. You're absolutely right. Let's do this." He snapped on the intercom. "Get me a photographer."

A little guy with an imposing camera stepped into the room.

"Let's bow our heads..." she intoned. Trump never bowed his head. She ignored the irreverence.

"Get the shot from several different angles," he instructed the photographer.

"Heavenly father, bless this man as he works to reunite a broken country. Help him smite his enemies and restore in his followers faith in the gospel so that America can once again be a Christian nation. Amen."

"Amen," echoed Trump.

Suddenly Jared burst into the room.

"Jesus, Jared! Can't you see we're praying here? This better be important!" bellowed Trump.

"Hello, Emily. Sorry to interrupt."

"Hello, Jew." Kushner looked to his father-in-law to reprimand her, but not really expecting it.

"I'll check in with you later, Commander," Grant said, heading for the exit.

"Build that cabinet! And take that photographer with you!"

"Mr. President!" Jared was excited. It was refreshing to see something other than a sneer on that face.

“Commander,” Trump corrected.

“Ooooo-kay. As you know, I’ve been riding reconnaissance with the Heaven’s Devils militia.”

“That Bible-thumping biker gang?”

“Yeah. We were going through Virginia firing up our civilian troops and we found one compound that was smoldering ash. About 30 dead. But here’s the interesting part...”

“That would be the part that interests me.”

“Almost all of them were killed by arrows!”

“The Indians?”

“That’s what the people in the area claimed.”

“Stupid. Very stupid. All right. Let’s nuke their reservation!”

“Let me remind you that fallout around the area might kill thousands of your voters.”

“That doesn’t matter. I declared martial law due to campaign fraud. I win!”

“Bold! But you’re going to need a new volunteer army,” said Jared.

“I already have an army.”

“I hear there’s been some uh, downsizing. They’re shooting the deserters.”

“I appreciate the heads-up. Great job. We need you out there. You’re doing a tremendous service for your country.”

“First, I’d like to wash up, eat some decent food and spend some time with Ivanka.”

“Fine, but hurry. You know we can’t count on the lame-stream media to tell us what’s really going on out there. I’m going to shut down social media except for my Twitter account so the nation hears the truth directly from me.”

“You don’t think Ivanka and I...”

Trump made eye contact. “Directly from me.”

Jared tossed off a frustrated salute on his way to the door. “I’ll be heading out again in two hours.”

The receptionist came bustling in as Kushner left. “Mr. Modi is calling from India to congratulate you, sir.”

“More Indians,” Trump mused. “What’s his first name?”

“Narendra.”

“Fuck that. Modi it is. All right. Patch him through.”

•

Alan saw that Candy was calling. “Honey, are you all right? Are you safe?”

“We’re fine. We’re in...”

“Stop. Don’t tell me where you are. I’m glad you’re okay. Are you still far away?”

“Pretty far.”

“Next question: who’s ‘we’? Be vague if you have to,” Alan cautioned.

“Let’s just say I’m traveling with a group.”

“I think I saw something about marauding Native Americans on the news last night. Be careful.”

“Don’t worry, Dad. I’ve become quite a badass.”

“When do you think we will see you?”

There was a long pause. “I don’t know. They need me here.”

Alan felt his eyes welling up. “We want you here, but sometimes, well... There are bigger choices.”

“I love you, Dad. And Mom and Josh too. Oh god, Josh! Did he make it?”

Josh grabbed the phone. “Hey, baby sister! Can Curtis and I meet up with you somewhere?”

“Remember where we went camping three years ago and you got stung by a bee and swelled up?”

“You mean...?”

“Yes.”

The four of them had camped in the Mesa Verde National Park in Colorado. A village built into the mountainside by the Pueblo Indians

more than eight hundred years ago would be practical and symbolic for the gathering nations.

“We’re on our way!”

“We’re not there yet. Spend some time with mom and dad.”

“Why can’t your mom and I go too?” Alan asked.

“No offense, Dad, but you get winded walking up the driveway. And there are lots of snakes. Mom hates snakes,” said Candy.

“Got it.”

“Go shopping for them, Josh. Get everybody stocked up,” Candy suggested.

“Nope. Can’t do that,” said Alan. “We’re keeping him and his friend under wraps. We can’t explain their sudden appearance and definitely won’t know how to explain their sudden disappearance.”

“Good idea,” she acknowledged. “I’ve got to go now. Constant potlucks! Josh, see you soon!”

The cupboards, the freezer, and the fridge were looking a little COVID-19, Alan realized. Thank God they were up to date on their meds.

He planned his exit like any other day. “Going to the store. I’ll be right back. Does anybody need anything?”

“I’ll text you my list,” said Josh.

He was applauding his foresight in buying an electric car two months before. He drove slowly, carefully. The neighborhood seemed deserted until he got to the mall.

Big burly types were packing heat proudly wearing their MAGA hats. One stood with the security guard at the entrance of the supermarket.

“Got your walking papers?” one burly guy asked.

“Excuse me?”

“Step over there. Please.” He motioned to a pudgy accountant type seated at a card table. A poster behind him declared he was the neighborhood watch.

“Do you have two forms of I.D.?”

“Maybe. I was just planning to pick up a few things in the store. What’s this about?”

“Nothing serious. This area has been red-flagged as a possible domestic terrorist zone. This is an effort to keep the area secure and safe.”

“I guess I need to get out more.”

“Do you have a driver’s license, a passport, some kind of government ID?”

Alan fumbled through his wallet. “I’ve got my license and my union card. Will my union card work? It’s got a photo on it.”

“Union card, eh? Okay. I just need you to take the loyalty oath and sign it at the bottom then you’re free to shop.”

“Can I do this later? I’ve got a sick baby at home and... I’ve already done this once.”

The makeshift official looked him over suspiciously. “Grandbaby,” he corrected himself.

“I really need your oath right now. Please raise your right hand and repeat after me, “I pledge allegiance to our Commander in Chief Donald Trump, Anointed by God. Blessed by the Church. Protector of All. Amen.”

“Amen.”

“Sign here. Thank you, sir. Have a nice day.”

His phone dinged with Josh’s wish list. Going through it, the requests were for practical items like jerky and trail mix that would sustain their energy on their journey. The boy was courageous AND smart!

The store was sparsely populated. Shoppers continued to maintain social distancing and some still wore masks despite the executive order undermining their efficacy. He noted that others avoided eye contact; it made him feel paranoid, like his every move was closely monitored.

As he left the store he looked up at the sky. A massive thunderstorm loomed over the city. They would need ponchos and hats for the road.

•

It was working. As they moved across the great plains toward a mass convergence, a gathering of the tribes, Candy was happy to know she had played a significant part. Two days later they were in Kansas moving southeast to Mesa Verde. They were now 300 strong and it was getting damned hard to hide their numbers.

Her walkie talkie roared to life outside Kansas City.

"There's a large group of people moving in your direction," said the scout.

"Do they look friendly or hostile?" she asked.

"Hard to tell. Everybody's packing these days."

They were headed to the Jack Reardon Convention Center. A friend of a friend had called in some favors, and he was opening it up for them. A group of churches had trucked in food and a local black-owned McDonald's was also helping out.

They had arrived. The building looked deserted. As the metal gate rose, a flood of vigilantes ran out of the building toward them shooting. Candy saw several warriors fall as she and Ronnie ran to a hotel around the corner from the convention.

"That large group we saw before is almost on you," the voice on the walkie reported. "Stand down! Stand down! They're friendlies!"

The militias were cut off from advancing or retreating. Arrows, small arms, and baseball bats found their marks. There was a far-off noise that General Songbird quickly identified.

"Everybody down! It's a Huey!"

The helicopter suddenly appeared over them. Several warriors went down in a flurry of bullets. An RPG appeared from the trunk of someone's car and was aimed at the Huey.

"If we do this, we are officially at war!" Candy warned.

"Where have you been, little sister? We're domestic terrorists! Fire!" Ronnie shouted.

A direct hit sent the helicopter spinning into a residential neighborhood. A fireball indicated where it had gone down.

"We're at your service, brother." One of the rescuing band introduced himself as a preacher.

"Who are you guys?"

"I'm Reverend Milan. We're elders and pastors and two rabbis from local churches and synagogues with some of our congregations. We brought in the food and realized we couldn't sit on the sidelines. This president is tearing this country apart."

"God bless you all!" Ronnie yelled, starting to choke up. He grabbed his walkie. "Captains take inventory of your casualties. Meet General Songbird in the church just north of the Convention Center for a debrief. "

A few minutes later, Songbird looked at the thirty tired, ragged warriors. Before he spoke, he locked eyes with each of them. "What we're attempting, guys, is to take back our country. We started small and every day more join the fight. Everywhere along the stop we've encountered a mixture of reaction to our purpose and a lot of doubt on whether or not we can complete our mission. I hope you will accept the responsibility ahead of us."

Reverend Milan approached the general. "May I make some remarks?"

"Knock yourself out."

The pastor looked around the room. "For those who don't know me, I'm Reverend Roger Milan, formerly US Marine Corp. Earlier today I was panicking. It's hard to hide 300 troops. Thirty is tough, but we're here today because it is possible. So, we are now on the night shift moving buildings and people. Y'all were awesome today!"

Ronnie announced the new plan. "We are about 970 miles from our destination. That's about two days drive or more depending on the weather. We'll never make it as one big group moving west. So, I'm asking that you all disperse. Don't draw attention to yourselves, no group larger than three unless you're traveling with family. Keep moving after sundown. Don't ask for directions. Use your GPS periodically then

shut it off. We don't want them tracking us by satellite. We're packing plenty of food so take enough to get you to Mesa Verde National Park. We will have more food and other supplies waiting for us there. More are joining the fight: union guys, ex-football players who still take a knee, military deserters, the Muslim Brotherhood, and more tribes. We have a war to win, battle by battle.

"We have the advantage. Sure, they have the firepower, but they let their guard down because we looked like frightened children. It's an effective disguise. I know, I know. It's not a disguise, but we're on the right side of history on this one and I'm proud to stand alongside each and every one of you. There is plenty to do in the coming revolution. Winston Churchill said fear is a reaction. Courage is a decision."

They all scattered in new directions. Candy and Ronnie continued together, feeling as though they had already moved mountains.

The rat-a-tat of an assault rifle sounded uncomfortably close. Candy moved away from the growing group of onlookers. She knew they should avoid anything that drew a crowd. She turned around and discovered Ronnie seemed to be drawn, too, moving rapidly toward the gunshots.

"Where the hell are you going?" she whispered.

"It's probably somebody from our group! I hope we're not too late!"

The tableau in front of them revealed two dead cops, one white, one black, and what looked to be an African American family, all alive. The crowd quickly began to disperse. The two adults appeared to be in their thirties, a scowling preteen girl by their side.

"Who's in charge here?"

"Who wants to know?" asked Ronnie.

"Hi," said the dad. "I'm Jeremy. This is my wife Aisha and our daughter, Mika."

"I don't recognize you," remarked Ronnie. "Were you part of our group a few miles back?"

"No, but we heard about the crazy Indians on TV, and we were coming to volunteer," said Aisha.

“What happened right before we got here?” asked Candy.

“We got stopped. They said they were looking for looters. There have been all these marches since he took control of the government. They had us on the ground and searched our car. Do you know what’s scary? Most of these folks don’t have a clue what’s going on all around them.”

Candy turned to Ronnie. “I think we should get out of here before the cops or more militia show up. Chances are they’ve had a chance to fall back and regroup.”

“Come with us!” Ronnie insisted.

“Our car is a VW beetle!” Candy objected.

“That’s okay, we’ve got an SUV with darkened windows,” said Jeremy.

“Let’s go!”

“Daddy, we don’t know them!”

“This is Candy. I’m Ronnie. We’re on our way to Colorado.”

“Then so are we!” said Jeremy.

•

Once again Commander Trump was livid.

“They took out a helicopter? Then send in a tank or two! We’ve declared martial law. We need to establish law and order!”

Bill Barr had entered the bunker at some time during the briefing. “You’re absolutely right, Commander! You stand on firm ground because, let’s face it, our country hasn’t been besieged like this since the Civil War.”

Video was coming in from Kansas City. “Idiots!” said Admiral Dusseldorf. “The militia should have waited for them inside the convention center. Amateurs!”

“Anybody know why there were so many of them in Kansas?” Trump asked the room.

“Maybe they were setting up a base there,” an aide offered.

"Somebody's thinking!" said Trump. He turned to General Patterson. "What do you think, have we seen the last of them?"

"Not if they've got more RPGs."

"What about the militia? How did they do?"

"They were cut off by a second group and wiped out."

"Shit! How many casualties on their side? Please tell me we wiped them out, too!"

"Could be. After the attack we saw no sign of an organized force. Other than the RPG attack on the Huey. That might have literally been their parting shot," suggested Harding from the Army.

Patterson looked around the room at what was left of the Joint Chiefs. They all seemed to be caught up in the blood lust of the moment. He was disgusted.

He had an idea. "Commander, what we need is some good intel on the ground."

"What do you suggest, general?"

"I'm itching to get into the thick of things. Let me take some special ops guys and see what I can find out. Maybe we'll find out the fight's over. If not, it will be when we show up."

"Those are some balls you got there, general. That's a tremendous idea!"

"Ass kisser," mumbled Harding.

An aide came in to report more warriors, Sioux riding down from the Dakotas.

"Double time on that, Patterson!" said the Commander.

Patterson saluted and quickly left the bunker. He spotted an MP. "Corporal, have you seen Captain Mendez?"

"In the breakroom, sir!"

They spotted each other as soon as he entered the room.

"Glad to see you're still here, Mendez."

"I'm not sure why I am, sir," admitted the Marine. "What you said shook me to the core."

"Take a walk with me, Captain."

"Yes, sir."

When they were out of earshot, Patterson asked, "How do you feel about what's going on?"

"I don't think it's good for the country. My family is staying off the streets, hoping this will all blow over soon."

"I've been ordered to check out the situation in Kansas. I'd like you to go with me."

"Just the two of us?"

"Of course not! I want thirty Special Ops and I want you to pick them."

"Yes, sir!"

"And, Mendez? Make sure they're black or brown."

"Sir?"

"That's an order, Mendez. We'll take a cargo plane and load her up good with RPGs, rifles, and a tank. Let's meet up on the airfield at 1800."

"Yes, sir!"

•

Josh and Curtis passed a sign welcoming them to Flagstaff, Arizona. There was snow piled high on the sides of the road. Up ahead, smoke rose from the chimney of a little coffee shop.

"I'm starving!" admitted Josh.

"I'd give anything to have some scrambled eggs, bacon, and real coffee. I haven't seen a 24-hour Starbucks since we left L.A.!"

Kicking snow off their boots, they found the coffee shop was busy at 8 a.m. Tables were situated in an L-shape in front of large windows looking out on the road. A large African-American man stood behind the cash register.

"Sit anywhere you want!"

A pretty black girl in her early twenties showed up to take their order. Her name tag said she was Darlene.

“What’ll it be, guys?”

They ordered their food and before she could walk away, Curtis asked, “Did you vote the other day?”

“I didn’t have a chance. They moved our polling place. By the time I got off, it was closed.”

“Didn’t you find that odd?”

“Nah. It happens all the time in these little towns.”

“Last I heard, Flagstaff’s not that little,” commented Josh.

She left to give a customer the check, filled some coffee cups, and returned.

“I usually forget to vote. I only remembered this time because highway patrol was in here the other day saying they were expecting trouble. I guess that’s why they moved the polling place.”

The big, burly manager walked over. “These boys bothering you, Darlene?”

“No, Daddy. Just making small talk.”

Darlene took the hint and made her rounds. Curtis went looking for the restroom. The manager followed him in.

“If you keep talking to my girl, you’re going to get her in trouble. Look, I’m going to give you some directions that will take you down some back roads so you can avoid the checkpoint on the highway.”

“What makes you think...?”

“California license plates. You’d be surprised how often that means trouble. You might want to take off ASAP before it gets busy in town. Breakfast is on me. Good luck. And if you have anything that says, ‘Black Lives Matter,’ get rid of it. They’re calling them domestic terrorists.”

Curtis grabbed Josh and they left quickly. Curtis told him about the conversation in the restroom and the advice that was offered.

“Should we stick to our plan of traveling at night?” Josh asked. “Maybe stop at a motel and get some sleep?”

"I say drive on through. The manager said we're only about five hours away. Besides, there's a lot of ice on the roads that freezes up at night. I don't want to spin off a cliff and not get found till next Spring."

"Okay."

They made it through town and onto the 180 East without attracting any attention. They spotted half a dozen motorcycles at a McDonald's as they transitioned onto US-89 North. One scraggly biker sipping his coffee seemed to take an interest in their passing.

They had traveled about 25 miles when Josh heard the roar of motorcycles from behind.

"Shit!" said Josh, glancing in the rearview mirror.

"What do you want to do?"

"What can we do? Just be cool. Maybe they're not interested in us."

"Right."

A couple of the bikers were pulling up alongside the old Buick on the driver's side. They took note of the two of them and began to drift closer.

Bam! Suddenly there was another biker on the other side kicking at Curtis' door.

"Maybe they just want to pass," suggested Curtis. They both laughed which seemed to infuriate the bikers.

Josh swerved toward the two on his side and was satisfied to see one waver before righting the bike.

Now there was a concerted effort to kick in both sides of the car. "Think they have insurance?" asked Josh.

"Man, if I wasn't scared shitless right now, I would think you were hilarious."

"When the guy comes up again to bash your side of the car, give him the door."

Curtis swung the door out, but the biker easily swerved and actually tried to grab his shoulder. Josh swerved the other way and the biker on Curtis' side had to avoid the door as it swung back.

He looked frightened. "Let's not try that move again!"

More bikers had moved into position. One of them had a tire iron and managed to smash in the rear passenger window. Shards of glass sprayed the interior of the car.

Josh looked up at the rearview mirror to see a Toyota Tundra barreling down on them. The bikers hadn't noticed them yet. The Tundra pulled behind the bikers on the driver's side. A baseball bat poked out of the cab and clipped a biker in the back of the head. He hit the asphalt, his motorcycle tumbling over him.

A double-barreled shotgun appeared on the other side of the truck and blasted the front tire of another bike. The rider flew over the handlebars. The rest of the bikers moved into position and pulled out firearms of their own and the battle was engaged. From out of the truck came three more shotguns and five more bikers went down.

"We are definitely outgunned," said Curtis.

The bikers suddenly remembered them and fired at them. The rest of the back window exploded inward.

The truck flashed their brights on and off.

Josh said, "I think the guys in the truck want me to pull over." He abruptly stopped on the shoulder and waited for the truck to catch up.

Three bikers revved up and went around the truck intent on doing damage to Curtis and Josh. The truck sped up, caught them in its grill, and shoved them aside.

"That's eleven," announced Josh.

Another truck appeared behind the bikers. A single man popped up from the bed with a rocket-propelled grenade launcher and fired one into their midst. Two bikers were far enough away from the blast that they rode quickly past and kept going.

"Holy shit!" said Josh.

A man leaned out of the window of the first truck. "Follow us. We don't want to be around when the law shows up."

They drove in a caravan all the way up the 89 to the 160 North. They all stopped in Tuba City and four guys climbed out of the first

truck and five out of the second. They circled Josh and Curtis. It was pretty clear they were Native American.

"What are you doing in Indian country?" one of them asked sternly.

"We're on our way to meet my sister in Colorado," answered Josh.

"What's she doing in Colorado?" another asked.

"Hey, when do we get to ask some questions?"

"We saved your asses. You'll get a turn," said the first one.

"So, your sister?"

"Her name's Candy. We're supposed to meet her at Mesa Verde."

"That's where we're headed. The gathering of tribes," said the first. "My name's Marcus. Me and Louis are from the Hualapai reservation. We got a couple buddies, Carlos and Chuck from the Havasupai." He pointed to the men from the other truck. "Those guys are Hopi."

"Hey! Not me!" objected one who looked younger than the others. "I'm Max. I'm Kaibab."

"This is Curtis. I'm Josh."

One of them looked at Curtis. "I was pretty sure you were cool, but you can't trust a lot of white folks these days."

Marcus handed Curtis a shotgun. "You need to be packing one of these for protection."

"We're going to get something to eat, do some shopping, and head out. It's about a four-hour drive," explained Max. "Are you stocked up?"

"We can always grab some more food. My mom and dad gave us their camping stuff," said Josh.

"How long are we packing for?" asked Curtis.

"Don't know."

•

Alan's phone rang. It was Josh.

"Josh! How are you, son? Are you with your sister?"

"We're almost there, dad! How are you and mom?"

"We are doing our best to go with the flow here. Cooperation is the key. Any problems?"

"Curtis is always hungry."

"Hey!"

"We've met some cool guys and we're headed in the same direction. They also seem to be better prepared than us."

"Be careful."

"We are, dad. Next time I call I'll be with Candy. In fact, we're on our way now. You and mom take care of each other."

"We love you, son. Talk with you soon."

Tanner was at the door.

"Knight, we need your help to man a checkpoint. We're expecting some trouble tonight."

"I wouldn't be much help. My son says I get winded just walking up the driveway."

"You will just have to ask folks some questions. Muscle will be there with you."

"Well..."

"This will go a long way to showing your loyalty."

Alan sighed and shared a look with Denise.

"Sure. Count me in."

"Great! We'll see you at the end of the block at about 8 pm."

They had a light dinner; Alan's stomach was doing flip-flops.

Ten minutes before his appointment, he put on a jacket.

Denise hugged him tightly. "Be careful. Don't let them catch you off guard."

He put on his best comforting smile and walked out.

There was a massive LAPD officer at the checkpoint. He looked at Alan with disdain.

"So, you're our new Neighborhood Watch?"

"I guess so. Alan Knight. What's with the increased security?"

“Just keep your eyes open. Question anybody and everybody.” He handed him a checklist. “If anyone even starts to give you lip, call me over. Look for telltale signs of terrorism: Black Lives Matter swag, anything that says Democrat Party. Those are the ones we want to pull aside and question more extensively.”

“And your name?”

“Fenton. Or officer or boss while you’re on duty.”

“When am I off duty?”

“When I say you are. About midnight.” Fenton looked up and saw a car approaching.

