

My First Story

Hi everyone, this is my very first story. I really hope ya'll like it. I worked hard on it, and I know it isn't nearly as good as most of the other stories on here but I hope everyone enjoys it. Please post your comments positive or negative. All feedback is welcomed.

Well I hope you all like it, I tried to make it different than the other stories. I think one of the big differences is the age of the main character, the situation, and the amount of preps he owns.

This is just the first three chapters.

Well please read it and let me know if you like it.

Thanks,
highlander

This story is dedicated to the Lord Jesus, my best friend, who protects and guides me.

Chapter 1

Brian rubbed his eyes. He had been in his Calculus class for over an hour, and the professor was still droning on about functions. Multivariable calculus, Brian thought to himself. Probably the hardest class he had ever taken. Why am I even in this, he wondered. I'm majoring in Government & Politics and Economics.

Finally the professor looked at his watch and reluctantly said, "It's time to go, see you tomorrow."

Brian walked out of the math building and headed across a large grassy area in the center of campus to the science building, where his girlfriend Hillary, biochemistry major, was just getting out of class. It was a beautiful fall day, and the autumn wind blew leaves across the Quad. Autumn was Brian's favorite season. He loved to see the leaves change color and he liked to be outside when it was chilly, but not too cold. It was also a Thursday and Brian felt relieved that he had only one day of classes left until the weekend, when he could relax after a very busy week. While he was waiting for Hillary, Brian's mind wandered to the past and he reflected on how they had met each other. Brian was not very good at surfing but it was something that he enjoyed nevertheless. So when he got to college as a freshman he had joined the surfing club. Hillary, who was a freshman too, had also shown up for the first club meeting. At subsequent meetings, the two had talked, and realized that they had a lot in common. Brian, still reminiscing about how their relationship had begun, recalled how he had become friends

with Hillary, and how they had started hanging out more and more and eventually he had asked her out. Brian and Hillary were now in the fall semester of their junior year at college, and had been going out for almost two years. They had become very close. Brian hoped that they would get married in the future but he had never mentioned these feelings to Hillary, at least not yet.

“Hi sweetheart,” he said, as he noticed her coming down the steps of the science building, her blonde hair blowing in the wind. “How are you? How was class?”

“Boring as usual...let’s get something to eat,” she replied.

The pair walked to the Student Union, which was a big building where the restaurants were located.

After lunch Hillary had another class but Brian didn’t so he headed back to his dorm room after walking her to her next class and saying goodbye.

Brian was fascinated with news and current events, which was one of the reasons why he had chosen to major in government and politics. He always had FOX News turned on when he was in his room. Across the ocean, things were not looking good for the US. Iran was enriching uranium, Venezuela secretly had ordered five “Amur” class submarines from the Russians in order to “protect the Caribbean and Latin American peoples from evil Imperialist aggression,” and to make things worse, the subs had been manufactured at amazing speed. That was because Venezuela had paid almost double the usual price for these subs. And Russia was more than happy to have an ally in the Western Hemisphere irking the United States.

So the five Amur class vessels had been delivered in early October, 2006, which was when the rest of the world found out about the sale. Currently, the subs were cruising the Caribbean, “protecting against Yankee invaders,” as Hugo Chavez, the Marxist Venezuelan leader had put it. Venezuela had also ordered 50 Su-27 fighters (the original order for 30 Su-30s had been changed in order to afford more planes.) And the Russians had provided a number of long-range missiles as well.

Elsewhere, China and India were building up their militaries at breakneck paces. India had quietly signed a vaguely worded mutual security alliance with China, while at the same time pressing the US Congress to approve the nuclear agreement negotiated with the Bush administration. Russia was also re-building their military.

The situation in North Korea was the cause for the most alarm. The North Koreans had moved 800,000 regular troops, 12,000 artillery tubes, and 6,000 tanks and armored vehicles right up to the border of the De-militarized zone. They had also activated 1,000,000 reserves and sent them to the DMZ. The North Korean explanation was that their troops had deteriorating training standards and that these exercises were meant to remedy that while at the same time demonstrating the power and viability of the DPRK military forces.

Washington wasn't buying it and an aircraft carrier battle group had been deployed to the area. A squadron of B1-B Lancers was deployed to South Korea, as well as 100 F-15C/Ds to supplement the 90 F-16s already there.

Meanwhile China was basing an awful lot of troops and hardware opposite from Taiwan across the Straits of Formosa.