“Look sharp. Here’s your first customer.”

Four college-aged guys pulled up reeking of pot and beer. Alan called out to Fenton.

“Uh, boss? Can you check this out?”

Fenton leaned into the car. “God, that smells good!”

The driver held out a lit joint. “Want some?”

Fenton took a long draw off the joint. “Got an extra brewski?”

They passed him a Budweiser.

“Thanks, fellas. Have a good night!” He frowned in Alan’s direction as they drove away.

“Are we going to have a problem here?”

“Should you be drinking and smoking on the job?” Alan asked.

“Who are you, my mother? The beer’s for after work. Those were just frat boys having some innocent fun. I was bonding with them. Head’s up! There’s another car.”

This car was an older model, a little beaten up. Alan leaned down and saw a young black couple in the back seat, an Asian couple in front. He glanced down at the checklist.

“Anybody here a member of a terrorist organization?” Nervous giggles all around.

“Of course not,” answered the driver in an offended tone.

"That wouldn't include BLM, would it?" the girl in the back seat asked sweetly.

"Yes, it would," said Alan.

"Then no."

"Okay then. Have a good night."

They started to pull away when Fenton stepped in front of their car. He stuck his head inside the vehicle for a moment then came toward Alan fuming.

"I knew it! I knew you were a security risk when I set eyes on you!"

"What are you talking about?" Alan asked.

"You clueless idiot!" said Fenton. "The county sends over one or two test vehicles every night and you just failed!"

"What?"

"Red flag number one: a black couple in the car. One Negro, an Oreo. Two, often a conspiracy. Red flag number two: nervous giggles when asked a direct question. They're hiding something. Pull that car aside and strip it, go through the glove box, under the seats, through the trunk. You're going to find something. Even if nothing's there, catch my drift?"

"Oreo?"

Fenton gave an exasperated sigh. "Black on the outside, white on the inside. They think like a white person and just happen to be black." He gave Alan a look of assessment.

"I don't think you're cut out for this. Or maybe you're a sympathizer. I'm going to recommend you to re-education camp. It'll get you out of the 'burbs for a while. As soon as your replacement shows up, you're free to go."

It was 10:30 pm when Alan walked in the door.

"How did it go? Did you pass the test?"

"Nope, we're going to get reprogrammed." He crawled into bed next to her and turned on his side away from her. He felt her move against his

back and wrap her arm around him. Her body's warmth chased away the foreboding chill that had followed him home.

•

"Men, I'm General Patterson from the Pentagon. You've been chosen for a very important, unique mission. I know you've heard that many times before but let me explain." Thirty-one black and brown faces, an intelligent team of kickass soldiers, waited for him to find the words.

"First, a show of hands. How many of you think your duty is to uphold the Constitution?"

Thirty hands.

"Second, how many think your first duty is to the President?"

He saw lots of puzzled faces and one raised hand.

"Yes?"

"Our first duty is to uphold the Constitution and follow our commander-in-chief, sir."

"And what if the commander-in-chief has been incapacitated?"

The soldiers were starting to exchange glances. "There's a chain of command, sir."

"So, who's next?"

"The Vice President, sir."

"Next question. Who did you vote for in 2016?"

There were more exchanged glances. The same soldier spoke up.

"How we voted is a private matter, sir."

"Bear with me, Colonel. Gentlemen, your vote in 2016 may compromise your objectivity and could undermine your ability to assess an imminent threat to the nation and each one of you."

"General, you guys at the Pentagon are the politicians. We're here to defend our freedom."

Here was where Caesar crossed the Rubicon.

"Do you remember the oath you took talking about enemies foreign and domestic?"

“Yes, sir!”

“We, gentlemen, have reached the most dangerous moment in American history. I am not using hyperbole. FDR referred to a rendezvous with destiny. THIS IS IT! In order to save our nation, our freedom, and all that we hold dear, we must rise up against tyranny. Some will say that we are aiding and abetting the enemies of the Constitution, but the opposite is true. So, I will ask the question again: Who did you vote for in 2016?”

The numbers revealed the hold that Trump had on the military: Seventy-three percent had voted for Trump.

“How many voted for him again?” Patterson asked. This time the total was about fifty percent.

“Thank you for your honest answers. Now I need to share some confidential information that will explain why those questions were important and why you’re here today. Mr. Trump is planning to seize outright dictatorial control of our nation.”

Some shook their heads and looked defiant.

“I witnessed firsthand his execution of a member of the joint chiefs of staff who gave him advice he didn’t want to hear. For his blunt counsel, General Sutherland received a bullet to the head. In this day where bad news is called fake news because we simply don’t want to believe it, I can verify it *because I was there!*”

“Now I must reveal our destination. We are en route to Kansas City, Kansas where the president has authorized force against civilians by an illegal militia working in conjunction with local troops. We are going to investigate and engage this and other illegal militias operating unilaterally in direct violation of the United States Constitution. As soon as I know more about the situation on the ground, I will inform you so you can be most effective in protecting human life and neutralizing enemy combatants. I will now answer any questions you may have.”

“General, how do we know this isn’t fake news or some test of our loyalty?”

“Captain, I swear to you on all I hold dear, my family, my rank, my country, and my faith that we are in some unprecedented hot water

here, deep doodoo, and we are the only thing standing between total anarchy and Civil war.”

“General, why us?”

“Colonel, take a look around. Look at your fellow soldiers, the best and the brightest people of color in this military. You all are here because you have the most to lose if this goes down. Maybe you’re not worried because you’re a badass son of a bitch. Then think of your family! Are there any of them involved in Black Lives Matter or maybe they’re political lefties? Trump has taken a page out of the Chairman Mao playbook and has established re-education camps.”

“And why is that a bad thing?” somebody asked.

“Is that America? We don’t have to agree with them, but it’s a free country, right? NOT ANY MORE! It’s time to get serious. I need to know that I can count on you, that your country can count on you.”

He spotted a hand in the back.

“One last question.”

The soldier stood up and drew his weapon.

“I need you to stand down, Gen...”

Patterson had pulled his own gun and put a bullet into the soldier’s head. The sound of the shot rang in the belly of the cargo plane long after the soldier had slumped to the floor.

“As God is my witness, I didn’t want to do that, but this mission is the most important thing you will do in your lives. We all need to go in knowing we have each other’s backs. I need to know that when I give an order, it will be followed quickly and without question. I need you to sound off individually starting with you, Mendez.”

“Sir! Yes, sir!”

Patterson was proud to see that all but one other had taken stock and thrown in their lot with the rest. Now what was he going to do with her?

Ronnie and Candy rolled into what was starting to look like a bivouac. Most of the warriors were moving supplies into the cave dwellings. The dwellings seemed etched into the side of the mountain with a portion still providing an overhanging shelter.

“Good. There’s not a lot anybody can spot from the air,” remarked Ronnie.

He turned to the brave who was showing them around. “Where are the park rangers?”

“We created a makeshift jail where they’re being tended to.”

“Not an ideal situation. Excess baggage but weren’t not savages.” Everyone within earshot laughed.

“It’s a little chilly. Have we got enough camp stoves and blankets?” Candy asked.

“You think it’s cold now,” said their guide. “The temp plummets after the sun goes down. And I don’t know how long the snowfall will hold off.”

“How many warriors have checked in?”

“Word of mouth has traveled to the west coast. We’re looking at three thousand, thirty-five hundred right now, with more pouring in.”

“Shit! A drop in the bucket!” He turned to the guide.

“Any idea on our odds?”

“We’ve been running the numbers. Counting the reserves, we’re looking at about seven million of them. And they’ve got all, or at least most, of the weaponry.”

Ronnie ran a hand through his hair. “What the fuck have I got us into?”

“It’s a fight for the country. A good fight,” she assured him.

“A lot of good people are going to die. Did it really have to come to this?”

“If you could have taken a time machine back to 1940 and killed Hitler, would you?”

“I would have gone back further and strangled him in the crib.”

"A little baby? I don't think so."

"Yeah, he was probably a lot cuter without that mustache."

Candy's walkie barked. "Somebody here to see you, Captain."

"I guess that's me. I can't get used to that military designation."

"Send them up to Area 5," she replied.

She saw two men running up the steep incline toward her.

"Josh!" They threw their arms around each other with tears threatening them both.

She turned and embraced Curtis. "Thank you for being here. Thanks for joining the fight."

"I just got a text. More brothers are coming."

"We have plenty of room," said Ronnie. "82 square miles."

Reggie and his entourage joined the group. "I was at Woodstock. This can get messy pretty fast. You're going to need sanitation duty. That, too, is part of the glorious rebellion."

"I'm on it!" offered Josh. "First on, first off, right?"

Josh's phone showed an incoming call from his mother. Candy was getting a call from her dad.

"Did you make it?" asked his mother.

"We're right here with Candy!"

"How does she look?"

"Okay. Healthy. Like the B.I.C."

"What?"

"The Bitch in Charge."

"I'm not going to tell you how anti-feminist that is. Go talk to your dad. Let me talk to Candy."

"We're so happy you guys made it safely. Any problems?"

"Nothing we couldn't handle with friends along the way."

"You can never have enough friends."

"Inventory is going well, but I could have sworn there were more hammers," Josh said.

“Huh? Oh. Order some more.”

“I did. They’re on the way. Lots more.”

“You can never have too many hammers,” Alan said.

“Especially when they’ve got all the nails,” Josh answered obliquely. “I’ve got to check in for my work assignment.”

“Already? Me too,” said Alan.

“What are you doing?”

“Your mom and I are going out of town for the weekend.”

“Really, dad? At a time like this?”

“A bunch of the neighbors are going to take a bus to an Indian casino to do some gambling.”

“Uh huh.”

“Nobody can make up their mind. They’re looking at ALL the casinos. And haven’t made ANY RESERVATIONS.”

The phone signal disappeared as did everyone else’s.

•

The copilot pulled Patterson aside. “KC’s an all-clear. Party’s over. Should we head for home?”

“Captain Flores, is it? Who did you vote for a few days ago?”

“Permission to speak freely, General?”

Patterson nodded.

“Fuck Trump.”

“That was quite emphatic.”

“Just another way of saying you have my full support, General.”

“And the pilot?”

“Let’s put it this way, he’s Muslim. He hates the Orange One.”

“Good enough. Any chatter on some of the more obscure channels?”

“Yes, sir, but it’s too weird to take seriously.”

“Try me.”

“There is talk about a big powwow on ancestral grounds. Some kinda Little Bighorn shit, if you’ll excuse my French.”

“It’s a lead, though, to where all these folks vanished. Do you have any opinions where this powwow might be happening?”

“There’s Devil’s Tower in Arizona, Rainbow Bridge in Utah, a whole lot of sacred sites. We’re not picking up any extra radio traffic. Not since Kansas.”

“Maybe they really are gone.”

•

“Has Patterson checked in?” the Commander asked a passing aide.

“No, sir.”

He turned to Admiral Harding.

“He wouldn’t just take off, would he?”

“Couldn’t tell you, sir. These are strange times.”

Trump stood up and seemed to sway for a second.

“Are you okay, sir?” asked Harding.

“Just tired.”

“Do you want someone to wake you when we’re in touch with General Patterson?”

“Only if it’s important. Good night.”

•

Alan worried that Jason hadn’t understood his message. He was clear without being obvious, he thought. And what had happened to the phones and the electricity? He was aware of the power of an electromagnetic pulse, but that usually required a nuclear blast far above the city. Was the resistance capable of such an act? Neither Josh nor Candy had given any indication that something of that force had been imminent. That narrowed it down to Washington or a foreign power.

Fortunately, these old buses, lacking solid-state electronics, were still working. They were headed to a re-education camp in the old

Convention Center. Their guards were herding them with a nervous glance among themselves.

The surly cop, Fenton, was checking off names as they boarded. Alan stopped.

“EMP, right?”

Fenton ignored him. “Wiped out everything west of Nevada,” said one of the other guards.

That was limited, though. Alan was pretty sure the damage was more extensive. He wondered how the kids were doing. They might never know now.

•

Patterson and the troops were tumbling along with their plane as it dropped like a rock from the sky. Mendez came out of the cockpit. “Everybody grab something and hold on. We’re ditching the tank!”

He and another soldier released eight of the ten tethers and had to jump back as the tank seemed to shake the rear of the plane apart. The gate stayed locked into place.

“We have no power to the gate!” screamed the copilot. “We need to open the ramp manually!”

“I’ll get it!” Mendez yelled as he yanked at the remaining ramp hooks and operated the manual hydraulic bellcrank.

Mendez and Anderson, an African-American female Special Ops member, tried to get out of the way as the tank rolled backward into space. It headed for the open ramp, the momentum as it rumbled away knocked Mendez off his feet, sucking him out in its wake. In a second Anderson had followed; the two soldiers were gone, and the gate closed.

The plane bobbed upward for a minute to compensate for the abrupt jettison of seventy tons of ballast. Then the plane still plummeted. Unfortunately, the C-130J had not been built to glide to a landing, but it held up admirably until it bounced off I-70, clipped an 18-wheeler and mowed down trees and foliage until it could move no more.

Patterson called out, “Everybody okay?”

“I think I might have cracked a rib,” said the pilot.

The general entered the cockpit and found a large branch has punched into the cabin and was inches from the nose of the pilot.

“I was trying to get us to Grand Junction Regional Airport, but I couldn’t raise anybody. Not even static,” explained Flores.

“If I’m right about what hit us, we’re lucky to be alive,” said Patterson.

“The only thing I’m aware of that could take out both the engines and communications would be an electromagnetic pulse,” said the pilot, El-Rahim.

“Much as I would love to sit here and discuss theories, among them who the hell did this, the temperature outside is dropping and I think snow’s in the forecast.”

One of the soldiers started whistling a Christmas carol.

“General, do you think someone saw us go down and they’re on their way?”

“That EMP would have knocked out radar with all the other electronics. I’d say we’re on our own. It’s damn lucky we have the best of the best here. Suggestions?”

“Hays here, General. We’ve got blankets and food. We don’t know where we are other than somewhere in Colorado, so my recommendation is sit here till morning.”

Patterson looked at the soldiers. Most of them were in their twenties but were trained for this. “Any other recommendations? Seeing none, you four take a walk around the craft. Check out the depth of the snow. Hays, take three of your buddies and break out supplies: food, blankets, the stuff we’re going to need to make it through the night.”

“We might post a lookout or two so we don’t end up somebody’s prisoner or collateral damage,” suggested Master Sergeant Perez.

Phillips suggested limiting their meal choices. “I say MREs for tonight till we get our bearings and options in the morning.”

They ate quietly until Hays broached an earlier subject. “For real, General, the president went off the deep end?”

"It scared the hell out of me. I mean, he's always been a loose cannon, but I hate to think what would happen with those launch codes."

"You mean what already may have happened."

"I hate to think he'd do that to his own country, but I've seen some crazy shit the last few days so, you're right. Nothing is out of the realm of possibility. In fact, if the EMP wasn't him, why hasn't he launched a retaliatory strike?"

"Maybe he can't. Maybe the EMP wiped the launch codes."

"Good point, Walker, is it?"

"Yes, sir!"

"You and your chow buddy have first watch."

"Yes, sir!"

"I suggest we all get some sleep. We don't know what time it is, but we have to be ready for whatever tomorrow brings."

"I've got a pocket watch my dad gave me that his dad gave him." He illuminated the face with his lighter.

"Simpson?"

"Yes, sir?"

"It's a pitch-black night. What are we going to do if we don't sleep?"

"Good night, General."

"Good night, Lieutenant."

•

Armando and his family stopped for gas in Grand Junction accompanied by his brother Ernesto and Ramon, who apparently refused to let them out of his sight. Ernesto was still in a lot of pain so Armando knew he'd be useless in any kind of dust-up with gabachos like the ones that had beaten him up a few hours before.

Armando was happy with their decision to head back to Mexico. There were going to be major problems for people of color for a long

time; he didn't want to end up like his big brother and was afraid for his wife and kids.

He insisted the boys pee even though they claimed they didn't need to and Ramon and Ernesto took the hint. He handed the guy behind the counter a twenty-dollar bill for the gas.

The guy was white, about 25 years of age, covered in tattoos. He scowled at Armando.

"Why don't you go back where you're from, Jose?"

"We are!" answered Armando in a celebratory tone. "We're headed there right now!"

"Good!" said the clerk, at a loss for words.

Outside, Serena was trying to pack everybody back into the car.

"Everybody put on your jackets," insisted Serena. The car's heater worked sporadically at best. The radio did its job; they pulled out of the station with Tejano music blasting. They were headed south when the engine coughed and died.

Armando tried several times to get it to start, but there was no telltale click, click as the battery tried to inject life into the spark plugs. Finally, the engine roared and jumped as though it was anxious to continue the journey. An 18-wheeler scared the hell out of all of them as it passed swiftly and silently on the right.

"Mira!" said Ramon. They looked back at the station. It was dark and so were the streetlights.

They looked up as something huge flew over creaking and whistling. A loud crash followed and continued up the side of the mountain for several minutes followed by deathly silence.

Pedro spoke up from the back seat. "Papa, what was that?"

"I don't know, mijo, but it was miles away."

They drove on into the night, keeping their eyes on the reflectors on the guard rails to help them navigate the dark.

•

Ronnie came walking up the trail at about 1 A.M. Candy and Songbird were sipping hot cocoa.

“Walkies are out, cell phones are dead,” he reported.

“EMP,” Songbird said matter-of-factly.

“Shit!” said Ronnie.

“Kinda puts us on an even footing,” Songbird said.

“Who do you think did it?” asked Ronnie.

“Crazy Donnie? Maybe. More like Kim Jung Un.”

“Are we talking war?”

“Depends. If his aim is as bad as they say, we’re probably at DEFCON 1 with no disruption to life as we loathe it. But if he landed a lucky strike, the United States won’t have any retaliatory ability.”

“I’m not going to be able to reach my folks,” said Candy.

“We’ve got like 5,000 fighters in here now. More coming in every day. All different colors, religions, even some nerdy little group calling themselves the Lancer Allies. I’m not sure how they even found us. How are we going to coordinate anything if we can’t communicate to everybody at once?” fretted Ronnie.

“Occupy Wall Street,” said Josh, as he walked up. “They had folks go out and round up a group, tell them the plan of the day, and those guys would carry the message down the line. Remember jazz hands?”

Everyone gave him blank stares. “It was like applause.”

“It would help with our first few tasks: training, finding who has it and who can teach skills like archery, small arms, martial arts,” said Songbird. “Josh, go find those Lancer folks and have them take inventory.”

“Yes, sir. Right after sanitation rounds.”

“Go tell your friend he’s got shit detail in the morning,” said Ronnie. Josh grinned, saluted, and left.

•

According to Lamar Simpson's grandfather's watch, it was about 6 a.m. when he and others awoke, but a fog was keeping the sun at bay.

"General?" He noticed that the general and several of the Special Ops were checking out the condition of the plane outside. Patterson was ordering the removal of weaponry first, then food and other necessities.

"Simpson, you're inventory. Grab a buddy. We have to get this shit out of here."

"How, General?"

There were car horns blaring on the road below. Soldiers who weren't busy saw two beat up old pickup trucks sitting on the side of I-70.

"Do you boys need any help?" asked Songbird. He suddenly noticed the man in charge appeared to be a General. "Good morning, General. I hope you and your team weren't planning to arrest us."

"Whatever for...?"

"General Songbird, People's Army, sir."

"Ah! The troublemakers from Kansas City."

"No sir, that would describe the militia that attacked us."

"Then you and I need to talk."

"We can head to HQ in one truck. Another with a trailer is on its way." Songbird turned to his troops. "Andrita, I'm leaving you in charge. Get this stuff down off the mountainside and meet us back at base. Camo everything."

"Yes, sir!"

Songbird and Patterson talked as they headed to Mesa Verde.

"Are you responsible for that EMP that took us out last night, General Songbird?"

"No, sir. My guess would be the North Koreans. I think we caught the edge of the pulse. I don't think anybody east of here felt it."

"That would explain why your vehicles are running."

"Yes, sir, but Kim Jung Un's aim will be better next time, I'm afraid. Is Commander Trump going to retaliate?"

“Couldn’t say. By now my team and I are classified AWOL or MIA, take your pick.”

“It’s going to make a big difference to us, General. Are you here to oppose us or join us?”

“I don’t want to tell this story more than once. Are we almost there?” asked Patterson.

Songbird parked in a huge Walmart parking lot just a half mile from the cliff dwellings.

“This is our stop, General. Please join us for coffee and a little bit of breakfast if you’re interested.” They reached the cliff where Ronnie, Candy and others were waiting.

Ronnie showed no deference for the General’s stripes.

“Friend or foe, General?”

“Here goes. All I ask is that you hear me out before you decide what to do with my men and me.”

Patterson told them what he had seen for himself in the bunker.

“Even though the reason I gave for leaving was legit – to hunt you down – the plan was to bring fire power and join your efforts to take out this dangerous traitor.”

“Is he going to come looking for you?”

“Well, by now he’s probably aware there was an EMP last night and may have affected communications. That may buy us some time. What’s the situation here?”

“We have just about every tribe here or on their way, a lot of military deserters, every group that has suffered the wrath and prejudice of Trump and his people. I’m afraid I’d have to label this a civil war.” Candy said.

“It’s sad that it has come to this. What’s the plan?”

“Now that you’re here, we’re open to suggestions,” said Ronnie. “We picked this spot because it’s hard to see from the air, whether that’s aircraft or satellite. At this point, we have about 12,000. Many have never shot a gun or fired a bow so they’re getting trained.”

“Just a thought: how far away is the NORAD base?” Patterson asked.

•

Trump, as usual, was angry.

“Can someone tell me where Patterson is?”

A very young-looking Air Force colonel spoke up. “We were tracking his cargo plane when the EMP hit. We haven’t found any wreckage yet so we’re still hopeful.”

“Hopeful? Hopeful of what? That he didn’t fuck up and his and his men’s rotting corpses aren’t lying in a field somewhere waiting for us to find their sorry asses? Never mind. He was one of the loyal ones. Let’s hope and pray he makes it back.”

“Thank you, Mr. President,” said Pence. “Mother and I have been praying all night for the safe return of General Patterson and his men.”

“No luck with the flyovers?” Trump asked an aide.

“We lost a jet to the EMP and it was decided to pull back.”

“EMP, EMP. Can somebody remind me what that is?”

“Electromagnetic pulse...” the aide began. Another whispered in his ear.

“Dumb it down.”

The aide started over. “Somebody exploded a nuclear weapon over Las Vegas, and it knocked out all the power: cars, computers, airplanes...”

“How long will it take to restore the power?”

“We don’t know. This has never happened.”

“Who’s responsible? We should have already bombed them back to the Stone Age.”

“We think it was North Korea. Anybody else’s aim would have been better.”

“Get Kim on the phone. Does he think he can get away with this?”

Minutes later, “Sir, Kim Jong-un is on line two.”

“Mr. President!”

“Commander, Kim. What the fuck did you do?”

“My apologies, Commander. It seems a bomb test misfired. Please forgive our error. No citizens, no cities were harmed, correct?”

“Kim, Kim, Kim. I thought we had an understanding.”

“Let me make this unfortunate incident up to you. We offer any assistance in tracking down your enemies.”

“Go on. What do you have in mind?”

“We may have repositioned a satellite over the EMP zone. We may be able to find missing soldiers, weapons, perhaps even some of your domestic terrorists.”

“Let’s see what you come up with.”

•

“Everybody up and out!” a guard bellowed.

Denise nudged Alan awake as the occupants of the Moscone Center stirred.

“I never got up before 6 a.m. in my life. I don’t know why I have to now,” Alan grumbled.

A husky woman correction officer replied, “Because we have tasers.”

They steered everyone into single file and aboard very old school buses that were immune to the EMP. Denise had never seen the BART system idled and useless.

The calendar was moving toward December and morning temperatures in the Bay Area averaged 57 degrees.

Alan watched as they rolled onto side roads along the 101 South. The freeway was cluttered with abandoned vehicles knocked out by the EMP.

“It looks like we’re harvesting today,” he told Denise.

“Please, God. Let it be corn,” said Denise. “My back can’t take bending over for beans or cauliflower.”

The bus stopped beside a grove of Haas avocados. Denise received a fruit picker and Alan followed her around with a bin.

Alan turned at a gurgling noise back toward the bus just in time to see someone in warpaint cut the throat of a second guard. The warrior looked at him and beckoned.

“Hurry! We don’t have much time!”

Alan pulled on Denise’s shoulder and motioned toward their ride. They dropped their tools in the shadow of the avocado tree and quickly climbed back on the bus. They glanced back and saw others run for the safety of the hulking vehicle as gunfire erupted. If their “educators” thought their prisoners would freeze at the sound of shots fired, they were mistaken. More ducked and sprinted for safety on board.

Two of the warriors jumped into the bus with one taking the driver’s seat and they were soon rolling down the road at a fast clip.

“Welcome to the People’s Army! I’m Logan and this is Gabriel in the driver’s seat. We are from the Chumash tribe and before we meet up with everybody in Colorado, we’re going to raise some hell!”

The newly liberated exchanged looks and cheered.

•

The children had to stop to pee again.

Ramon asked, “How far away is Mexico?”

“My cell phone doesn’t work. Your cell phone doesn’t work. So, no GPS. I would say the answer is very far,” Armando was getting annoyed.

“What time...?” Serena asked, catching herself abruptly.

“Time to get some rest,” answered Ernesto.

They had scarcely started on the road once more when they were confronted by a barrier. Scruffy looking bikers, Armando counted about a dozen, flagged them down.

One of them with a gut that threatened to break his belt stomped over to the car.

“Where ya going, Pancho?”

“Home to Mexico, señor,” Armando said agreeably.

"You're not injuns pretending to be Mexcans, are you?" asked another biker.

"They're brown, not red, you idiot," proclaimed the first one.

The second biker and Ramon were exchanging scowls.

"What are you looking at, beaner?"

"No hablo ingles, cabron," he replied with a smile.

The first biker waved them through. "Better get out of here before Floyd gets all pissy."

They had driven another twelve miles when they encountered another checkpoint. There was one lone brown man.

"Buscamos un lugar para descansar un rato."

"Sorry, I don't speak Spanish. I'm Cherokee."

"We're looking for a rest stop."

"You're not red. You're brown like us," said seven-year-old Paco.

The thunderous roar of several motorcycles came toward them from where they had just left.

"Go!" the Cherokee yelled.

Armando felt that time had slowed. He didn't seem to be able to move fast enough. He heard a gunshot and saw the Cherokee go down hard in a pool of blood.

Ernesto was hit. The others ducked behind the car while bullets flew.

They heard gunfire from further up the canyon. Armando couldn't believe what he was seeing: two soldiers on foot with AR-15s mowed down the bikers as they advanced.

"The rest will be here soon now that the bikes are working. Get in the car and go to the Mesa Verde National Park exit. Somebody will guide you from there."

Armando wasn't sure what to do, but the soldier seemed to be someone he could trust. Where was Ernesto? Face down in the street, not moving. Serena and the boys were near hysterics, crying. Ramon

was frozen with shock. He, Armando, like the soldiers, must be a man of action.

“We’re going to safety. Vamanos!”

•

Songbird walked Patterson around the main encampment.

“I’d show you all 82 acres, but we’d need a working vehicle for that,” he explained.

“Then your prayers have been answered,” Patterson responded as a warrior pulled up in a smart car.

“Not much to look at,” he said to the two generals, “but it’s a way to get around.”

“It’s great. Thanks!” said Songbird.

As Patterson squeezed into the passenger seat, Songbird admitted there was not much more to see.

“What do you see as your biggest liability?” he asked Songbird.

“Do you mean besides being seriously outmanned, outgunned, and undertrained?”

“Point taken.”

They made the rounds, spending time with clusters of warriors of all colors, Songbird taking note of suggestions.

A beat-up Ford Fairlane came barreling toward them on one of the back roads.

A family jumped out and waved them down. Patterson noticed the car was riddled with bullet holes.

“Hello, el General!”

“Can we help you?” Songbird asked.

“I am Armando Garcia. This is my wife, Serena and my two boys, Pedro and Paco. And this is Ramon. Your soldiers have saved us, so we are here to help.”

“How did you get in, sir?”

“We missed the entrance and found a back way.”

The two generals looked at each other. "Security."

"Bienvenidos," said Songbird. "Please find someone in a vehicle and asked them to direct you to food and shelter. I hope you will share your story with us later."

"Thank you. We are happy to serve," said Ramon.

•

"Mr. Pres... Commander. We think we found the general's plane," Admiral Dusseldorf announced.

"We did or the Koreans?"

"Uh, they did, sir."

"Kim's going to hold that over my head."

"He was the one who launched the EMP that caused our plane to crash."

"Right, right. Did they find anybody alive?"

"There's a truck headed to the site now. We had to get something drivable from outside the EMP zone."

"Do we know how big the zone is?"

"The nuclear device was detonated somewhere over Salt Lake so if we determine the bomb's size, we're talking Nevada, Idaho, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming and maybe Oregon and California."

"What's the worst-case scenario? Are we talking riots, that kinda thing?"

"We've been getting reports like that since election night."

"I don't mean the good guys. I'll talking about all the snowflakes, Antifa, groups like that."

"It's getting bad out there, Commander. The only vehicles on the road are pre-1972. No cell phones, no power, no TV, no burglar alarms. We have had to redeploy some of the poll watchers to security at the supermarkets. As more people start running out of food, the more things will escalate."

“We’ve got like a gazillion troops out there including the National Guard. Let’s mobilize, people!”

He turned to watch everybody scramble. Despite the situation, he smiled. He was in the eye of the hurricane.

“And find Patterson!”

•

It was obvious that this was the first time Gabriel had driven a bus. Alan winced every time he ground the gears as he shifted.

“Where are we going?” someone yelled from the back.

“To the supermarket!”

There was a puzzled murmur from the passengers.

“We’re stocking up. By the way, does anybody here know how to handle a gun?”

The murmurs rose in volume and tempo.

“I do!” Alan yelled.

Gabriel turned to his partner. “Give that man a firearm!”

It was a Glock. It could have been his. It felt familiar, hefty, substantial.

They pulled to the curb just short of a Safeway in San Jose. An African American with a handful of rifles and shotguns stood at the front of the bus.

“You and you,” Gabriel’s partner pointed at Denise and a big guy, “come with us.”

“Anybody here good with a shotgun?” asked the new guy.

An androgynous person near the back of the bus said in a ringing, confident voice, “That would be me.”

“Yo, I’m Richie. You keep that thing trained out the window at the front of the store. Somebody come out, down they go.”

“I’m Daisy. Come and see me after this is all over.”

Richie smiled and winked.

As they pulled into the Safeway parking lot, they saw a line and two guys in camo brandishing shotguns apparently keeping order. Gabriel pointed the bus at one of them, gave the accelerator his full weight, and nailed him with the grill as Richie swung down firing a Dirty Harry-style 45 at the other guy. The people in line scattered screaming.

Richie turned back to Alan. "Come on! Move!"

Alan felt his back wrench as he jumped to the pavement and almost lost his grip on the Glock. If the kids could see him now!

Another militia man came running out of the store. Alan couldn't react fast enough and closed his eyes, ready to meet his maker.

The shotgun behind him exploded with sound and fury and the body lay at his feet, eyes staring at the sky, seeing nothing.

Richie yelled, "Grab a cart, old man. It's shopping time!"

He turned to the few folks who had waited in line who still lingered. "Go ahead. You were here first."

One of the men plucked up the courage to run into the store and was gunned down by another militia man still inside. The victim's body lay there as a warning for anybody stupid enough to try it.

"I was afraid of that," Richie muttered.

"You knew that was going to happen?" screamed Denise.

"More than likely. Sooner or later."

"Take me back to the avocado orchard. It's worse out here than it was there. At least we were cared for," said Denise.

"Till the food runs out. That stuff you've been harvesting isn't staying in the Bay Area. Somebody is stockpiling or feeding an army."

"Which is it?" asked Alan.

"The militias and the bikers in the area have been doing chili cookoffs and beer runs together for years. A big fraternity. That includes most of the local cops. They all used to be at each other's throats, but these last four years have really brought them together. I'm Porter, Clarence Porter. FBI. We have seen these affinity groups suddenly working very well together."

Another passenger, "What were you waiting for?"

"We were told to just stand back and stand by, don't do anything to jeopardize the mission."

"What do we do now?" asked another woman from the bus. "The government got us into this mess. Now they need to get us out. Go get us some food, G Man."

"Okay, but I'll need two other guys. We create a diversion and I rush in with gun blazing, isn't that about right?"

A lanky gray-haired guy from the bus said, "With no power it's got to be pretty dark in there, right?"

Alan ended up on the roof. He and Richie had dragged an old aluminum ladder over to a remotely accessible spot as quietly as they could. He was responsible for a second diversion if needed, the first was up to Porter. Richie was stationed at the back door.

Alan was so nervous, he jumped at the noise Porter was making out front and almost fell through the roof. The simultaneous noises from both places had the desired effect on the guy in the store. He pirouetted through the aisles, trying to pinpoint their location, figure out who was out there. Agent Porter slid on his belly from the doorway into the produce section and lobbed cabbages and melons in every direction to confuse and draw fire elsewhere. By now, Alan was making it hard within the store to hear anything other than him running back and forth across the roof. The militia man had had enough. He fired both barrels of his shotgun into the direction of Alan's stomp. Porter grabbed at an ankle as the man attempted to reload. The others rushed in and soon had him roped to a chair.

"You do realize that the power's been out for about 36 hours now?" Richie asked their prisoner. "That meat's going to get rancid soon. Isn't it better to hand it out?"

"I'm saving it for the boys."

"What boys?" There was a loud roar from out front. It sounded like a hundred motorcycles.

The prisoner smiled. "Time's up!"

•

Snow was drifting down through the trees in Mesa Verde and though the temperature hadn't dropped, everyone felt instantly colder.

The demands for food and shelter were increasing every day as other tribes and groups came to the Gathering. Their number had grown to 20,000. Latrines were overloaded and, Candy observed after watching a fight over a petty issue, the troops were bored and demoralized. It was time to do something.

"I think it's time for action," she said at the morning meeting.

"I agree," said Patterson. "What did you have in mind?"

"Battles on two fronts, something that will keep them from zeroing in on our exact location."

"I know where some of the white supremacist survivalist guys hang out on the other side of Cortez. But they have a lot of guns and a lot of ammo," said Marcus, one of the Hualapai.

"We need to have one more target. This is our coming-out party, guys," said Ronnie. "We're trying to make a statement and bring back shock and awe."

"How about Durango? It's about 50 miles from here, has about 20,000 population."

"What's there?"

"Ever heard of the White Aryan Resistance? Rumor has it they came in a few months ago and bought some land not too far from downtown Durango."

"That's a target." Patterson was encouraged to see morale pick up. They had a bold plan of action and now needed to see it through, whatever the cost.

One of his troops approached him, Simpson.

"With your permission, General. We're attaching ourselves to these warriors. We want to help."

“That’s commendable, Simpson. You’re not going to get a medal for this; you’ll probably end up in a military prison, but I respect and salute you.”

Simpson returned the salute. “Today’s terrorist is tomorrow’s legend, right?”

“‘We must all hang together, or we shall hang separately.’ Ben Franklin.”

General Songbird was planning to lead both groups, leaving the first group to make their way back to camp. Fifty miles was quite a hoof when you had to get there on foot, a journey that seemed so inconsequential in a car could take them two days. He turned to Reggie.

“I needed this. I was getting soft.”

“My cheeks are bright red, my lips are chapped. What’s not to like?” Reggie laughed.

“If I had a musket, this could be Valley Forge,” remarked Songbird.

“I find the AR-15 to be a much more effective weapon.”

The first group consisted of 100 warriors. Some were from local tribes and others were clusters of quiet, serious local activist groups full of young people. They were fighting to get their country back and were willing to engage the American war machine, damn the consequences.

They gathered in the predawn hours. Some traveled ahead in one of their commandeered fleet of junkers to scout out the enemy’s compound and to report to the warriors who came to fight.

Candy walked with the other warriors, contemplating the days ahead. With every skirmish and battle they won, they would be considered that much more of a threat. The temperature had dropped to the teens overnight. Though it was too cold to snow now, the fierce icy wind whipping through the trees made her teeth chatter uncontrollably.

She looked around her. Warriors were knee-deep in the drifts that had fallen during the night. Their feet would suffer most from the cold, damp conditions.

Up on the road above them was an SUV headed their way. It parked and the occupants waited until Candy drew abreast. The door

opened and two men jumped out and grabbed her, throwing her into the back seat. The warriors around her struggled with her abductors and managed to pull one of them from the vehicle. He went down fighting, but the SUV had fishtailed and finally caught purchase on the icy mountain road and she was gone.

She was surprised to be greeted by Jared Kushner.

"Just sit there and keep your mouth shut. What have you done with our General Patterson?"

She stared back at him, a touch of amusement on her face.

"Well?" He caught on. "You may speak now if you have any information about Patterson. Do your people have him in custody or did he die somewhere along the way?"

She was silent. One of the goons in the front said, "I told you she wouldn't say anything. She's just a scared little Harvard girl. Right, honey? I say pitch her over the cliff."

"No!" she screamed. "I'll do anything, say anything, just don't hurt me," she whimpered.

"Okay. This is just an act. She really is going over the side now."

The agent came around to the side and opened her door to reach in and grab her. She got a solid kick to his face. He slipped on the ice then seemed to find his balance before he went backward over the cliff.

"This is my stop," she said as she slipped out the door. The agent driving was unbuckling his seatbelt to pursue her.

"Don't bother," said Kushner. "She won't last long on this cold, dark road. I think Patterson's dead, don't you?"

"You're the boss."

•

"Your blood pressure appears normal," the doctor announced.

"What the hell do you know? I hire you to lie to everyone else, not me. My BP's going through the roof, isn't it?"

"No, commander. You're the most healthy 74-year-old I've ever known."

“Now I know you’re blowing smoke up my ass.” He turned to a ubiquitous aide. “Get Secret Service to show this guy the door. Don’t forget to revoke his pass. No more disgruntled employees like last week!”

Someone he had fired in his first 100 days of office had confronted him on the way to some affair in the Rose Garden. Secret Service had pounced on him and carted him off before Trump could even remember his name. “Beautiful job, fellas.”

“I’m going to go lie down. Keep up the good work, boys. Wake me up if you find Patterson alive. It can wait if he’s dead and wake me if any other emergency comes up you can’t handle yourselves.”

There was a sudden loud noise from outside, the Pennsylvania Avenue side where all the libtards and all those ungrateful socialists congregated, screaming epithets and giving him the finger.

“What was that?”

“An M-80?”

“Well, be sure. I don’t want any surprises. No wonder I’m stressed out.”

Secret Service checked in with security at the fence.

“They say some liberal tried to blow himself up. An M-80 won’t get the job done, though. The guard also said the police showed up and took a report from a witness who claimed the firecracker was thrown into the middle of their group from a passing car.”

“When will people learn you don’t mess with the US government? I’m going to bed. I have a big golf game tomorrow. Remind me, who am I playing tomorrow?”

“Duterte from the Philippines. He also wants to ride a Harley while he’s here.”

“No,” corrected another aide. “He wants you to give him one. He called it his quid-pro-quo.”

“Fuck him,” said the commander. “He has never played an honest game of golf in his life and he hasn’t done me any favors. Now I’ve got to get some sleep or I’ll be a real asshole in the morning.”

“Good night, Commander.”

•

General Patterson was relieved to see the warriors had mustered for him. Their breath came out in puffs of steam. Most of them seemed intent, even eager, to get on with whatever the day held for them. He met each warrior's eyes, shook their hands, and took their measure. None of them seemed consumed with the dread usually associated with what could very well be a suicide mission.

“In a few hours a platoon should be reaching the compound in Cortez. We're coming up behind them to provide fresh reinforcements and to collect some souvenirs for our battle in Durango. Let's get this show on the road, shall we? For America!”

“For America!” everyone bellowed. “One family, one tribe!” Marcus of the Hualapai yelled.

“Let's go already!” a young voice called out from the ranks. Everyone within earshot laughed.

The scouts took off in a beat-up Ford Fairlane. Everyone else marched up the road toward the highway.

A little red pickup raced to the cliff dwellings where the other leaders were discussing strategy and logistics.

Armando jumped out of the truck. “Help! Help me, please!”

Josh was one of the first to arrive. Armando opened the passenger door. Inside, seated next to the driver was Candy. Her lips were blue and she was barely aware of her surroundings.

“Get her out and smothered in blankets!” Josh ordered.

Someone ran over to assist. “I'm a doctor. Let's get her some hot chocolate and two or three heavy blankets.”

Someone found an oversized sleeping bag; the volunteers removed Candy's clothes and covered all but her face.

Josh turned to Armando. “Where was she? How did this happen?”

“Slow, please. Some bad men grab her. We tried to stop them. They drive higher up the mountain and leave her there. We carried her down the mountain.”

The doctor examined her. “We’re not exactly equipped to fight acute hypothermia. Let’s take her into town.”

“Won’t we blow our cover?”

“Do you think nobody knows we’re up here? Cortez is a pretty small town and I’m pretty sure we all know you’re here and what you’re up to. And, just for the record, most of us are behind you 100 percent.”

The doctor rode along for the trip to Southwest Memorial, keeping a watchful eye on Candy’s vital signs. Within minutes she was connected to several machines and hospital staff took over.

A well-dressed older man approached Josh in the hospital lobby.

“You’re the brother, right? I’m Preston Hughes. I own a lot of land around here and most of the town. We appreciate what you’re doing. If you need anything: food, blankets, or bullets, you let me know.” He pressed a business card into Josh’s hand. “Anything. Trucks of food are headed to Mesa Verde at this moment.”

“How is it this hospital has power?” Josh asked.

“Short answer: They had a Faraday cage, a whole room in fact, with a lot of necessary equipment. I’ll send an electrician over this afternoon. I think he has enough batteries and such to restore probably half your fleet.”

Josh eyed him warily. “Let me help you bring down that bastard,” Hughes said.

Patterson saw them and walked over.

“How’s Candy?”

“They don’t know.” Josh said.

“Your place is here by your sister. We’re moving out in twenty.” Patterson told him.

"I agree," said Hughes. When it was clear Josh wasn't going to introduce the two men, Hughes stuck out his hand. "Preston Hughes. I was telling Joshua here that I would like to make a sizable contribution to the war effort."

"How do we know you're not driving us into an ambush?" Patterson asked.

"Do you mean the local book club of armed vigilantes?"

"No. Somebody is already working on that group. We're the second wave. Some of us are traveling a little further."

"Durango, maybe? It's true what you've heard about the neo-Nazis up there. They're a little more professional than the local bunch. Chances are they'll be waiting for you."

"At some time, we have to take the offensive."

"Said like a general. From now on, everywhere you go they'll be waiting for you. The element of surprise is over," Hughes warned.

"The worst part of this is that a lot of good people are going to die."

"Just between you and me, General, do you have any hope of success?"

"I will do anything to stop Trump. He is clearly unfit to lead this country. Some of us stuck around his administration, moving dangerous objects and ideas out of his way like you would a two-year-old. If we hadn't been there, we'd probably be ass-deep in World War III instead of where we are now: on the brink of civil war."

"So, what happens now?"

"We take back the country a little at a time."

"Or die trying."

Hughes had a big military-grade satellite phone that buzzed to indicate an incoming call. He listened, said, "Really?" and quickly rang off.

"It seems your advance troops have successfully routed the local militia, but they're not sure what to do with the prisoners."

"Any suggestions?" asked Patterson.

“They’re probably totally useless to you. They’ve been radicalized by this president. The sheriff in Cortez belongs to their club, but I can call in a favor. We’ll lock them up for their own protection and figure out what to do with them later,” Hughes suggested.

“Thanks. Nice meeting you. We’re heading out.”

“I’ll have a couple of RPGs waiting for you at the Exxon outside Durango. Go to Lou’s garage and ask for Preston. In the meantime, send over about 10 of your wimpy little trucks to Van’s Supermart, get whatever you need, and tell them to put it on my bill.”

“Thank you, Mr. Hughes. I’m glad you’re on our side.”

“I have to warn you: there are folks in Cortez who think Trump is the Second Coming. Watch out for snipers and crazy grandmas.”

Within an hour, there were 25 trucks ready to roll. Ten were sent to pick up supplies, courtesy of Preston Hughes.

“What’s to keep them from tracking our every move with a satellite and taking care of us with a couple of F-16s?”

“Nothing. Especially as the only moving vehicles on the road. We have to get to our destination before Washington realizes we’ve bounced back from the EMP,” said Hughes.

•

An aide dared to disturb the Commander. “Did they find Patterson? You’d better hope so because I left a very specific warning.”

“He’s on the phone, sir. Line one.”

“Who’s on the phone? Patterson?” Trump grumbled.

“No sir. It’s your son-in-law.”

“Jared?” He picked up the phone. “Give me some good news.”

“Mr. uh, Commander, we found the plane. Empty.”

“I’m waiting for the good news. Are they dead? Did you rescue them?”

“We found tracks, military vehicle tracks. We followed them until we lost them.”

"Lost them! Then you're calling me to say you fucked up?"

"No, no, no, dad."

"Don't call me dad!"

"Commander, we captured a young woman who was dressed in military gear."

"Yeah? So what?"

"The jacket said Patterson. In our attempt to capture and interrogate her, she jumped to her death."

"I would say you found a whole lot of nothing!" yelled Trump.

"Mr. Commander, I think we're on to something. I'm afraid Patterson may have changed sides."

"Or the fact that the girl was wearing his jacket means there's a naked popsicle out there somewhere. I'm giving you twelve more hours to come up with something conclusive. Don't bother me until you know for certain where Patterson is."

Trump dropped the handset on the cradle before Kushner had the chance to react.

•

Alan was still on the roof, hoping in the ensuing confusion they forgot about him. He was more afraid for Denise. Was she still on the bus or was she inside the market?

A small sound came from the other side of the roof where the ladder led to where he was now.

"Psst." It was Denise's voice and it had never sounded so good.

Alan peered down the ladder into the darkness. It was amazing how *dark* dark could be. No moon cast any light. He couldn't see his hand in front of his face. The only way he knew she had reached the top of the ladder was the scent of her hair. She clutched his arm, and he pulled her up.

"Shh." They moved together behind the coolers again to wait out the sounds below. They jumped when they heard gunshots in the distance.

A voice below complained, "Only two? This is Jeff. We're almost done here. Meet us at the entrance to the 101 Freeway. We're way behind schedule. Here are three more." These gunshots came from directly below them.

Jeff raised his voice to reach any stragglers still hiding nearby. "We would have brought you along, but you had to go and burn up your only mode of transport." He shrugged though he wasn't sure anyone could see him.

He turned to an underling. His face flitted from sorrow to anger in a split second.

"Set this place on fire. We're not coming back."

•

Candy awoke to the sound of incessant beeping. She opened her eyes and waited for focus to discern that she was surrounded by IVs of various substances and a machine that monitored her heart rate. She remembered quickly what had happened and began to assess the damage.

Toes, check. She breathed a sigh of relief that she could feel them. Fingers? Hmmm. One hand was heavily bandaged and she quivered when she thought of removing the bandages. Would she have any fingers? One? Four?

A nurse came in to check on her and found Candy in the process of unwrapping her hand.

"Stop!" she cried.

Candy looked at her as though daring her to stop tending to her own wound.

"Let me grab all the stuff to redress the bandage after you've had a chance to recognize your good fortune to still be alive."

"Will I share your enthusiasm?" Candy asked as the gauze fell away and she was staring at two whole fingers, a thumb, and two stubs just above the knuckles, the last two fingers on her left hand.

"I'm sorry," the nurse said.

"I refuse to feel sorry for myself. Please just patch me up and I'll rejoin the fight."

"I don't think you're in any shape..."

The doctor was making the rounds and saw Candy throw the food tray.

"Nurse, just give her something for the pain and get her out of here."

"No! I need to keep my senses sharp and my reactions quick," Candy insisted.

"Well, if we can't give you something for the pain, let us give you some antibiotics for the threat of infection."

"Okay, but no funny stuff."

The nurse loaded the syringe with a strong sedative as the doctor okayed it with a surreptitious nod of his head. Candy went under without any time to react.

"Let me know when she's awake and you probably don't want to be in the same room when it happens."

"Roger that!" she said. "Thanks, doctor. She really needs a little more time to heal."

•

"I think they've gone," said Alan. "Let me check."

"Be careful."

He smiled. "Always."

He looked over the side of the building by the ladder into the inky blackness below.

"I can't see a damn..."

A shot rang out and his body fell.

Denise stifled a scream. If she let them find her, Alan's sacrifice would have been in vain.

"I knew there was at least one more. Why don't you take a look around up there for anybody else?" said Jeff.

The walkie-talkie roared to life. "Power's back on. Get into the city ASAP."

Denise sat in silence until she was sure everyone was really gone. She cried for a little while and decided she was going to Colorado even if she had to walk the whole way.

•

Trump was already into his second Pepsi by 9 A.M. and still feeling groggy from lack of sleep. Everything seemed to need his constant monitoring and bitching to get the joint chiefs to do anything. Fucking generals weren't used to taking order themselves anymore. He wondered if he could clone Patterson if he wasn't already dead.

An aide stood before him and smartly saluted. "We found a lead with Kim Jong Un's satellite photos."

He thrust the photo at Trump.

"What am I looking at here?"

"We're seeing a lot of heat signatures in Colorado around a national park called Mesa Verde."

"Can you just say it in English?"

"Uh, table green, green table, Commander."

"Make a memo to change its name to English, Captain. Something patriotic. Freedom Hill. Doesn't that sound better?"

"It's Corporal, sir. Corporal Tait."

Trump looked around at those sharing the bunker War Room with him this morning.

"Corporal, why are there so many of you around?"

"Sir?"

"Soldiers. Military. Did something happen while I was trying to sleep?"

"There was a vigilante group in Cortez, Colorado that has disappeared. Their last transmission was at about 2 a.m."

"So, you're gearing up for a retaliation?"

“Actually, we had a meeting to decide the strength and breadth of our retaliation, sir. We also explored our options in terms of the optics. Polling suggests...”

“So, everybody’s here for a big meeting? To discuss what you’re going to maybe do? Tell me, Corporal, who was responsible for the donuts for this meeting?”

“Sir?”

“I want the asshole who planned a meeting rather than taking action to ‘fess up. Come on, who was it?”

“That would be General Scheering, sir.”

“Where might we find General Scheering?”

“Commander, sir, he pulled an all-nighter to strategize if and when to attack the enemy.”

“An all-nighter? Like in college before finals?”

“Well...”

“Should we wake up General Scheering and give him an ‘A’, Corporal? Ask him if he’s ready to go to war?”

“I’ll go wake him right away!”

“Corporal, I want you to pour an ice-cold glass of water over his head. That’s an order!” said Trump.

“Okay.”

“WHAT!”

“Yes sir, Commander!” The corporal left the room like he was running for his life.

•

Daylight was approaching and Denise had managed to resist the urge to roll into a catatonic ball. As she climbed down from the roof, she saw Alan’s blood, sticky but drying on the ladder’s steps. She avoided his crumpled body on the ground. She hated just leaving him lying there, but she didn’t have the tools or the time to give him a proper burial. More than anything now she wanted to find the kids, make sure they were safe, and join the fight against this would-be dictator.

Denise stood in front of the store and looked down the highway in both directions. She found a tarp just inside the store and used it to cover Alan's body. It might stave off hungry animals for a while, but not for long.

She headed south staying by the highway but not on it. She didn't want to attract attention and there would be plenty of places where she would be able to find cover. The day was warming up to be a scorcher and she was glad she had thought to grab a couple of bottles of water. Her stomach rumbled because she hadn't found anything to eat. All the candy and cookies had been carted off by the bikers.

She wanted to cry. Life had become horrific in a matter of hours. She missed Alan and his ability to ignore a crisis until he had studied it and come up with a solution. Missing that steady hand, that stabilizing voice in her ear, was what affected her most.

Denise escaped into a quiet reverie as she put one foot in front of the other, a mindless plodding that moved her inexorably forward. She passed a rickety farmhouse on the east side of the highway and was tempted to go look for food. She kept moving.

"Hey!" a woman was standing on the porch yelling at her. She waved at Denise and smiled. *What do I do now?* She was too tired to run, her thoughts too scattered to react with any concern for her own safety.

She looked up to see the woman was a hundred yards closer than she was when Denise's thoughts had turned inward.

"You look exhausted. My name's Marjorie. Can I help you?"

Denise stopped and stared at Marjorie as though she wasn't really there. Marjorie appeared to be somewhere north of 50, but short of 60 with a boy's haircut that kept her heavy curls off her neck.

"I'm hungry. I've got some money," offered Denise.

"Come on," said Marjorie. "You look ready to collapse."

Both of them headed toward the house. "What's going on out there?" Marjorie asked.

"Revolution," Denise said.

Over scrambled eggs, toast, and potatoes, Denise told her what had happened since election night. When she described what had happened to Alan, she broke down and cried. Marjorie's eyes brimmed with sympathy.

"Oh, hon. I'm so sorry. I've been alone in this farmhouse for almost ten years now. My husband died of cancer and my social security checks don't give me enough to renovate or move."

"Those checks may not be coming in anymore," said Denise.

"I don't have a working TV. Haven't for years. Ignorance is bliss like they say."

"Now what you don't know can kill you."

"Let me drive you to Colorado," said Marjorie.

"You're relatively safe here. I don't want to take you away from that and put you in harm's way."

"No offense, Denise, but I think that's my choice. I've got a truck with a full tank and a barrel of gas we keep for the tractor."

"That's very kind, but what about your cattle?"

"I've got an idea."

Marjorie opened the stock pens and shooed them onto the highway. "That should slow down any pursuit."

She scratched a solemn cow between the ears. "Goodbye, Lola. I hope to see you again soon."

Marjorie turned to Denise.

"I birthed that girl. Let's go before I change my mind."

"Really, Marjorie. You don't have to get dragged into this."

"Our country needs us. Get in the truck."

•

Patterson surveyed the damage to the Cortez compound by binoculars. He would have preferred walking the area, but some members of the local volunteer fire department were still putting out the embers of a burned-out building.

Songbird stood next to him and surveyed what his troops had done to the militia of Cortez.

“Can I assume the building that you torched was their armory?” asked Patterson.

“I’m afraid it will be difficult for them to determine what they lost in the fire and what may have been pilfered prior.”

“What did we manage to acquire?”

“We were in a bit of a hurry, but we collected twenty AR-15s and two RPGs.”

“Then it’s on to Durango. We picked up three more RPGs from Preston Hughes.”

One of the local warriors said, “He’s good people, man. He’s always sticking up for tribal sovereignty.”

“Let’s get out of here before we’re spotted,” said Patterson.

They made their way to the rest stop just outside of town where the others were waiting. A refrigerated truck held 50 warriors and soldiers. Two more trucks were parked in the lot with another by the exit. Colorado Highway Patrol was there questioning one of their drivers.

“Oh shit!” Songbird uttered under his breath.

Patterson did not hesitate. He walked over to intervene.

“Officer,” He glanced at the name. “Olsen, can I pull you aside for a moment?”

Olsen saw the stars on his lapel. “What can I do for you, general is it?”

“We are on a classified mission of utmost purpose. I can’t even give you my name because it could put you in jeopardy.”

Olsen said, “That’s okay. I know who you are. Do you realize there’s an APB out on you?”

“That’s to gain the trust of these traitors we’re up against. If you check with the White House, they can confirm.”

Olsen winked. “Just one question, general.”

“Shoot.”

“Don’t tempt me!” Olsen laughed.

“What’s your question, officer?”

“Why are all your men wetbacks and nig...”

Patterson winked back and almost choked on his next words.

“They’re expendable. Just think if we found a minefield. Why lose a single white man when you don’t have to?”

Olsen grinned. “I get it. Tell you what, though, I still have to call it in. You understand, right?”

Patterson nodded and a soldier came up behind the officer and quietly broke his neck.

“Thanks, general. That truly is the face of the enemy.”

“That’s not your enemy, corporal. Hate and prejudice are your enemies.”

The going was rough. It had snowed since the EMP had knocked out the power.

Patterson called Songbird over. “The distance by car is about 46 miles, only 39 on foot. They will be watching the roads, but those are the only options with big trucks.”

Songbird suggested, “Let me take the occupants of one truck to the rest stop just outside Durango. Just give us about an hour to get there and we’ll be in place and hold back until the other trucks arrive.”

“It looks like there will be some snow tonight,” said Patterson. “Do we need a contingency plan or will the cover from a blizzard work in our favor?”

•

“Sir, Commander, I think we’ve located General Patterson.”

“Great! Get him in here!”

“Our sources say he’s gone over to the other side.”

“Other side? Other side? There is no other side. You’re either with me or you’re dead.”

“Well, our sources...”

"I'm sick of these domestic terrorists. And now a fucking general?" Trump turned to the Navy guy and snapped his fingers.

"You! Admiral..."

"Dusseldorf, sir."

"I need you to take him out!"

"Myself, sir?"

"Of course not, you feeble overweight floating device. If any operation called for the Navy Seals, this is the one. Bring me his head!"

"Yes, sir!" Dusseldorf saluted smartly and gestured to his aide, Lieutenant Drake. "With me," the admiral commanded, and they left before the commander could get creative.

"That should keep him out of my hair for a while," he muttered. "Can we get a bomber over that area?"

"Sir, we don't know the current status of the EMP."

"Find out! We've got scientists around here somewhere. Have them figure out how long this pulse thing is supposed to last."

•

The weather had turned nasty overnight with icy winds, black ice, and sleet into the night. The sky was slate gray in the glare of streetlights. Snowflakes were dropping to the streets, twisted sideways in the wind before they fell to earth and began to stick to the streets and sidewalks.

The warriors streamed back from Cortez to join the truck caravan headed to Durango up Highway 160.

"General Songbird, tell your men to fall out and rest up for the next confrontation," Patterson ordered.

"Sir, if we tried to enforce that command, we'd have mutiny on our hands."

"Have we 'confiscated' much artillery?"

"Our haul hasn't been as lucrative as one might think it would be. We have added fifty AR-15s, two more RPGs, and stuff we haven't even begun to count. We have enough soldiers of all stripes and weaponry to

take over a small island nation, but I'm not really confident we're ready for prime time," Songbird admitted.

"This blizzard may cause us some mobility issues," Patterson commented as he watched one of the food delivery pickups fishtail as it left the grounds.

"Consider it a gift. Everyone is staying inside, sitting next to a fire. We'll slip right past."

"I hope you're right. The snow will muffle the sounds of the trucks," Patterson turned to an aide. "Are you ready to fight for your country?"

"Now more than ever, sir!"

"Hang on to that resolve, sergeant. You'll need that in the darkest moments."

A little jeep carrying two careened toward them and stopped at the last possible moment.

"Colonel Brach representing all those miscreants who defected, sir," he announced with a smile and a snappy salute.

Patterson turned to Songbird. "What do you think, general? Do we trust them?"

Songbird frowned. "Hell, no. There are lots of county jails available around here." He pulled out a map. "Montezuma County has plenty of room."

"What?"

"But we want to work for you now," protested one of the prisoners.

"Here are your choices: locked up or dead."

"Fuck!" The prisoner shook his head. "Outnumbered a thousand to one and you yahoos give them the finger – and us – and fuck yourselves in the process because, without more troops, all of you are already dead. You just don't know it."

"Right back at ya!" one of Songbird's women, Maggie Something, laughed. She had a pistol in her hand and shot him as he turned to run.

Songbird decided to make an example of her.

"Where ya from, corporal?"

"The rez, sir."

"Almost everybody here is from 'the rez,' sister."

"I'm a proud Apache!"

"A proud Apache, what, corporal?"

"A proud Apache, sir!"

"Clean up your mess, Corporal, and put on your war paint. We're heading out." He turned to an aide. "Get the prisoners out of here, lock 'em up, and throw away the key," ordered Songbird.

"Yes, sir, General!"

Denise and Marjorie, heading south on the 101 freeway, reached a checkpoint where burly bikers mingled with local law enforcement.

One of the bikers approached the truck.

"Where are you coming from?"

"Getting gas for the tractor back home which is where we're headed right now," answered Marjorie.

One of the deputies stood next to the biker.

"You ladies shouldn't be out traveling alone. It's dangerous." He threw his arm around the biker's shoulders. "You might run into one of these bastards!" They all laughed.

"Lucky we're almost home then. "

"Okay," said the deputy. "Better get your asses in the house and stay there."

He gestured for them to drive on. They drove in silence for about ten minutes.

Marjorie turned to Denise. "Did you ever think you'd live to see that?"

•

Candy woke up livid.

"Where's the doctor who allowed me to be drugged?"

Josh walked into her room.

“What’s with the screaming? We heard you all the way down the hall.”

“You and I both need to be somewhere else! Did Patterson order you to babysit me?”

“Little sister, I’ve been babysitting you since you were a baby!”

Candy glanced around. “Where are my clothes?”

“You don’t have insurance; I had to offer them something.”

“Have you seen this?” She held up her hand with stubs where two fingers used to be.

He openly cringed. “Who did that to you, Candy?”

“Jared Fucking Kushner. That’s why we have to get back in the fight!”

“I’m not going to hold you back, little sister. If you think you’re ready, we’re going together.”

Josh found her some clothes and a jacket and some boots that were a little too big. The doctor stood before them.

“Don’t try to stop me, Doc. We’re going to go kick some ass.”

“Soldier, I feel sorry for anybody that gets in your way. They don’t stand a chance.”

•

“The Indians are coming!”

County Sheriff Jimmy “Boz” Bozell gave himself some extra time for an honest assessment of the Battle of Cortez. This time the locals knew who was marching toward them, how many were coming, some 900-strong, and both sides were armed with the conviction they had the support of God and country.

Deputy Sheriff Morris paced. “Morris,” the sheriff barked.

Morris stopped pacing. “Yeah?”

“Make up a grocery list and go to Hamlin’s and stock up. Just good stuff, no junk food. We don’t know how long we’ll be under siege so

we're going to stay alert and healthy. Let's get everybody over here for a meeting. Call Jenkins, too."

Mike Jenkins was a 27-year-old transplant from Ft. Morris, straight out of college. He was mayor because nobody else wanted it. He had big plans later for something further up the food chain: Congress, Senate. After that, who knew? This little emergency, if that was what it would turn out to be, showed him in full hero mode.

A few minutes later he heard the blatt sound of motorcycles roaring into town. The townspeople recognized the Goats as the cavalry for the White Aryan army on the other side of town. They had been just another bike club till they grabbed the town by the balls. Now an uneasy truce had turned into an alliance that made some nervous.

Jenkins and his two right-hands, Parker and Stomp, leaned against the podium beneath them.

"I'm sure you guys know there's a bunch of Indians on their way, planning to kill every man in this room." He looked around the room as he paused for dramatic effect. "And they're going to rape every woman they can find."

"What about the kids?" somebody yelled out.

"How the hell would I know?" he asked, irritated. "Hopefully, we won't have to find out. We're setting up an ambush over by the Welcome Center. They won't know what hit them."

*

There were 30 warriors, a handful of soldiers, and a couple of those crazy hot-doggers from Aspen ready to ski cross-country their way into combat.

Patterson cringed as one of the volunteers, a young woman in her twenties, about five feet tall, seemed to be struggling with the heavier weight of a weapon on one side.

"Are you okay, soldier?"

"Yes, sir!" In her attempt to come to attention, the weight imbalance threw her onto her side in the snow.

The others stifled any laughs. He gave her a hand up.

"The AR-15 fully loaded weighs about eight pounds," Patterson said loud enough for all to hear. "It's like lugging around a sack of potatoes or a baby."

He caught an almost involuntary flinch from the embarrassed volunteer.

"Volunteer, are you a mother?"

"Yes, sir."

"Shouldn't you be with your child?"

"Sir, she's the reason I'm here."

"Understood, but I'm not going to explain to her someday why I let you go. Your courage and dedication are commendable, but not expendable. There's a job for everyone in this man's – and woman's army. We're going to need you here, soldier."

"Sir, I won a gold in the last Olympics for the slalom. I'm right where I need to be."

His eyes searched her resolve.

"You win this round, soldier. Good luck." He was afraid to salute and see her topple over again. He nodded.

•

Five miles up ahead, an advance Scout on snowboard used the patches of ice on the road to accelerate around bends. He stopped and looked around, listening for noises that didn't belong out here in the wilderness, his breath coming out in puffs.

A shot rang out and he felt a tug at his left shoulder before he saw the blood and felt the pain. He threw down the snowboard and knew he had to get out of there before the next shot killed him.

The sniper's bullet hit him at the base of his skull. He was dead before his body pitched forward and slammed to the ground.

Patterson heard the shot echoing through the canyon and knew the fight was coming to them. "Seek cover!"

His ski patrol, he realized, encumbered by their skis, would draw fire and not be in a position to do anything about it. If the opposition lined both sides of the canyon, they would all be mowed down before they were anywhere near Durango. He knew from reports from Homeland Security that these Neo-Nazi groups included members of law enforcement as well as former military snipers. Taking Durango would not be easy, and he would lose many of his troops in this battle. He sent scouts to see what might lie ahead.

•

“Fuck yeah!” The Commander couldn’t control his joy over the news he had just heard out of Colorado: His people, his goddamn ragtag, beer-swilling bikers, were taking the fight on the offensive. He wasn’t going to worry about Patterson any longer; his boys were in it to win it!

Trump turned to an aide. “So, that empty thing...?”

“EMP, sir?”

“It’s over?” he asked, ignoring the haughty tone in the soldier’s voice.

“No, sir. Not quite. It’s just spotty coverage.” He pointed to a map. “It’s bad over around the Rockies, but that’s what protected everything else.”

“So, who’s giving us the play-by-play?”

“NORAD, sir.”

•

Deep below the Rocky Mountains, Stan Stemple was blissfully ignorant, but that wasn’t going to last long.

His buddy Lenny was due any minute to take the next shift and Stan was looking forward to catching some football. This 24-on, 24-off shit was the worst part of the job.

Lenny showed up an hour late. Stan was pissed, but the look on Lenny’s face indicated something major had happened up top.

“Is it war?”

“Could be. They said sit tight.”

“Then you lost contact?”

“Yeah.”

“How long ago did that happen?”

Lenny checked his watch, held it up to his ear, then tapped it.

“I checked radiation levels.”

“And?”

“The machine’s broken, but Pike’s Peak said we’re the safest folks in Colorado.”

The comm indicated they had an incoming call.

“NORAD.”

“This is General Hastings, White House. What is the status of your base?”

“We have an all-clear, sir,” Lenny commented. “Systems have rebooted, and we’ve got 95 percent eyes and ears. Though we do seem to have lost some of our ability to see the periphery.”

“Thank God you’re in that fortress. We lost contact with everyone between Denver and Vegas. The only reason we’re communicating now is the radio and other equipment we had in a Faraday cage. “

Faraday... “An EMP, sir?” Stan touched his shirt pocket, reaching for a pack of cigarettes that wasn’t there anymore.

“It looks that way, soldier. We need you to go check conditions outside.”

“Who...? But radiation levels could be...”

“That’s an order. We’re not sure who to blame yet. What’s your name, soldier?”

He said, “Hamilton,” though it was Stemple.

“Okay, Hamilton. Put on a HazMat suit and do a little reconnoitering. You should find a Geiger counter in your own Faraday Cage. Just go do a quick look-see and report back. While you’re gone, power down your comms to save battery life.”

“Yes, sir.”

“What the fuck, dude!” Lenny exploded. “Why did you give them my name?”

“Sorry, Hamilton, I’m pulling rank. Get the Geiger counter and check it out.”

“Fucking government. They said this place was impervious to a nuclear bomb,” Lenny grumbled as Stan helped him into the HazMat suit and brought him the Geiger counter.

“Washington had the problem, not us,” shrugged Stemple.

“Quick out and in, right?” Lenny clarified.

Stan nodded.

The cameras didn’t show much. All he could do was follow Lenny’s ascension to ground level. The cameras outside in the elements were dark. Though they were shielded, they bore the brunt of the atomic blast.

The last thing Lenny expected to find up top were Indians in warpaint.

“Man, what the fuck took you so long? We’ve been waiting here for days,” one of them said.

Lenny couldn’t answer; he had an arrow through his throat. The Geiger counter roared.

•

Reggie seemed angry to see Candy and Josh, especially after he noticed her missing fingers.

“How the hell are you going to hold a bow now?”

She held up a crossbow. “See? Still silent and deadly.”

“You’re too late to join the latest offensive,” he told them. “But Songbird and Patterson are advancing on Durango as we speak.”

“We’ve got an old Indian motorcycle with a side car,” said Josh. “We’ll catch up.”

Candy held up her hand with the missing fingers. "Somebody's got to pay for these."

"All right, go. Don't come cryin' if you're missing a few more of those by the end of the day."

Reggie wanted her to stay but knew her PTSD wouldn't let her.

•

An hour later Reggie's morning meeting was interrupted by one of the warriors from the periphery. She had two older women with her.

"My name is Marjorie, and this is my friend, Denise. She's looking for her son and daughter."

"Who might they be?"

"Josh and Candy Knight."

•

Songbird was in his element. His pyro skills were finally coming into play. Just outside the "Welcome to Durango" sign, the scouts helped him string some explosives across the main road into town. Everything was deceptively quiet, so he knew there was a high probability they were under observation real time and the other side already knew about the booby trap. He was counting on the fact they were so busy preparing their own warm reception they weren't paying attention to any surveillance equipment that might be working.

None of Durango's surveillance was working and the only Faraday cage in the area was at the hospital.

Sheriff Bozell kept licking his lips in anticipation of the coming battle. He nudged Morris, his deputy. "Shit! I can't believe it. We're in the middle of the twenty-first century and we're still fighting Injuns!"

"We shoulda been taking notes when we watched them old movies!"

"The good guys always win, Morris. Drive on down to the Welcome Center and see if they're all ready to go."

Snow had powdered the ground outside and threatened to come down heavier in the evening. Morris liked driving the squad car; it commanded respect.

His attention was drawn by the frantic voices on the radio. He bent down to turn it up and realized with dismay that he had rolled past his destination.

“... Several hundred seem to be headed our way...” Morris didn’t hear the rest. He and the cruiser lit up the night in a fireball.

•

Stan was feeling grouchy. A stupid, fucking EMP had ruined Football Sunday and Lenny was up top taking his own sweet time. He heard footsteps approaching.

“About goddamn time!” he yelled. But it wasn’t Lenny, but rather two Indians in war paint.

“Who are you? Where’s my frien... my co-worker?”

“Your buddy had a sore throat, a real bad one. Anybody else here?”

“Don’t kill him yet,” one told the other. “He needs to explain a few things, first.”

“Roger that.”

“No. Nobody else,” said Stemple.

“You. What’s your name?”

“Hamilton.”

“Why does it say ‘Stemple’ on your uniform?”

Oops. “Hamilton’s my first name.”

“Okay, Stemple. Seeing as how we’re not going to be friends, I’m just calling you Stemple and you can call me Chief.”

“Man, that’s racist as shit,” complained the other guy.

“Call me Daddy.”

“Okay... Daddy.” They looked at each other and all three of them roared with laughter.

“That’s clearly not going to work. Tell you what. I’m going to be Smith and,” he said pointing to his companion. “He’s Wesson.”

“Okay,” Stan agreed.

He showed them both the comms, the old ones, but they caught him in his lie. Smith punched him in the stomach, doubling him over, and knocking the air out of his lungs.

“Next time you try shit like that, we’re just going to shoot you. Now show us the firepower and missile system.”

They saw their living quarters if they were going to stay. The kitchen was sterile and barren.

“Where’s the food?” Wesson asked.

“Down one more level.”

“Let’s go get some, I’m hungry.”

The elevator was huge with room enough for two cars. There was a ding and the doors opened. Two MPs stood there with guns drawn.

“There’s another up in the comms room. He’s armed, too,” Stemple told them. “And they killed my friend.”

•

Trump tweeted. “I appreciate everyone staying inside until we get these mobs rounded up. Your safety is my concern. And though they’re only armed with bows and arrows and other primitive weapons, they are still considered dangerous. Each law-abiding citizen with a gun is hereby authorized to shoot first and ask questions later.” He chuckled at that last part. He never would have dared putting that out there a few short months before. But then, he had never considered Indians much of a threat.

He turned to Brigadier General Foster. God bless the old geezer; he looked like an angry American eagle. “I know we can’t nuke ‘em, General, but what about a good, old-fashioned Viet Cong carpet bombing?”

Foster looked thoughtful. "Something precise like an F-35. Drop it right down the chimney. No peripheral damage. I think it could work, Commander."

•

The illusion of stealth had been broken. The warrior ski patrol carefully avoided the large gap in the road that now existed and the burning, charred remains of a Chevy Blazer and one deputy.

The skiers bobbed and weaved. Pulling aside their panchos revealed AR-15s that threatened to drive them backwards with their kick but made a serious dent in the oncoming bikers.

Patterson heard the roar of another Harley coming up the road behind them. He was ready to take out whoever came around the bend.

"Hold your fire!" he warned the rookie taking aim next to him. It was that pain in the ass woman Brenda/Candy who sat in a sidecar, crossbow at the ready. Younger brother Josh charged forward as though under a spell straight into the phalanx of bikers. Patterson watched as the brother/sister team seemed to mow down anyone in their way.

He turned to his driver. "Get up close behind them and give them as much backup as you can!"

A dazed, bloody biker walked in front of their car, making a mess of their windshield before falling to the side. For a quick second, they lost Josh and his sister. All around them were burning bikes and bikers, a few lifeless warriors, and the fierce fighters on both sides who just wouldn't go down.

Behind them a Yellow Freight truck came barreling up the road, barely acknowledging the massive chunk in the pavement that was missing. It slammed and punched through the south wall of the Durango Welcome Center before it plowed to a stop.

The night was quiet for a moment. The advance looked at the mangled cab and could only imagine what the soldiers in the back looked like. Suddenly the back door swung open and some of them came out screaming with bloodlust. Others, more shaken, some limping

from the wreckage, cheered, partly to show they were alive and some because they were surprised they weren't dead.

He looked up to see Candy walking toward him. She stopped to light a cigarette.

"I didn't think you smoked."

"I didn't. But I figured if I survived all this, what's one little cigarette going to do?"

He pulled one out of the pack and she lit it for him. "Good point."

The fight seemed to be moving into town, the townspeople retreating into the shadows.

"Do you think everybody here is against us?" she asked.

"I doubt it."

"Where do you think we'd be likely to find them, these silent supporters of ours?"

"Hmm. Some place that could hold a lot of people. Or maybe I'm just being optimistic," Patterson replied.

"So, a church, a school, a prison..."

They looked up at the clock tower that sat on the promontory of what appeared to be a college campus that gazed down upon the town.

Patterson pointed. "There. A gym or some other large building where they can keep everybody together and that clock tower is the perfect lookout."

"No hurry. We'll just wait for our reinforcements to arrive and overwhelm them."

A lanky guy in his sixties approached. "We've got the main phone line into the admin building, general."

"Thanks, soldier. What's your name?"

"Sanchez, Ernie. I'm an old phone guy. Piece of cake."

•

Somebody inside the college picked up. "Hello? This is Mayor Tommy Welch. Who's this?"

“The good guys, who do you think?” said Patterson. “We’re coming in. Release the prisoners.”

“Hold on a minute! I think you’ve got a few of our people.”

Patterson turned to Candy. “What an asshole. They’re all his people.”

•

“Commander, we’ve found General Patterson. He’s in Durango, Colorado.”

“What the hell is he doing there?”

“Apparently trying to arrange a prisoner exchange. And we have a situation at NORAD.”

“Of course, we do. Okay, spill it.”

“A couple of Indians in war paint killed a NORAD comm tech. They’ve been captured and we’re awaiting your orders.”

“Are there any more of them?”

“Hard to say. A lot of the exterior equipment got fried in the EMP, but I’d say no because of the size of the assault in Durango.”

“How many traitors have attacked?”

“Estimates are anywhere between 200 and a thousand.”

Trump turned to the remaining joint chiefs. “Ideas anybody?”

•

Candy was pacing. “They’re taking much too long.”

“It takes a while for them to set up a trap.”

She gave him a look of alarm.

Songbird laughed. “Don’t worry. He’s got this.”

Reggie addressed the pro-Trump prisoners. Volunteers had slapped electrical tape over the mouths of the 50 prisoners.

They were ready to march them in. “Remember to breathe through your nose,” Reggie told them. Some of them marched in silently without tape emitting little puffs of steam and fogging up glasses.

Candy turned to Patterson. "I thought we had 50 prisoners. I'm looking at about 75."

Songbird chuckled.

Josh was one of the "prisoners." He glanced around warily, taking note of those with guns, prisoners, and exits. He didn't like that the gym felt so claustrophobic with so many inside.

"Now!" he yelled, tossing smoke grenades, ducking behind their prisoners. "Run for the exit!" he yelled at the scrambling bodies all around him. He ran toward one of the doors himself. He glanced once behind him and saw lifeless bodies of townspeople tumble down the bleachers.

The shouts and screams were only drowned out by the echo of gunshots.

As prisoners from both camps ran out of the building, those who were still taped hadn't had the opportunity, in most cases, to rip it from their faces. Those were the easiest for the warrior snipers to spot and shoot.

In a few minutes it was all over. A hundred bodies, representing both sides, lay on the ground. Some were warriors who rose from their prone positions playing dead to join their comrades as they rounded up survivors.

Candy hugged her brother, then punched him in the arm. "Don't ever do something that dangerous without letting me know!"

"If I had, would you have stopped me?" Josh asked.

She laughed. "Probably!"

"If she hadn't, I would have!" came a familiar voice.

They turned to see their mother and another woman accompanied by Reggie.

"Mom!" Candy cried as they ran toward each other. Tears openly flowed as they embraced. Denise looked down at Candy's hands. "What happened?"

"Oh, Mommy. There's so much to tell. We'll catch up over dinner." She looked around. "Where's Daddy?"

Denise burst into a torrent of tears, unable to speak. Marjorie responded. "We have our own bunch of stories to share."

•

Trump was surrounded by his joint chiefs. "It's obvious we have to make a public example of these domestic terrorists. Somebody get me NORAD on the phone."

Someone handed him a phone.

"This is Command..."

"Get off the phone, fool! I'm waiting for the President!"

"This *is* the pres... Commander Trump."

"Oh, yes sir!"

"Who is this?"

"Sergeant Hamilton," he lied. Lenny was beyond protesting at this point.

"I understand, Captain, you have some hostages."

"Yes, sir. Two of them. They killed my partner."

"What was your partner's name? I'd like to send my condolences to his family."

Oh shit. "Stemple, sir, Stan." He could explain it to Audrey when he talked to her later. In the meantime, he could be getting a medal!

"You don't want to see these savages get off scot-free, do you Sergeant?"

"No."

"No?"

"Hell no, sir!"

"That's more like it, soldier. Now, this is war time, a time when you do what you've got to do. How does a firing squad sound, Stemple?"

He froze for just a second. Just who was he?

"Hamilton, Commander. Stemple's my dead partner, God rest his soul. The best soldier I've ever known. He would be honored with a 21-gun salute."

"I was talking about the hostages, corporal."

"Serg..."

"Not much longer, if you don't get this thing done, Hamilton. Take them outside, blindfolds or not, and boom, boom. Pretty easy, right?"

"Yes, sir. Consider it done."

"Good. I knew I could count on you. *Sergeant.*"

"Thank you..." but the Commander had hung up.

•

Denise brought her children up to date and they were quietly sharing their grief when Reggie, brother Ronnie, Songbird, and Patterson gathered around the family.

Patterson wanted her to consider her children. "I want you to know, Mrs. Knight, what an integral part Candy has played in all this. We would not be where we are today if not for the sacrifices of your family and all the others who fight to save our country from this madman. Right now, we need her advice and counsel. Our forces have grown too large. Our moves can now be tracked by satellite and that brings danger to us all. The time has come to move us eastward toward the capitol, but to do so in stealth mode striking with deadly force, then fading into the woods until needed again."

"How can you ask so much of my children when they have already lost so much? Is that really fair?"

"War is never fair, Denise. But this fight is an important battle for each and every American to consider their part," Patterson told her solemnly.

"In the seventies, tribes came from many parts of the country to march on Washington to protest the countless broken treaties," said Songbird. "It was inspiring to see so many of our brothers and sisters join us along the way to Washington to speak out against those who had lied to us again and again."

“We need to move in small groups, still 20,000 strong, but smaller, more elusive,” explained Candy. “But, Mom, this time we’re staying together as a family.”

Denise and her children were joined by Marjorie in a tight hug.

“We’ll be sending 15 groups of 200.”

Hughes arrived a few minutes later. “I’ve got a call for you, Patterson.”

Hughes handed him the satellite phone.

“Well, well. You are still alive!”

“And, apparently, so are you, Mr. Trump.”

“Such disrespect from a man who should know better.”

“I won’t be baited, Trump.”

“I wasn’t calling to exchange pleasantries, Patterson. A couple of your proud Indian warriors have been caught trying to break into NORAD. My current plans for them include a firing squad at dawn.”

“We don’t seem to be missing any warriors here. Are you sure they’re with us?”

“An Indian’s an Indian, right?” Trump laughed. “NORAD’s on the line. I’ll have them send you a photo.”

The photo showed up almost simultaneously. They were young guys, early twenties. Patterson called Songbird over to see if he could identify them.

“They’re probably Arapaho. They didn’t want anything to do with our revolution. A couple of hotheads must have had other plans,” said Songbird.

“Well, are they yours?” asked Trump.

“Could be.”

“You’ve two days to turn yourself in and maybe, just maybe, I’ll let your kimosabes go.”

“I would offer to take their place, but I don’t trust you to do the right thing.”

“Two days, Patterson.”

Trump hung up and turned to General Foster. "He won't be able to resist being the hero. Tell NORAD to save a place in the firing squad for our traitor."

Foster chuckled. "Well played, Mr. President."

"Commander, General. Just Commander."

"Of course."

*

Songbird and his warriors volunteered to take the northern route parallel to Interstate 70. Patterson was making a direct approach to NORAD with a squadron of warriors and an alternate plan that could save the captives. Patterson just hoped it would work.

The Knights, the Lancer Allies, the Garcia family, and others were going to follow Interstate 25 south to the I-10 east. A large, muscular black man approached Candy.

"The name is Jones. The Panthers would like to join you."

"We would be honored, Mr. Jones."

"Great, because we'll be picking up some brothers and sisters along the way."

"We'll also stop at reservations along the way for more reinforcements," said Candy. "About two hundred of us will split up and take Interstate 40 east."

Reggie added, "There are a lot of reservations, including the Lakota, through Montana, North Dakota, and Minnesota. If you can handle rough winter weather and won't slow us down, feel free to join us."

"We'll be meeting up with my brother as the I-94 and the I-90 converge just north of Madison," explained Ronnie. "And we'll join with the I-80 group at the southern tip of Lake Michigan."

"We have folks in Chicago, Gary, Detroit, L.A, Alabama, Mississippi, well, pretty much anywhere America has failed us," said Jones.

"So, pretty much anywhere?" one of the Lancer Allies offered.

"You got it, brother."

“That’s what brings us together in this marvelous quest,” said Reverend Milan.

A warrior approached Reggie. “More food and shit from Hughes just came in. And a ton of MREs.”

“MR...?” asked Denise.

“Meals ready to eat. Army rations for the long walk.” Reggie explained.

“You know, Denise and I drove out from the west coast and most folks don’t know there’s a revolution going on. Can’t we just pull up to a fast-food joint and order 200 burgers and fries?” asked Marjorie.

“You will notice that a lot of fast-food places have a sign in the window that they’re temporarily out of business. And 200 burgers? Wouldn’t that be a red flag?”

“I guess so.”

“Keep it to 50 per establishment,” suggested Reggie. “Tell them you’re hosting a cub scout meeting. That should keep you under the radar. And don’t do it a lot.”

•

Lieutenant Svenson had relocated to the comms area, waiting to hear that Patterson was on his way. What was the country coming to when Indians not only ventured off the reservation, but had the nerve to attack a military installation? And for a high-ranking general to go renegade? Commander Trump was right to make examples of them all.

Reports from the surface indicated that radiation levels were creeping back down to the “acceptable” level. In any case, a firing squad wouldn’t be out there long enough to have any real concerns. Besides, NORAD was fully equipped with the complete menu of suggested meds to counteract exposure and what the scientists called “internal contamination,” Potassium Iodide, Neupogen, Prussian Blue, and DTPA.

Svenson knew Trump planned on broadcasting the execution coast-to-coast so he needed to look his best.

The phone rang. He picked it up on the first ring.

“Stand by for the pres..., the commander in chief,” said the voice at the other end.

Commander Trump seemed to be in a good mood.

“Lieutenant, there’s a promotion in your future if you don’t fuck this up,” said Trump.

“Thank you, sir.”

“Don’t thank me yet. Have you invited the local media?”

“Sir, this is a secure facility, especially in these times. Would that really be wise?”

“Good point. NORAD has always had this air of mystery. Let’s keep that. Have you got the equipment to feed the event to the outside media?”

“We’ve got state of the art facilities here, Commander. “

“Tell you what, have somebody shoot some footage and send it to the White House ASAP. If it’s suitable, you’ll get the green light.”

Trump paused for a moment. “By the way, General Patterson is on the way.”

“Very good, sir.”

“Tell me, Lieutenant. Are you comfortable taking a former superior officer into custody?”

“Nobody’s above the law, sir.”

“How true, Lieutenant. How true. The Joint Chiefs say he should be knocking on your front door in about twelve hours. He may have something up his sleeve, so be ready for anything.”

“Yes, sir. We have tentatively scheduled the event for 10 am, Mountain Standard Time, barring any unforeseen circumstances.”

“Sounds good, Major.”

“Lieutenant, Commander.”

“We’ll see.”

•

Patterson dressed in civilian clothes. He felt wearing his uniform and anything that looked like he still swore allegiance to America under Donald Trump, even as camouflage in a world that had claimed him a traitor, was beneath his dignity.

Songbird approached as they mounted borrowed horses.

"I'm going with you."

"Negative. You've got 200 warriors to lead to Washington."

"What problems can't be solved by a few well-placed explosives?" asked Songbird. "Then I promise you, we'll be on our way."

"Fine. But the most you can do is create a diversion."

"Admit it. You had no plan."

"Don't get cocky, soldier. Yours is just better."

•

A nameless aide stuck his head just inside the conference room Trump had adopted for his War Room.

"Kim Jung Un on line one, sir."

"My people are seeing some movement in Colorado, Mr. Commander."

"It's just Commander and yeah, I know. Our traitor general is turning himself in."

The North Korean dictator snorted and giggled.

"What's so funny?"

"Do you think he would just surrender?"

"Of course not, Kim. We're prepared for every contingency." He covered the mouthpiece and whispered to Dusseldorf. "We are, aren't we?"

"Of course, Commander."

"Thanks for your concern, Kim. Watch your back." Trump hung up before the General Secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea could get his cryptic sendoff translated. *Always leave them guessing.*

Trump turned to another faceless aide. "What's the word on our power problem out west?"

"As far as we can tell, they're still in the horse and buggy stage."

"How long before the power comes on?"

"Hard to tell. We've never had to deal with one of these. It could be weeks, months, or even years."

Trump yelled at another aide. "Get this useless clown out of here and get me somebody with answers."

•

The president of Mexico called back Preston Hughes.

"Mr. Hughes, are you really in a position to make a deal such as this?"

"Mr. President, leave the details to me and have your troops standing by."

•

The RCMP and Lieutenant McManus were putting in extra hours to deal with the flood of refugees from the south. Most of them were families of lifelong Democrats.

"I almost ran to Canada to avoid the War in Vietnam," commented one old codger to CNN. "I can't believe we're here again."

McManus took some grim satisfaction that the story was getting global play.

The reporter also had Obama calling from some "undisclosed location."

"This is a time of nightmares for democracy, of fascism writ large. Our nation stands at a crossroads."

Viewers heard a loud blast and a burst of gunfire. An excited young voice crowed, "I got him! I got him!"

The station cut back to the reporter who appeared visibly shaken. "We can't corroborate what we just heard," the reporter stated in solemn tones, "But we all know what we heard."

The refugees standing in line to be accepted into Canada gasped and cried to themselves.

A voice from far behind him yelled, "Next!" the crowd shuffled forward, and receiving seemed to come back to life with new urgency.

•

Two Chinook helicopters with the load capacity of the old C-130 cargo plane and carrying 40 Marines per, lifted off from Fitzsimmons Air Base in Aurora, Colorado headed for NORAD. As usual, the winds were buffeting the choppers, whipping through the flatlands of eastern Colorado, a level area that carried an icy windchill up into Wyoming.

"What's nice about these babies is the ability to strike very accurately from miles away," Captain Leo "Bull" Moran explained to Trump.

"What kind of firepower are you packing?"

"Everything you could possibly want in persuasive power." Moran had been told to keep it short and to speak in superlatives to avoid upsetting the commander.

"I don't want to win an argument, Captain. I want to annihilate them."

"Yes, sir. They'll leave just a little smudge on the ground."

"That should take care of the Rick Patterson problem permanently," Trump said smugly.

"General Rick Patterson, Commander?"

"Yeah. Why? Did you know him?"

"I thought I did."

"This guy is a traitor to his country, a rogue. I'll pay \$1 million to the person that can prove he's dead."

Moran was sure this guy must be the same Patterson. Trump shared a photo for the "wanted" poster.

It was him. He had served twelve years under Patterson, a solid, righteous dude. If he thought a situation was dicey, you got the hell out of there. Still, his duty was to his commander-in-chief. Was it his duty

to inform Trump of his history with Patterson? He kicked his brain into auto and left that question for another day.

•

Kim Jung Un was biding his time. No commander, especially one with an oversized ego, could handle battles on so many fronts without leaving himself open in a way that provided an opportunity for an adversary.

His friends in Beijing were interested parties who avoided appearing in public with him while cultivating a big brother/little brother relationship that was more like gang recruitment. They were suddenly hanging on his every word as he boasted on a Chinese video chat service.

“Dirty bomb over Salt Lake City. Boom! Lights out,” he said.

“You must mean, Las Vegas, comrade,” answered a grinning Mùchén Wáng, a Deputy Party leader in Shanghai.

“But still. I am here to speak of it,” countered Kim.

“Still, little brother. This Trump person is very unpredictable. Even America’s allies say so. Perhaps it’s best to move with confidence once this president wins his civil war.”

“Let me remind you, big brother. You may only offer me counsel as any big brother might, but I am the president of North Korea and will do as I please.”

“To do so in some situations, little brother, you may find yourself standing alone against an enemy who never misses their target.”

“He’s a foolish, gullible man. He thinks by working together to attack his enemies within, that we are friends and can be trusted,” said Kim.

“Then I leave you to your plans, may they be successful,” grinned Wáng.

“Until I see you in person soon, big brother.”

“Be well and be safe, little brother.”

The thought was almost simultaneous from both of them. *Arrogant asshole.*

•

After a night camped near Interstate 25, they found an old, abandoned gas station the next day.

"I feel like we're being watched," Songbird told Patterson.

"We've got satellites that can pick us out from up there," he said, pointing. "But now we have to worry about drones. We must be on the tattered edge of the EMP."

As if summoned, a drone buzzed overhead as it zoomed past them until a warrior nonchalantly raised his rifle, took quick aim, and shot the drone out of the sky.

"Save your ammo. There are more where that came from. Even if we shoot down every one of them, the base just calculates that as our progress point, and extrapolates our ETA. They'll be ready for us."

"Good to know," commented Songbird. He gestured to a handful of warriors. "We'll be back before sunset."

Later that evening, after firming up their plan, they looked down at the shadow of Colorado Springs, hulking dark buildings in a greater darkness. Sitting by a propane gas stove, Patterson gazed at the sky, "Man, you can see a lot more stars without all that damn light pollution."

Patterson shook off his reverie. "Are you ready for tomorrow?"

Songbird smiled. "Sure. We hang back and pick up the pieces."

•

"White House."

"White House, this is NORAD. Enemy approaching from ten miles out."

Trump was listening to their progress.

"Here comes Special Ops," Songbird whispered to Patterson.

"Commander, I know you're listening. You're interfering with my ability to surrender."

"Nonsense, Patterson. They're there to escort you onto the base."

"Then send out the warriors. After they're safe, I'm all yours."

"What are you up to, Patterson? You have to be up to something."

"Let's call it mutual distrust."

"Somebody followed your guys last night. Those bombs you planted won't be going off to create a distraction. You're trapped and your ass is mine!"

NORAD reported, "Special Ops moving in."

Patterson and his troops watched the heavily armed enemy approach on foot. He turned to Songbird. "General, it has been a pleasure fighting beside you to save our country."

Songbird saluted him and turned to the Marines. He pointed his horse toward them and galloped. Patterson turned his horse to follow, glanced at the phalanx of Marines, and suddenly saw a familiar face.

"Moran?"

"Stand down," Moran commanded. One did not obey and shot at Patterson, grazing him. Moran whipped around and shot the errant soldier.

"Those with me take a knee!" Moran roared.

"What are you doing, Moran?" bellowed Trump.

"I'm turning myself in, my small troop, and all weapons over to General Patterson. Long live the USA!"

"White House to NORAD. Proceed with firing squad! Are we getting this out to the TV stations and social media?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Proceed on my order." Gun shots erupted from NORAD.

The trees behind the Special Ops forces erupted with more men on horseback. These were warriors.

"Utes!" Songbird explained with awe.

They swept past the others between them, friend and foe alike.

Their leader, an elderly man, approached the gates of the base.

“Let me in. I am Marvin Burch. I am the Chairman of the Southern Ute Tribe. I am here to claim the bodies of my son and his friend.”

“Wait here,” a corporal insisted.

Songbird stood by the Chairman. “Mr. Chairman, I...”

“I remember you. You visited our reservation and spoke with our council about the coming war, and I guess this is it, and my son was one of the first casualties.”

The chairman cast a vision of a once powerful warrior then that of a tired, old man. “I cannot declare war until these two boys, excuse me, two warriors, are returned home. Then we will put on the war paint and join you.”

“Don’t you need to confer with your council again?”

“We received a unanimous vote over Zoom last night. We are ready to commit.”

•

The Commander felt like throwing something. He hit an aide in the back with a paper weight.

“How did our perfect fucking plan go so far off course?”

No one wanted to meet his gaze.

“We knew about Moran, but we thought his military training would keep him in line,” offered

Hastings.

“And where the hell did those Indians come from?”

“I believe they have been identified as the Southern Ute Tribe, Commander.”

“How did we miss neutralizing them, General?”

“Well, sir. There are 300 reservations across the country...”

“Shut ‘em down. Shut them all down.”

“Sir, I don’t think we have enough troops domestically to make that happen.”

“General, wouldn’t you agree that desperate times call for desperate measures?”

Trump turned to his favor old hawk, Brigadier General Foster. “What do you say, General Foster?”

“Bomb a couple of them. The rest will fall in line.”

Trump looked across the conference table. “Now this is a man of action!”

•

The Chairman was the first to hear the sounds of air forcefully pushed aside, the sound that missiles make just before impact. His son lay across the saddle, as did his friend on another horse when the ground trembled beneath them, and the fiery light of the explosion replaced the light of day with something painfully brighter. As the mushroom cloud rose in the distance, they were hit with a hot, fierce wind that threatened to bowl them over.

In the aftermath, they stood in the silence. Any animal within earshot had either fled in fright or was dead.

“Nukes. He’s using fucking nukes against his own people!” Songbird was out for blood.

Patterson spoke up. “I think now is the time for your troops to head east.”

Chairman Burch’s voice quivered. “Please. I’m sending a scout to see if there were any..., to look for survivors. If the scout finds that our worst fears are realized, we will join you on this march.”

“I offer some of my warriors to accompany you,” Songbird said gently.

“If it is what I fear, too many have died today. To lose more would be foolish.”

They made camp where they could ensure the inhabitants of the base they were still there.

•

“Why don’t they go home?” Sargent Stemple asked Major Hynes.

“Maybe they’re asking the same question about us,” Hynes responded.

“You know what’s weird, Major? No media. No TV stations, newspapers, nobody.”

“Did they do it out of spite, knowing he wanted them here?”

“I feel a little more comfortable if I know they’re there, harassing us,” said Dixon. “It’s times like these intermittent moments of quietly waiting that drive me up the fucking wall. Watching and waiting.”

“Major?”

“Yeah?”

“How many Native Americans are there in the whole country?”

“I’d say about 3 and a half million.”

“That’s a lot of pissed off Americans.”

“Don’t forget. We’ve got all the big guns, the nukes, and roughly the same number of bikers on our side.”

“Still, Major, aren’t you nervous?”

“Yes, Sergeant. I am.”

•

Near dawn, there was a light dusting of snow. The warriors’ bodies had been buried right in front of NORAD.

Patterson looked around.

“Where’s the Chairman?” Songbird pointed toward NORAD where the chairman had just reached the gates. He waved a little white flag.

“What is he...”

There was a sudden explosion, and the Utes rushed the breach in the fence.

Special Ops followed closely behind.

“Should we join them, General?” asked Hudson, Songbird’s second.

“Too late. Get some snipers within range and pick off the soldiers who make it outside.”

When the war cries and the gunshots had been silenced and the only sound was the sigh of the trees, Patterson addressed his former aide-de-camp.

“What the hell are you doing out here, Moran?”

“Following you, General. As always. You haven’t steered me wrong yet.”

•

Candy explained. “We have about ten battalions or companies branching out across the country on every interstate travelling east. Small enough to avoid looking like an invading army, large enough to intimidate vigilantes. We’ll be taking the I-10 route, keeping close to the highway, just not on it. If we’re fortunate, local tribes will find us. I’m hoping by the time we roll into Phoenix we’ll be prepared. Our numbers will be strong.”

“Are you sure you want to do this?” Denise asked her daughter.

“No offense, Mom, but I think you’re really asking if I’m up to the task. I am, but don’t take my word for it.” She turned to her battalion.

“Who’s ready to follow me, no matter what?”

The cheers were deafening. “Lay on, MacBeth,” said Denise. She had already paid the price with the death of Alan. She didn’t know how she would deal with the death of her son or daughter. But if Candy was marching into hell, she would be there beside her.

•

Reggie’s group of 200 had left very early that morning, heading north on Highway 550 to catch the I-94 somewhere in Billings, Montana. They packed heavy gear: snowshoes, skis, down sleeping bags. Their backpacks were weighty, but there was a practical need for everything. Later, they would meet up in Wisconsin with Ronnie and his 200. Both brothers were counting on other tribes to now join the fight.

Candy hugged Ronnie goodbye. “Be safe,” she said.

“You, too.”

They walked silently down the road. "I'm sorry you have to walk," Candy told her mother and Marjorie.

"Don't you worry about us. We old ladies are built of strong stuff," said Marjorie, smiling.

"Where do you think you get your super strength, your commanding presence, and your good looks?" Denise joked.

"Some of daddy, but a lot from you."

"You're an amazing woman all your own, sweetheart. Don't think otherwise."

Somebody in the back began to sing *House of the Rising Sun* badly, but it was something to march to so a few more joined in, followed by others until it sounded like everybody was singing. After the last voice had faded, they retreated to their own thoughts and listened to the sounds of their shuffling advance and the forest around them. Glancing at her watch, Candy saw it was about 9:30 and realized that time meant very little to her anymore.

A Volkswagen came up from the rear of the pack. It was Armando Garcia. He stopped next to the three women.

"Please," he said. "The ladies." He gestured to Marjorie and Denise.

They tried waving him away, but Candy interrupted. "It's a good idea. We should take turns, so we don't end up leaving anyone behind."

"Fine," Denise responded, relieved to not have to stop the whole procession to rest.

•

Reggie was thinking about his little brother. He gave him a hard time most of the time, but Reggie was impressed with Ronnie. He had stepped up in a big way and his brother was just going to have to treat him with a little more respect from now on.

Suddenly he heard music. He dropped back to hear where it was coming from and saw it was some scrawny kid from the college in Durango. He had ear buds in and was listening to classic rock.

"What's your name, kid?"

“Travis.”

“Travis, how is it your phone is working?”

“I replaced the mother board.”

“How did you know how to do that?”

“I used to work at one of those phone stores. I fixed a lot of stuff that others didn’t know how to.”

“What other kinds of talents do you have?”

“I can write code and I was learning a lot about creating AI holograms before this all went down.”

“Fascinating. Let’s talk later.”

“Cool.”

•

Commander Trump vented his anger on Major Hynes. “What the fuck were you thinking?”

“I’m sorry. I’m confused.”

“You didn’t bother to find out where the two Indians came from?”

“I assumed...”

“That’s right. And here comes Papa and his band of merry savages. And they got close enough to blow a fucking hole in your gate! How far did they get inside?”

Another voice responded. “All the way, Commander. All the way.”

“Who is this?”

“General Eric Songbird, People’s Army.”

“We’re coming after you, Songbird. And all those traitors who used to care about America.”

“We still do, Mr. Trump, that’s why we’re taking back the country. You don’t deserve it.” Songbird suddenly worried about a second barrage of nukes. “And don’t bother bombing the base. We’re already gone.”

Songbird directed his troops to evacuate the building and get as far away from it as possible. He knew Trump might send something their way out of spite.

He climbed the hill where Patterson, Moran, and Tomas Doe, a Ute tribal elder, waited for him.

“General Patterson, why didn’t your peers from the Pentagon stop him? Why don’t they now?” asked Doe.

“Because all the good guys in there are either dead or out here.”

•

Whenever possible, Candy and her 400 would travel south on the 160/491, bypassing all the possibilities of discovery and death in the big cities of Colorado. Better to stick to the lesser-known roads. There were plenty of deer in this area and a lot of hungry people to feed. For some, it was good practice with a bow and arrow.

“Why are there so many of us?” Marjorie asked nervously.

“When we reach the 40, we’ll split up. My group is headed to the 10. Preston Hughes has promised us a surprise in Las Cruces.”

•

Though it was late winter, there were snowdrifts and occasional flurries they had to contend with. Spring, it seemed, was still a long way off. Reggie knew Ronnie was about one day behind him. He and his troops had stayed behind a while to help Preston Hughes train and put people in charge of those staying in Mesa Verde.

“If any of you are worried about being sitting ducks here, you’re free to go. And if you’re staying, prepare to work. We have to feed about 15 thousand, keep ‘em from freezing to death and somewhat healthy, and dispose of their waste,” Hughes told them.

A hundred or so left, but most of them stayed.

Ronnie was on his way to Interstate 90, Reggie to 94 and they were going to reunite in Tomah, Wisconsin in about two weeks, Creator willing. He wished there was a way to reach Reggie to discuss the situation.

•

“Commander, Chief Justice Grant is here to see you,” an aide announced.

She stormed in. “This has got to stop! Nuking your own people? Are you mad?”

“No, but you’re making me mad!” Trump’s face was crimson. “What happened to capital punishment? The new Supreme Court should be doing its job, so I don’t have to!”

“SCOTUS has never condoned nukes.”

“What punishment could be more God-like than Whoop-ass raining down from on high? Remember, you are now the SUPREME Court. Claim the moral high ground. God’s will and all that.”

“Who are you to...?”

He wagged a finger in her face. “Uh, uh, uh. The Commander giveth and the Commander taketh away.”

He could see her contemplating her options, could almost hear the gears grinding.

“We must pray,” she insisted.

“Right now? I’m kinda busy.” One glance at her face convinced him she was fighting her inner demons, and she was very close to a mental check-out.

He snapped his fingers at a passing aide. “Grab me a couple of camera guys from the press room. Make sure they’re Fox. They owe me.”

A few minutes later, Grant and the Commander were on their knees. “Would you like to lead us in prayer, Commander?”

He saw the spark of vengeance in her expression. “Please do us the honor, Justice Grant. The angels can never deny you.”

“Dear Lord, help this poor soul, yet the greatest leader in the world, guide his hand in the pursuit of thine enemies and may justice prevail. Amen.”

“Amen,” resounded throughout the room.

“Ladies and gentlemen, if you’ll step out for a moment. The Justice and I wish to pray a little longer in solitude.”

After they had filed out, Trump turned to Grant.

“Beautiful prayer, just beautiful. ‘May justice prevail.’ Interesting choice of words.”

“Divinely inspired.”

“Did you mean ‘justice’ like a Supreme Court justice? A particular justice? Poetic justice? Or ‘just us’ because we have an agreement?”

“What’s your preference, Commander?”

He reached over and slapped her. “Quit being coy.”

She realized he had become more dangerous in the last several days. “This is the last time you hear me utter the word ‘nuclear.’”

“Then we have reached an agreement. Now, get out of my office.”

She scurried out silently. Everyone watched and wondered as the pompous judge who had swaggered into the oval office avoided making eye contact as she left. The Commander was smiling. Beaming. “Come in, come in! How soon can we bomb those fools at Indian boot camp?”

•

“We’re moving out!” Candy yelled. She turned to Denise. “How are you holding up, Mom?”

“It’s fucking cold. There’s never enough to eat. And I’m stiff from sleeping on the ground. But don’t worry about me. How are you holding up, dear?”

“I’m good, Mom.” Candy again raised her voice to make an announcement. “We’re going to pick up the pace a bit. If you feel you can’t keep up, let somebody else know, or find the medical officer.”

She smiled down at Pedro and Paco in the Beetle’s backseat. “Are you ready?”

“Yes! Vamanos!”

There was up to two feet of snow in some areas, slowing their advance considerably. They were on Highway 44 south, though it was little more than a dirt road. Farmington, New Mexico was just ahead, and Candy wanted to get her troops something special to reward their endurance.

They all heard a half-familiar rushing sound beyond a copse of pine trees. Candy passed under them and climbed an embankment. A snowplow on its rounds almost scooped her up and blasted its horn in loud disapproval. Cars were making their way on their morning commute, fishtailing in the new snowfall. She wanted to call somebody to tell them the good news, but just behind her the EMP was still affecting a large swath of the Midwest.

Denise climbed up beside her. "We should be able to make up some time now," she said, smiling.

A handful of their number headed down the road to two fast-food burger places and a taco restaurant.

Candy waited with her mother and her friend by the Welcome to Farmington sign announcing Population: 47,000. "I've driven through this town. I didn't realize it was this big," Marjorie commented.

The fast-food arrived and everyone ate quietly, their thoughts turned inward.

"What we need now is transportation," said Josh.

"We need a school bus," said Denise.

"Or two," commented Josh.

"The advantage we have here is the fact that the fine citizens of Farmington don't seem to realize there's a civil war going on. They're just getting on with life. How can we take advantage of that?"

Candy spotted the doctor who had helped her with her frostbite.

"Dr. Murphy, would you be willing to get us a bus or two?"

"Or three," said Josh.

"I think there's a bus charter company in town. We just need somebody with a credit card we can load up."

He sighed. "I have such good credit. Well, anything for the cause." He held out his card to Candy.

"Oh no, that would send up some red flags. How about you and I stroll over to the bus charter company together?"

“Let’s see, three buses, mileage, insurance...” The salesman jotted down figures.

“Ten thousand dollars!” The good doctor was in shock.

“Imagine how much time we would save getting to Washington,” said Candy.

“Okay,” Dr. Murphy said, handing the salesclerk his card. “Do you have a group discount?”

“Let me see what I can do.”

“We’re going there to pray to, I mean for, the president.”

“Aww, ain’t that Christian of ya.”

“When do you need them?”

“Now.”

“Now?”

“Brother Patrick got a vision this morning.”

“All right. Come back in an hour. I’ll get ‘em all gassed up.”

A county sheriff’s car was parked out front when they returned.

“Shit,” said Dr. Murphy. “Looks like a trap. What do we do now?”

“Bluff.”

•

“Where are those launch codes?”

The Joint Chiefs hid the briefcase in a nearby closet.

“Commander, Putin on line one.”

“I’ve gotta take this,” he growled at an aide. “You keep looking for that briefcase.”

“Good afternoon, Commander. How goes the transition of power?”

“I think you know, V. And that’s why you’re calling.”

“Just rumors, Commander. Can I offer any assistance or advice? Speak to me, Donald. I am your best friend at moments like this because only I can understand.”

“True, true. Did you know that fat, little Korean fuck hit us with a dirty bomb? I should have retaliated immediately.”

“It’s too late for that now. It would just look like an unprovoked attack. The media has such short memory.”

“I have found a good nuclear pounding gets everyone else’s attention.”

“Yes, but there are some who might take that as a declaration of war. And the land will be contaminated for decades.”

“How can anybody wiped out by nukes protest anything?”

“Point taken, Commander. Still those dead traitors have brothers, sisters, cousins.”

“You have been at this game a lot longer than me, Mr. President. How do you deal with your traitors?”

“Poison. Find your figurehead, predict his death as inevitable, and be far away from the actual incident when it happens.”

“Of course! Plausible deniability!”

“You constantly amaze me, Commander. I wasn’t sure you were familiar with the term.”

“I don’t throw it around, but it has come up now and then.”

“I understand, my friend. Good luck. May you put this all behind you very soon.”

“Dosvedanya, Mr. President.”

“Ciao, Commander.”

Trump kicked something under his desk. It was the missing briefcase with the launch codes.

•

“Moran,” confessed Patterson. “I’m glad we were able to do some catching up, but we’re at war and your Special Ops are needed to save this country.”

“How can we best assist, General?”

"There's a courageous woman moving 400 troops to Albuquerque. I'm not worried about her two hundred headed down the I-10, but her brother's a lot less trained and could use the best of the best. Just let him keep his pride as long as you can. Let him think he's in charge for a while."

"You're getting sentimental in your old age, General."

"What are the Utes planning?" Patterson asked the Chairman's successor, Collins.

"We are looking for revenge, of course. But we have been convinced, brutally, that we can no longer stand by. General Songbird, we should have listened the first time. My wife and child were back there, and I will take them with me when I visit each reservation and call for action."

"I would be honored if you would allow one of my best warriors and me to accompany you on that mission."

"No offense, General, but they didn't listen to you because you're no longer one of us; you have changed and adapted to the white man's world."

"I understand. I determined where I stand a long time ago."

•

Candy and the others walked into the RV rental office not certain what to expect.

"Ah! Here they are," the manager said with an uneasy smile. He stood next to and slightly behind the sheriff.

"Sheriff Joe Buckley. What can I do for you?"

"We just had a nuclear device explode over the Rockies. We are close to World War Three!" Marjorie gasped.

"Who are we fighting?" asked the clerk.

"China, Russia, North Korea, who knows? We hate not knowing."

"Where are you going with those buses?" asked Buckley.

"We're taking our congregation out of harm's way," Denise announced. "Atlanta."

"What church?" The sheriff was still suspicious.

“First Baptist.”

There was a noise across the street as a camper pulled up and ten soldiers poured out.

“What the...? This day keeps getting stranger and stranger,” the sheriff muttered.

An older soldier with salt and pepper hair headed purposefully toward them.

“Major Leo Moran, Special Ops,” he addressed the sheriff. “You may be aware a nuclear device was detonated nearby. We are here to evacuate the town before the winds bring fallout.” Moran saw the buses waiting at the curb and turned to the clerk. “We’ll have to commandeer those buses. In fact, all your buses.”

“Hey! We just rented those!” Josh had entered unseen.

“I suggest you get onboard, then. And bring any family members.” He winked at Josh.

The sheriff watched as Josh gestured toward an alley and an endless stream of humanity scrambled for the buses.

“Got room on one of those buses for me?” Buckley asked.

“Sure, but you’ll have to relinquish your weapon,” said Moran.

“Ah ha! Communists!” The sheriff pointed his pistol at the renegade soldier. “You’re all under arrest!”

Moran knocked out the sheriff with a single punch and looked at the clerk.

“We don’t want any more trouble. Do you have a closet we can lock him in?”

Josh dumped the sheriff inside and gestured at the clerk. “Him, too?” he asked Moran.

“I’m coming with you!” He grabbed the other bus keys and headed for the parking lot.

•

Reggie and his warriors were still moving north on the 550 Highway just short of I-70 that cut across Colorado and came much too close to Denver for his comfort.

It was early March, and it didn't feel like winter would let up anytime soon. He and Ronnie had calculated an early Spring, a tad optimistic for this mission. He remembered the time it snowed in Denver on the Fourth of July. They hadn't known whether to build a snowman or set off some fireworks. It was decided for them: the snow melted as quickly as it had come.

There was still snowpack so they might have been forgiven for not hearing the horses. Suddenly the platoon of 200 were surrounded by a dozen warriors from out of the woods.

"Hey, brother. The name's Reggie. Pequot."

"You're in Ute territory. Uncle," the man on horseback said as he sized him up. "Name's Jacob. White River Band."

"We would appreciate talking to folks in charge."

"That would be the Tribal Business Committee, over in Fort Duchesne."

"Where's that?"

Jacob pointed west. "That way about 340 miles."

"Got a horse I can borrow?"

"No need. We're going north with you."

"Who's we?"

"About a thousand of us."

"All on horseback?"

"Hey, we don't fuck around. We Utes were the first tribe with horses. Google it."

"That means more food, more latrines, horses to feed... My brother Ronnie's about a day behind us. Any chance we can split your warriors between us?"

“I’ve got a better idea,” Jacob offered. “We’ll do our thing, you do yours. We’ll be there if you need us and we won’t have to pretend you all smell like a roses.”

“Fair enough. Let’s move out.”

“Not so fast, Injun. School’s closed for Spring break. Bring everybody in for some chili and frybread and a shower. We have cots and blankets. Bunk down for the night, bro. Start early, refreshed, smelling much better.”

•

Preston Hughes stared up at the sky, expecting any day now for it to fall, another example of Donny’s retributions. But the EMP kept out the drones. Any surveillance was coming from satellites. The missiles hadn’t arrived.

He had final word from a frat buddy in the DOD that an Army battalion was enroute on foot to take charge of the encampment. All his government and business connections were no longer returning his calls. He was “hot.” He could escape to fight another day or hunker down till they showed up to cuff him.

He would do as much as he could while he still could.

•

General Patterson, silly to keep calling himself that, but he was still responsible for troops, these committed to him as much or more than others he had led into previous battles. They were still within shouting distance of NORAD.

“General Songbird, I believe this is where we had planned to part ways.”

“We’re headed east, per my orders,” said Songbird. “What about you, general? What’s your next destination?”

“I’m going back to Mesa Verde and try to convince Hughes to go west and recruit tribes from California, Washington, and Oregon.”

“Safe travels. See you in Washington DC.” Songbird gave him a wry smile. “Don’t take too long or you’ll miss the party.”

•

Preston Hughes was protected from the elements, wedged between two slabs of rock where he could watch the troops sweep the area and maybe pick off one or two, though firing the AR-15 threatened to expose his position or start an avalanche.

He heard something or someone rummaging around and waited until footsteps came nearer.

“Hold it right there,” he growled.

With his hands up, the dark figure turned and cast his face in moonlight.

“Patterson! You couldn’t have picked a worse time to come back. The Army’s on its way to take the whole fucking place into custody!”

“How many are still here?”

“I managed to smuggle out about a thousand. I’m hoping most of them got away,” said Hughes. “There’s probably still about nine thousand and change.”

“And what do we have in the way of weaponry?”

“Two RPGs and about fifty AR-15s and a few civilian types: two 4-10 shotguns, a couple of .22 rifles, a few handguns, a samurai sword, nothing that would win a battle against the US Army.”

Sudden explosions lit up the night sky.

“Here comes company!”

Just as suddenly, all was quiet except for the moans of an injured soldier.

The forest around them erupted with US troops fighting guys who looked like they just got off their couch, occasionally it was soldier to soldier, between the woke and whatever the troops still following Trump as Commander called themselves. The “real” Army?

Patterson crouched behind a thick pine. There was nothing like the rush of adrenalin from putting himself in harm’s way. Life never felt richer than at the moment he could possibly lose it.

“Psst!”

Patterson was astounded to see a grinning Songbird. "See! I told munitions come in handy!"

A single shot rang out and Songbird pitched forward and lay still, his eyes looked up at the moonlit night, seeing nothing.

•

Candy, in the lead bus, pulled them over once. She came back with Dr. Murphy's credit card and four cellphones, one for each bus. Now that they were out of the EMP's influence, they needed to stay in touch, especially when her brother's buses took I-40 and she continued on to the I-10.

"Josh, we're getting near Albuquerque, and we go our separate ways. I don't have to remind you, right now you're traveling in comfort but you're big enough to draw attention."

"You be careful, too. You're not going to have me watching your back!"

"Good point." Her phone showed she was getting another call with no caller ID. Should she answer?

"Hang on, Josh."

"Who would...?" he was asking as she transferred to the second call.

"Hello?"

"Ms. Knight, Leo Moran here, Special Ops. According to your phone signal, you're pulling into Albuquerque, right?"

"Captain Moran?"

"Not anymore. I wanted to check with your brother to see if we might be able to join his group."

"He's full-up. You might need some more buses..."

"Done. I used my military credit card one last time."

"Then let me give you his number. I'll say my goodbyes and let him know you'll be calling."

"Very good. By the way, there's a big mall near you with a huge food court. You might consider taking your troops there. Just be sure to count heads afterward."

"Thanks, Cap..."

"Leo. Just Leo. Another thing: if you're staying on the highway because there's no alternative, watch out for checkpoints."

"Thanks, Leo."

"You're welcome, Ms..."

"Candy. Just Candy. Or Brenda."

"Bren...?"

"Private joke."

•

Reggie was thankful for the solid meal and a good night's rest.

"Where to now, General?" asked Jacob.

"We're going up Highway 13 to Highway 789 to talk to every tribe between here and Madison, Wisconsin. We're taking back America."

Reggie hadn't realized a small group had gathered. Their cheers surprised him.

"Maybe after all this is over, you should run for Congress," Jacob remarked.

•

Ronnie sent a rider ahead. They had been following his brother's trail for the last few hours and though it had snowed during the night, they could tell the tracks were fresh. And suddenly there were merging horse tracks. Lots of them.

He heard two horses galloping toward him. The forest echoed with a familiar bird call.

He met the scout and his companion in a clearing.

"I'm Billy of Uintah and Ouray Indian Reservation. You are on Ute land."

"Fair enough. Have you seen a short stocky Indian recently?"

“Look around, brother. What do you think?” Several warriors chuckled, some looked defensive. Many of Ronnie’s warriors were older and overweight.

“His name is Reggie and he looks kinda like me. He also has an army with him.”

“There were about two hundred – Indians, mostly – who came through last night. We fed ‘em and gave them somewhere comfortable to sleep. They left this morning and many of our warriors joined them.”

“We’re not supposed to meet up until we converge on Billings, but we’re pretty close to catching up now.”

“Are you sure you don’t want to take a little R and R?”

“It’s not even noon yet. We put up the old farts last night in the local cheap hotel, so all-in-all I think we’re ready to roll on.”

“Suit yourself. How about lunch?” Billy offered.

“My stomach’s growling,” admitted Clayton Wildhorse, Ronnie’s second.

“We’ve got chili and frybread.”

“Got enough for 200 people?”

“It’s venison, but yeah.”

•

An aide rushed in smiling.

“Good news, Commander!”

“I’m not sure what constitutes good news around here but go ahead.”

“The Indian encampment at Mesa Verde has been left in smoke and ash and America’s enemies are on the run.”

“Jesus Christ! ‘On the run?’ Not wiped out?”

“Commander, most of the estimated eight thousand at Mesa Verde were women and children...”

“And traitors, every one of them!”

“Sir, think how this looks if you go after...”

“Think how this looks if I don’t!”

•

At the north end of Mesa Verde State Park was a little-known dirt road for deliveries to the park store. It was the same road that had allowed the Ramirez family to breach the security checkpoints set up by the People's Army. Now it was providing an escape route for Preston Hughes and John Patterson and the small group that hadn't already escaped or lay dead throughout the park.

"Be thankful they didn't nuke us," Hughes whispered.

Patterson put a finger to his lips.

With the EMP's hold over electronics still hampering twenty-first century warfare, at least they stayed on an even footing with trained troops, slipping in and out of the shadows of the towering pines.

"Make sure you put out those embers. We don't need any more bad PR." Two soldiers were sweeping the brush.

The lieutenant would have said more, but an arrow impaled him on one of the nearby huge Douglas firs that thrive in the Rocky Mountains from Canada down to Mexico.

•

Josh and Moran were cruising through Las Cruces when the local sheriff's department pulled them over.

"Where are we?" asked Moran.

"On the 60 to avoid attention on our way to the 40 east."

"That didn't seem to work."

"What do you recommend, Major?"

"You tell me."

"Throw caution to the wind. Take the highway. Take our chances." Josh looked at Moran's face. "I take it you don't agree."

"The first, maybe the second checkpoint will be the end of us. If we go further out of our way, maybe through the suburbs, we will probably run out of gas. But we'll be walking instead of dying."

“Then let’s cut through the suburbs on full tanks,” said Josh.

“Hey, it’s your call.”

The highway patrol officer stood at the bus entrance and tapped on the glass.

“License and registration,” he demanded of the driver. “Where are these folks headed?”

“Prayer meeting in Washington. The Commander’s calling a Christian confluence. We’re thinking it might be the Rapture!” Josh had the appropriate wild-eyed look on his face.

The sheriff wasn’t buying it. A voice yelled out from the back of the bus. “Long live Commander Trump!” The rest of the bus parroted the slogan at full volume. The deputy decided not to question their zeal. He left the bus and waved them on.

•

Reggie’s joints ached. The one night’s respite on the rez had spoiled him again.

Jacob brought him a cup of coffee. “Oatmeal’s coming up.”

“Thanks.”

“I suggest we head up through Casper. They’ve got a WalMart there. We can pick up some supplies and could cut over to the east from there to pick up the 90.”

“The plans are to meet up with my brother in Billings then go our separate ways until we rendezvous again in Madison.”

“Let’s get everybody fed and on the road, then.”

Reggie turned to somebody who seemed to always be flanking him. “What’s your name, warrior?”

“About time you noticed me! I’ve been covering your ass for a hundred miles. Quentin Bishop, Ute.”

“Thanks for joining us.”

“Some of us were thinking we have kin over at Wind River. Maybe we can recruit.”

"I thought you said you were Ute."

"My old lady's Arapaho."

"Take thirty warriors." He turned to his other flank. "Your job is to make sure this guy makes it back. We'll see you at the border."

Reggie glanced around and saw an eager young Black man. "What's your name, warrior?"

"Tyrone Moondog. My daddy was Ojibwa."

"You're a long way from home."

"Getting closer every day."

"I need you to take 30 warriors into Casper and pick up supplies. We'll meet you at the border, too."

"I'm taking Travis as my second."

"Who?"

"You know. The tech kid who made his phone work in the EMP zone. We're going to pick up a few things at the electronics store."

"Couldn't hurt. All right. See you at the border."

•

The Commander was getting restless and impatient with efforts to root out those pesky Indians and old hippies.

An aide rushed in. "Commander! *Real* good news! We've spotted a group of a few hundred traitors on foot marching up through Wyoming."

"And...?"

"Troops are moving in to intercept."

"Beautiful. What can go wrong?"

The aide missed the sarcastic tone and the rhetorical nature of the question.

"They're still in the EMP zone so we can't use drones or anything that runs on sophisticated technology."

"Guns and grenades still work though, right?"

"Still effective, yes sir."

“Go get ‘em!”

•

Ronnie’s warriors were recharged and headed up to Billings to the rendezvous point.

“Pace yourselves,” he told them. “We’ve got about 48 hours and it’s going to get colder.” They were entering a mountainous region of state parks: the Tetons and Yellowstone, so a slow and steady pace was the order of the day.

There was a burst of gunfire from what sounded to Ronnie like an AR-15.

“Everybody down!” Ronnie shouted.

A speaker roared out from a short distance away. “This is the United States Army. You are ordered to drop your weapons. You are under arrest.”

There was another brief exchange of gunfire.

“Hold your fire! There are women and children here.”

“Submit to arrest. You are surrounded!” the Army responded.

“All right!” Ronnie yelled. “We’re coming out!” He motioned everyone to drop their weapons and to slowly move forward.

Walking into a clearing, he took stock. The Army had managed to round up most of Ronnie’s group.

“What are you going to do with us?”

“We’re taking you into the nearest town for processing.”

•

Candy’s buses were on a lonely stretch of I-25 heading south enroute to catching the I-10 east in El Paso.

The buses pulled to a halt and eyed the armed folks that blocked the highway in front of them. Sand dunes rose high on either side and blocked them from seeing anything other than directly in front of them. Candy stepped from the bus.

“Can we help you or may we pass?”

"You are Candy Knight, yes?"

"Yes."

"Who wants to know?" interrupted Denise.

"Mom, get back on the bus. I've got this."

"My name is Major Fernando Reyes of the Mexican Army. Preston Hughes sent us. We come to assist you."

"I'll need to confirm this with Mr. Hughes. Do you have a way to reach him?" she asked.

"He suggested that we dress like regular campesinos, like the workers harvesting your crops. We would not want to officially enter a war against Trump's illegitimate government. We would all surely suffer."

She felt uneasy; she was missing part of the story. She had been trying to reach Hughes for the last several days. When getting food last night, the restaurant had the TV on and she saw the smoldering ruins of Mesa Verde.

"We are here, Miss Candy, because we are very much concerned for our country. First the wall, calling us murderers and rapists, and now this?"

"Let me try to reach him again before we do anything," she suggested. "Trump is probably choking the phone networks."

"No problema, Miss Candy." He handed her a satellite phone.

"Preston Hughes."

"Preston. It's Candy!"

"Candy! Oh my God! Are you okay?"

"Yes. For now. What happened?"

"We waited too long to leave. They came after us." He suddenly gasped. "And we lost Songbird." He seemed to choke up. "He's dead, Candy, and I feel somehow responsible."

"Don't," she said through gritted teeth. "We know the bastard who is the real reason Songbird is dead."

“You’re speaking to me on Major Reyes’ sat phone. I assume you’re with him right now?”

“Yes.”

“He and his most loyal soldiers are going to help us defeat Trump. Then we will honor our commitments to them, to the tribes, and to each other. The United States stole the moral high ground two hundred years ago and we’re going to have to earn it.”

“Where’s Patterson on all this?” she asked.

“He’s right here, hearing this at the same time you are. In a sense, it doesn’t matter what we think. You will be inheriting this grand experiment, this land grab disguised as manifest destiny. This is your generation’s opportunity to finally get it right.”

“If we all don’t get nuked in the process.”

Patterson grabbed the phone. “Let’s hope the Commander doesn’t decide to invite his fascist dictator buddies to help him get rid of us.”

“His massive ego and acute paranoia won’t let him,” said Hughes.

“I hope you’re right. But he’s still got the firepower to wipe out all of us like swatting a fly. Do you want to join us here in El Paso?” she asked.

“Don’t wait for us. We just emerged from the EMP zone and we’re a couple of days behind you. The Commander is getting desperate, and he won’t hold back any longer,” assessed Patterson. “He wants this to all be over and so do we.”

•

Moran handed Josh the cell phone. It was Candy.

“We’re about a day behind you. Please stop and pay your respects to the Navajo Nation. The Navajos are an important force to be reckoned with. Fierce, strong women with no sign of weakness. Some of their warriors may choose to go with you.”

“So, they’re kinda like you.”

“Not really, but thanks. I’m still unclear what it is we’re going to do when we get to Washington.”

“Yeah,” acknowledged Josh. “Me, too.”

•

Their buses were stopped at the reservation's entrance.

"We're here to pay our respects," Josh explained to security.

"We've been expecting you. Head to the welcome center. I'll let them know you're on the way."

Moran and Josh exchanged curious looks.

•

Ronnie was looking for a break, some distraction that would allow some of his troops to get away.

There was a roar of what sounded like a hundred advancing Harleys.

"Run!" Ronnie shouted before the silence exposed them once again.

Shots rang out. A teenage boy fell to the ground, not moving.

"Hee hee! I don't know if it's more fun hunting 'em like two-legged deer or..."

The biker went down with a gunshot to his skull. He obviously wasn't prepared for deer that returned fire.

One of the soldiers motioned for his men to pull out. "Captain says leave 'em for the bikers."

"Nice working with you, Sarge! Hey, Bill! Don't forget to grab a couple of scalps."

Another voice hushed the screams of a woman quickly going out of her mind. "Go for the young ones."

Another biker voice sounded alarmed. "Get away from those bikes! What are you doing?"

A big guy ran through the clearing, his hair and jacket in flames.

A few minutes later, the only sound was someone dying of excruciating pain without a clue of whose side he had been on.

Ronnie wearily rose and looked around into the eyes of a biker clearly on his feet one last time.

"Gotcha!" The biker shot him, and they collapsed, both dead before their bodies hit the ground.

•

The wind had shifted and Reggie smelled smoke.

Creator, don't let that be Ronnie's people.

•

The people of Casper, Wyoming, outside the EMP zone, didn't seem to realize there was a revolution going on. Tyrone Moondog followed Travis into the electronics store and watched him tear through spare parts and clearance items, oblivious to everyone and everything around him. Finally, the kid looked up.

"Okay. Ready."

It was just a handful of odds and ends, but the charge came to \$251.

"I'm not sure I have enough credit for this," he told Travis. "And we still have to get food."

Tyrone handed the credit card to the clerk and waited several minutes. After almost twenty minutes, with both of them growing more anxious, the clerk returned.

"I'm not supposed to tell you this, but your card came back as stolen. By law I have to call the cops and they're on their way, so I suggest you grab this stuff and get the hell out of here."

Travis smiled. "Thanks."

"My gut tells me you guys are okay and my gut's never wrong. Good luck!"

Back out on the street, they tried to blend in.

"Do they think I stole my own card?" Tyrone asked.

"Nah. We're on the list now. They have cameras all over town; they must have facial recognition. We need to get back on the road."

"We still need to eat. Let's get everybody together and see how much cash we can come up with for food."

•

Trump was on Twitter again.

TRAITORS HAVE BEEN FOUND AND DEALT WITH. TAKE PRECAUTIONS, AMERICA! YOUR NEIGHBOR COULD BE A TERRORIST. ALWAYS BE VIGI...

"Hey, Hutchins! Spell vigilant."

"V – I – G..."

"Forget it." DON'T BE TOO TRUSTING.

He was thrilled to hear about the Indians taken out by bikers in Wyoming. It was too bad the Army hadn't stuck around to help them finish the job, but with so many hot spots around the country these days, they had their work cut out for them. With the Trump Volunteer Network now in place, pansies like the Army should be able to hand off dirty work to folks like the Proud Boys or a biker gang looking for a fight and authorized to start one.

"I need a debrief. Somebody give me a debrief." Aides exchanged glances, not sure what the Commander was looking for.

"Sir?"

"Let's get a scoreboard set up in here. I need to know how we're doing against the terrorists."

Trump turned on the TV. "Who the hell put this on CNN?"

He saw an exterior shot of the White House and turned it up.

"... With the ongoing crisis with domestic terrorism, Pres, *Commander* Trump has had to forego his golf game for several weeks. Our sources inside the White House say tension and tempers are mounting."

"That's why I'm all tense. I need to get down to Mar-A-Largo, swing some clubs, and get some fresh air."

Staff, eager to see him go, encouraged him. "The best thing for you, Commander." Others murmured assent and nodded.

"Commander, do you really think that's advisable?" asked an aide, oblivious to glares from his peers.

"If I don't get out of town, I'm not going to be good for anybody," the Commander confessed. "Call the VP, whatsizname. Tell him he's in charge for now."

An aide hung up the phone. "Marine One's waiting for you, sir."

"I'm feeling better already! Let's see, today's Wednesday. See everybody next Monday. Unless there's something that can't wait."

Just a handful of reporters clustered at the helipad as Trump boarded and waved adios with a sweeping hand gesture.

The helicopter began to move sideways as an RPG left a smoking trail on its way to hit Marine One. The skilled pilot shifted at the last second and the weapon exploded at an upstairs window of the White House. Within seconds Secret Service had mobilized and surrounded a Latino man in his 30s as he sat in a white van just a block away. Before they could stop him or possibly do the job for him, he ended his own life with a shot to his temple with a Glock 19.

The media found domestic terrorist Victor Romero had attended a rally in the area a few days earlier. FBI found a picket sign in his living room that stated, "Not our real president."

"Delusional," was one Fox reporter's assessment.

•

Hughes and Patterson were taking some shortcuts to catch up to Candy's convoy. Preston and Fernando Reyes had fought the War on Drugs together in the old days before they both realized the futility of their efforts.

The plan was to take Highway 285 south to the intersection with the I-10 and meet up with Candy and company as they passed through Fort Stockton, what Texans called a big little town of about 8000.

Hughes had a pickup truck with a worn camper awaiting them in a parking lot in Roswell. Inside were all the comforts of home, including his favorite nightcap and a freezer full of T-bones and hamburger patties. He was too old to be traipsing about the country without adequate subsistence and two old guys in a beat-up old pickup could probably fly under the radar.

That night as they barbecued some steaks in a campground outside Midland, they made plans.

"I'm still filthy rich. We should charter a jet," suggested Hughes.

"A charter is going to get some scrutiny. Can't we just buy a bunch of tickets to National?"

"Same credit card for about 300 passengers. Even *more* scrutiny."

They sat for a moment, sipping on Preston's bourbon, and considered the possibilities.

"Wait a minute!" Hughes shouted. "Let me check inventory."

He combed his physical property database, remembering an ironic move he had made in 1990.

"Wait till you see what I bought a few years ago."

•

Candy's phone rang. It was Hughes. "Meet me at the San Antonio Airport, hangar seven tomorrow night."

He hung up quickly, but not before Candy caught the excitement in his voice.

•

Travis and Tyrone met up with the others with large bags of burgers and waited to say anything till they knew everyone was fed before they announced they were probably being followed.

"And that might be followed by our arrest," admitted Travis.

"We need to hurry this along. We don't know how long we have or how close they are."

"So why panic?" somebody asked.

"They can mess with us any way they want. Suddenly your checking account is frozen or there's a drone with your name on it," explained Travis.

"We should hit the border in the morning."

•

Reggie felt things. He had always felt things. He knew when the traffic light would change, not that it did always. He knew when to go

for that construction job. They had just fired a guy when he walked in. His nerdy-ass white friends said it was The Force. Now he had a feeling about his brother. He could no longer feel his animal spirit, his connection to the land.

They were close to Montana near the border town of Buffalo, Wyoming. He laughed when he spotted Travis and Tyrone parked next to the “Welcome” sign in a dilapidated Chevy Impala, circa 1964. Rust had eaten away much of the wheel wells.

“They look guilty of something,” Reggie commented as he and Jacob prepared to cross the road.

“Hey, look! It’s Reggie.” Travis said.

From out of the corner of his eye, Tyrone saw the large van rolling downhill toward them, and braced himself for the impact.

Reggie looked on with anger as several cowboy-looking types surrounded Tyrone’s Chevy and beat on the car’s windshield.

Suddenly, the assailants stopped with looks of horror, turned, and fled as fast as they could.

Reggie ran over to investigate.

“What the hell just happened?”

Travis and Tyrone were doubled over with laughter.

“I think somebody saw a big, old grizzly,” said Travis.

“How is that possible?”

Travis pointed to the van’s side mirror. “Watch.” A vicious, snarling bear appeared on the mirror’s surface looking very real.

“It would have been more effective with a soundtrack,” Travis complained.

“Hey, it worked. Good job. Let’s go meet up with the others in Billings.” Despite his unease, Reggie was still hoping to see his brother in a few hours.

•

Josh wasn't fooled; he knew Moran was in charge, but he appreciated the illusion. He pretended Moran was there for advice and counsel, his second.

The guard at the front gate of the Navajo Nation escorted Josh and Leo Moran to the main building. Overhead, like a guardian, stood Window Rock, a natural formation carved by time and wind out of the Arizona landscape, headquarters for their tribe for over one hundred years.

A tall, ruggedly handsome man in his seventies stood before them in the lobby. In blue jeans, a bright red shirt, cowboy boots, and turquoise jewelry, he smiled. "Yá'át'ééh." He pointed to his heart and waved his hand toward them, palm down. "Welcome. I'm President Chayton Elder. Please have your people stay aboard the buses until we have a chance to present them with dinner vouchers."

"Yá'át'ééh, Mister President," said Moran. "I'm Leo Moran..."

"Formerly Captain Moran, Special Ops, if the information I received is accurate. And this must be young Josh Knight."

"Yes! Great intel."

"We have a love-hate relationship with the US government, strongly leaning toward hate at the moment. For this bilagáana, this false president, to nuke the First People, is a crime that cries out for justice. The Navajo Nation stands 165 thousand strong not because of this government but in spite of them. We have anticipated your call to arms. Already five thousand naabááhíí, brave warriors, give of their mind, body, and spirit to ride into battle."

"This false president is a coward. He will blame others for this heinous crime because he is a man without honor, without conscience," said Moran.

"This was the second bomb. Who dropped the first?" asked Josh.

"Rumors in the intelligence community point at North Korea," said President Elder.

“Sloppy delivery, limited impact. I would concur,” Moran said. “Though it must be the first complete power failure to hit the state of Nevada.”

“Our warriors will arrive in Washington in two days. I suggest you coordinate your actions with them. Here’s a burner phone and the cell number for Hashkeh Naabah is already programmed.”

“Maybe we should call him now.”

“Five thousand more naabááhíí will accompany you when you leave.”

•

The Commander was shaken up, but as usual, when he was shaken, he got pissed off.

“The frickin’ rocket was this close! Let’s fry that guy!”

Olson from Secret Service reminded him. “He killed himself. There’s not much else we can do other than drag his carcass around town.”

“Do I have to remind you there are a few others out there who would like to try again?”

“CNN did a poll. Twenty-seven percent.”

“Get this asshole out of my office! And off my detail!”

Olson turned and left. “Twenty-eight percent,” he muttered under his breath.

Trump looked at Jennings, the new FBI director. “Got anything. Antifa? Democrat?”

“My agents who covered the rally last week said there was a hodge-podge of organizations out there. Nobody seemed to be in charge. And footage shows Romero just milling about.”

“Let’s put the fear of God into ‘em. Put out a press release claiming he was a leader with Antifa, then round ‘em up. It won’t be long till they’re turning each other in.”

•

Candy and her convoy pulled up to the fence at San Antonio International Airport. A guard at the gate asked, "Miss Knight?"

"Yes."

"Come in. They're expecting you."

Patterson and Hughes were standing outside Hangar Seven. There weren't a lot of lights to indicate anyone was on the property. Hughes was chuckling, barely able to contain his mirth. She embraced both men.

"Wait till you see this!"

He opened a side door and they stepped inside the hangar into a bright light that momentarily blinded her. Then she saw them, rows upon rows of Boeing 727s emblazoned with TRUMP.

"What the...?"

"They're mine! I bought them all for a song back in '92 when the company went belly-up! Seventeen airplanes!"

The buses were unloading their passengers, and many did a doubletake as they gazed on their transportation to Washington, D.C.

"The galleys are full, the tanks are topped off, and some of my friends in the air traffic controller's office are expecting us," said Hughes.

"What are we waiting for? Let's go!" Candy had never seen Patterson so excited.

"We've got to wait for Josh and Moran," she reminded them. "And Reggie and Ronnie."

•

As Reggie had feared, Ronnie and his group of followers were nowhere to be seen in Billings. Reggie posted several warriors and others around town, hoping for either advance scouts or stragglers if Ronnie's folks had arrived and departed early, leaving behind a few contacts.

He checked into a cheap downtown hotel for a few days. He was packing to leave when there was a tentative knock on his door. He opened it to find an old Native American man.

"Are you Reggie?"

"Yes."

"I am the last, the only survivor of Ronnie's proud warriors."

Reggie almost collapsed, steadying himself at the door. "Please. Come in."

"Your brother died trying to protect us." He told Reggie of the Army ambush and the second wave, cruel bikers who replaced the Army and destroyed those who could still fight.

"How did you survive?" asked Reggie.

"The area was covered in snow drifts and fallen trees. They didn't see my body or thought I was dead, I'm not sure. Or maybe I survived because they wanted me to deliver this warning."

"Many good people have died because of this false president. My brother was just one. What is your name?"

"Bobby Waukeegan. I am Ojibwe from the Blackfeet Rez."

"Why were you out there? No offense, but your fighting days were over long ago."

"I am only 90. I was a Marine Corp. sergeant in the DMZ for five years in Korea. No offense, but I or Creator will decide when my fighting days are over."

"Please, take a rest. We leave in the morning."

"Thank you. I am very tired. I walked three days to get here." He was asleep almost instantly, snoring in a subdued rumble.

Later, when Reggie went to check on him, the room was strangely quiet and his forehead was cold. He felt for a pulse and found none. The old man had passed.

•

Josh felt a chill in the air as he looked across the windswept plains of the Mescalero Apache reservation. It was small as reservations go, but the population of about one thousand didn't warrant anything bigger in the eyes of the BIA, the Bureau of Indian Affairs. What was large, however, was the Inn of the Mountain Gods Resort and Casino. He was escorted along with Moran and a small group of his fellow travelers

past the slot machines and poker tables into an auditorium where several Apache sat waiting.

"I'm Eddie Aguilar, the president of the Mescalero Council," said a somber man in his forties. "We understand you're here to ask us to join your suicidal mission."

"May I respond to that?" Moran asked Josh. "Until a week ago, I was Marine Special Ops, ordered to destroy this uprising among Indian nations and others who were daring to question the legitimacy of this election. I now stand with them in this fight for justice. Whether we win or lose, we stand united against fascism, against this man who would rob us of our democratic principles."

"Some would say you have reaped what you sowed, a nation built on lies upon lies, with no honor, deserves no respect."

Josh addressed the president. "We have backtracked a bit to solicit more help for what we will face in Washington. If the Apaches are forced into battle, none would survive, but in a show of fierce force, they are the equal of tanks and cannons."

"Would we not be exchanging one white government for another white government with promises, however well-meant, with even less ability to back them up?"

He looked pointedly at the Native Americans in their entourage.

"Give us some time to deliberate. In the meantime, please avail yourselves of some rooms to refresh and regenerate for the long road ahead."

The next afternoon one hundred warriors – men and women – joined them for the inevitable showdown. They kissed children and aunties goodbye. Some brought their own form of transportation, looking for an ability to avoid capture.

Josh's phone rang as they pulled onto the highway. It was Candy.

"How soon can you get to the San Antonio airport?"

"Two days max. Why?"

•

Reggie called Candy to tell her of Ronnie's death.

"We got off to a rocky start, but I feel like we grew close."

"He thought of you like a sister."

"I'm honored. Will you be joining us soon?"

"I will have a short ceremony here for him and another warrior, but first we're sending someone your way you may find much more useful."

•

"We're putting you on a plane by yourself because we're running out of time."

"Why can't Tyrone join me?" Travis seemed disoriented. Tyrone was his rock.

"You have something important to do and you will attract a lot less attention by yourself."

It wasn't true. After they checked his baggage, a TSA agent nervously contemplated the suitcase full of wires in front of him. "Get the passenger," he said.

Travis stood next to TSA Agent Fine, an overweight man in his twenties with thick glasses.

"What is it?" he asked Travis.

"I'm building my own stereo."

Agent Fine wasn't about to touch anything. "Where are the speakers?"

"At home in D.C. I've been picking up spare parts at swap meets on the road."

The other TSA agent asked, "What do you think, Fine? Should we call the bomb squad?"

Fine had been scolded earlier in the day for reporting a suspicious-looking rhumba vacuum. "I don't see anything dangerous. Get this guy to his gate."

•

Hastings reassured the Commander. “I really think we’re turning the corner on this revolution, civil war, Indian uprising, whatever you want to call it.”

Secret Service, never far away, spoke into his sleeve. “Commander, we’re moving you to a more secure location.”

“Uh-uh. I’m not going to fly out of here anywhere. Too dangerous.”

“We’ll be in a very small motorcade to Camp David. There’s an imminent threat. We need to really batten down the hatches.”

“What kind of threat?”

“There seems to be some kind of convergence on the national mall. They’re headed here on buses and aircraft charter.”

“Those are my supporters, the common folk. They’re gathering around because I’m some sort of father figure and that’s what patriots do. They flock to their leader. Turn on the TV; I’ll show you. Make sure it’s on FOX.”

Sean Hannity was commenting on the lively crowds headed for Washington. “Folks, decked out in full Trump, USA and the new Commander of Our Nation T-shirts are being invited and welcomed by a whole new contingent of Republican officials to the cradle of the nation.

“I’m here,” said one sincere woman from Tennessee. “Because I want to offer my life up as a human shield to anyone who might want to harm our Commander. We come to pray for our nation.”

A guy in his twenties, wearing a classic MAGA cap, bellowed, “Terrorists are setting off H-bombs, attacking our military. Go, USA!” He stepped through the metal detector and the loud screech indicated he was carrying a weapon. The next machine over followed suit.

“We need backup,” a female TSA agent spoke quietly into her walkie-talkie. “Stat.”

Travis looked on as TSA agents, overwhelmed by Trump supporters carrying contraband, attempted to wrestle individuals to the floor. He calmly walked his suitcase to his gate where cooperative ground

personnel checked it. There was nothing for him to do for the next five hours but catch up on his sleep.

•

“The plan is to fly in with the additional air traffic they’re expecting, landing at staggered times into Reagan, Dulles, and Baltimore,” explained Hughes. “We’ve filed our flight plans with the FAA. Everything looks legal and above-board.”

“Won’t the Trump stamps on our planes be a red flag?” asked Reverend Milan.

“I would think just the opposite,” said Patterson.

“The Trojan Horse gambit,” Moran pointed out.

“There’s also something ironically juicy about arriving this way,” said Candy.

“How do we decide who’s flying?” asked Josh.

“Each Boeing 727 can handle 189 passengers, give or take. That’s about 3200 troops,” Hughes said.

“Have we got enough pilots?” the Reverend asked.

“We only need seventeen. We’ve got ten and I hired ten more.”

“Preston and I promised the first five planes to the tribes. I want it to be clear that they are reclaiming the country and we’re along to support their claim. I just wish Songbird was here to see this.”

Hughes glanced at his watch. “It’s 2300 hours. Our first flight takes off at 0600. Let’s get some sleep.”

•

A watchman noticed a flurry of activity around the hangar at about midnight and tried to report in, but he became another casualty. His body wouldn’t be discovered until several hours after he failed to appear at the end of his shift.

•

As he disembarked, Travis was assaulted by the cacophony of Trump supporters crowding the concourses of Reagan International. For the most part, everyone seemed in a festive mood, post-Christmas, post New Year's.

He walked past a CNN correspondent in mid-report.

"The crowd remains jubilant on tomorrow's celebration, the People's Inauguration Day, January 6. New attendance records are being set on the lawns of the event and across the city."

•

"President Putin on line one, Commander."

"V!" Commander Trump was all smiles. "Another beautiful plan."

"I must admit, Commander, I learned the merits of human shields from others. But turning an impending civil war into a cause for celebration for your re-election, was my idea."

"I'm taking some time off after we root out any last conspiracies. How about joining me in Mar-A-Largo for some golf next week?"

"I think that can be arranged, Donald, my friend."

"We'll sign some agreements. Maybe I'll get to build that casino in Moscow, after all."

"Throw in Alaska and we have a deal," laughed Putin.

•

Travis had never stayed in a hotel, much less the Watergate. The historical significance of that event was lost in the mists of time, glossed over in his American history class for something more recent and, to his teacher, more relevant.

Well rested from his flight, he set to work on assembling the pieces for the AI hologram projector that had proven its worth in Wyoming. He had the image he wanted, but was lacking an audio, just as he had with the oversized grizzly.

A light tap at the door interrupted him and for a moment he thought his part in this scheme might have been exposed and would put them all in prison, in front of a firing squad, or something much worse.

“Who is it?”

“I’m Ernie from engineering. They told me the sound isn’t working on your TV.”

Travis opened the door to a tall, gaunt Latino in his seventies who grinned and stuck out his hand. “Ernie Sanchez. I guess we’re working together.”

He saw the life-size image Travis had managed to project in the middle of the room.

“Are you able to make that a little more substantial looking?” Ernie asked. “Cause if I hook up voice to that semi-transparency, we’re done.”

“If I crank the gain, the picture becomes more solid and, believe me, the addition of the voice is a deal closer. What have you got for me?”

•

Patterson welcomed warriors at baggage claim at Reagan. Hughes offered bus rides to those arriving in Baltimore. Josh and Moran covered arrivals to Dulles. Logistics were hammered out, agonized over, and refined until everyone was fully aware of what was to happen.

“We’re bringing in warriors from Union Station down Delaware Avenue and Louisiana Avenue as makeshift parades. In order to differentiate our folks from theirs, we need something to set us apart.”

Hughes yelled out, “I just got off the phone with the Democratic National Committee. I bought up all their Biden merchandise and if some scuffles allow us to create a big enough distraction to blow this whole thing open, then so be it.”

The next morning as the media was informed anonymously of the hordes of discontented Biden supporters assembling a protest and march in front of Union Station, Travis and Ernie were establishing a line-of-sight on a media scaffold in the middle of the capitol grounds.

The air was crisp, but it didn’t take long for Trump supporters to glimpse the Biden caps and t-shirts and decide they weren’t going to allow this display of fealty to anyone other than the right and true Commander.

Suddenly the speakers crackled and people heard, ““V! Another beautiful plan.”

The crowd stopped fighting among each other and looked around to see where the voices were coming from.

“I must admit, Commander, I learned the merits of human shields from others.”

“There! Up on stage!” somehow bellowed. “It’s the Commander and Putin.” It wasn’t, but from a distance, it certainly looked like them.

“Turning an impending civil war into a cause for celebration for your re-election, was my idea.”

“What?” someone yelled indignantly.

“I’m taking some time off after we root out any last conspiracies. How about joining me in Mar-A-Largo for some golf next week?”

“I think that can be arranged, Donald, my friend.” “Putin” seemed to nod in agreement.

“Maybe I’ll get to build that casino in Moscow, after all.”

“Throw in Alaska and we have a deal,” laughed “Putin.”

“No! Traitor!” The cries came from various parts of the capitol grounds.

The Commander had genuine fear in his eyes. “No! I’ve got to explain! That’s all fake news! It’s a set-up!”

Travis spotted the “real” Trump emerging to take the stage and killed the projector.

“Traitor!” The cries were coming from everywhere it seemed and not just audience plants, now, but those who realized they were victims of a con, this one perpetrated for the last several years.

Sanchez hit an interceptor switch on his sound equipment, and it still sounded like Trump.

“We have lied to our neighbors north and south. We haven’t been the policemen of the world, we’ve been the bullies.”

The man onstage was waving his arms about and jumping up and down.

“Traitor!” Someone threw a Trump flag and the battle was on.

“We’re done here, I’d say,” said Ernie, glancing around him at the riot just below.

“I’m not climbing down just yet. I think we need to ride it out.”

The former supporters of the Commander stormed the doors of the capitol.

“Hang Trump! Commie traitor!”

At last, both sides were in concert: to find the conman-turned-traitor, a man so desperate for power he was willing to relinquish the oil-rich Alaskan tundra to the Russians. At last, the blinders were off, and everyone agreed that this man should not be president, commander, or in any position of responsibility or power.

Former Trumpers charged into the building beside warriors in warpaint as Secret Service bundled him into the presidential limo and took him to a new and close undisclosed location.

Navajo Nation President Chayton Elder appeared on national television that evening with Vice President Pence, Supreme Court Chief Justice Emily Grant, and the joint chiefs of staff, including General Rick Patterson.

“Good evening. It is with a heavy heart I come to the American people to express my deepest regrets that false election results went unchallenged in an attempt to avoid civil unrest or even war. Too many of us were willing to follow our hearts rather than our heads condoning rather than condemning the criminal actions of one man. For that, we most sincerely apologize for any harm perpetrated upon the true patriots of this nation who upheld the Constitution as the law of the land.

“In a session with both houses reconstituted and assembled to perform their duties in this rarest of circumstances and, in cooperation with the newly assembled Supreme Court, the previous official body, and the joint chiefs of staff, we have agreed to a period of shared power with those whose lands we occupied and then stole two hundred years ago. We make a solemn vow before the American people tonight that a Constitutional Convention will determine the governing bodies of this nation within six months and make way for those bodies to represent and

govern the American people. This has not been a bloodless revolution, but it is a revolution nonetheless and we beg your patience as we move forward into a new era. May Creator bless and protect the United States, whatever form that may take.”

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During the transition there were problems with interpretation and renewed and strengthened focus on the environment. Texas and California griped when Padre Island and San Diego were annexed to Mexico, but everyone agreed it was a minor inconvenience with passports and taxes.

Former Commander/President Donald Trump was found guilty of treason and sentenced to 20 years in the newly reopened Alcatraz Island.

A moratorium was declared on oil drilling and research at Stanford University has proved that affordable alternate forms of energy are imminent.

Reggie and Candy married. Josh was reunited with his buddy Curtis and his sister Savannah. Preston Hughes established Hughes Airways and former General Rick Patterson retired to San Diego where he started a fishing company with a fleet of boats.

A parliament-type system of government was organized out of the Constitutional Convention with regional oversight by individual tribes. A reconciliation council is sorting out best use grants on property. The land belongs to all, but private ownership of buildings is considered a just compromise.

“This grand experiment in democracy has proved there is room for growth and compromise,” wrote Candy Firewalker in her memoir. “I’m glad I could help.”

THE END