China had recently sharply cut back on the amount of Treasury bonds they were purchasing from the US. Most people don't know it, but that is how our government borrows money, they sell treasury bonds to the banks of China. Since China had greatly reduced buying, the government of the US was caught with tremendous debts to pay and not much money to do it. It was widely speculated that welfare and Medicaid would go bankrupt, and in most cities, the poor were furious and began to riot.

The illegal immigrants and their allies joined in, and coming up to the midterm elections, there was an exploding crime rate in most US cities. Also many people were intimidated by promises that if the "Xenophobic Republicans" won the election, they would start rioting even more violently.

Chapter 2

During the next week, life for Brian and Hillary went on pretty much as usual. They went to a movie one night, as a treat since they had both done well on very hard assignments that had been due the previous week. Going to movies was rare because both Brian and Hillary were saving their money in anticipation of their future life together, even if neither had mentioned marriage yet.

Then on the day before the elections, the couple were sitting in Hillary's dorm room doing homework. Hillary started surfing the web, and when she went back to her homepage to check her email she noticed a News Alert.

"Reuters: A suicide bombing has just occurred in Albany, NY. A person described as a young man of Middle Eastern descent, attempted to force his way into the Governor's Mansion. When State Troopers protecting the building tried to detain him, wrestling him to the ground, he detonated his bomb, which he carried under an overcoat. The blast killed four state troopers and a teenage bystander."

Brian and Hillary turned on the news to see reactions to the bombing. While it was not as spectacular as a huge attack like the one on 9/11 had been, it was even more unnerving to many Americans, since it showed that the terrorists were willing now to settle for smaller targets. This new strategy of the terrorists was confirmed when only a couple of hours later, another Muslim man blew himself up in a WaWa Mart in Blacksburg, VA. The Muslims were apparently trying to show Americans that even if they lived in a smaller town, they were still in danger. This only increased the hysteria of the American people going into the elections.

The next day, the midterm elections occurred. By the end of the day, it had become clear that the Democrats had taken both houses of Congress.

The Dems had stunned everyone when they had suddenly reversed their position on the Patriot Act, a few weeks before the elections. They began to advocate all kinds of surveillance programs, including cameras in all public places possible, after the British model. They also proposed much more aggressive wire-tapping, spying and eavesdropping, to combat “domestic terrorism” in addition to external terrorism. The Democrat platform included a giant array of proposed laws that would allow the government to scrutinize, track and monitor everyone in the country.

It had become clear that the new governor of NY had been targeted because he was Jewish, and the governor was one of the most vocal advocates of the new surveillance laws.

The Democrats had also cleverly and craftily won over many swing voters who were upset with the GOP by tailoring their plan with regard to Iraq. The Dems now proposed what they called “triumphant disengagement.”

Brian shook his head in disgust when he read about this new concept. He reread the New York Times article he had accessed in the college library that described the plan: “Many political insiders attribute the Democratic victory in the midterm elections to their newly developed policy in the War on Terror. The Democratic party launched an immense media campaign to convince voters that they are not “soft on terror,” with commercials on TV featuring prominent Democratic politicians assuring the American people that they will work to destroy terrorists where ever they are found. This new approach is part of the Democratic strategy known as “triumphant disengagement.” The Democrats insist that unlike the aftermath of the Vietnam war, the terrorists will not win in Iraq.

“The strategy calls for a brief but intense operation against the terrorists in Iraq, during which “All of the terrorists will be killed or captured,” according to Harry Meade (D-OR) the new Senate majority leader. Meade has stated that the generals on the ground have told him that this campaign will “break the terrorist foothold” in Iraq. While no Democratic leader has mentioned a timetable for the operation, aides close to Senator Larry Kenedy, Democrat of MA, have speculated that it will not be longer than a week.

After the campaign is over, a “rapid but organized and very tactical” withdrawal will take place, according to Meade.

Meade went further to say that after the US troops are withdrawn, measures have been taken to ensure that there is not a resurgence of terrorist activity. “The Iraqi air force pilots have been well trained by the Russians, and Iraq has purchased a number of MiG-29 fighters to defend against Iran as well as MiG-27 planes to attack terrorists on the ground. What’s more, several countries have donated Mi-8 helicopters to Iraq. These can be used for attack or transport. The Iraqi army and police will continue to

be trained by a Brazilian company, which landed an immense contract. The choice of Brazil clearly demonstrates that we did not pressure Iraq to choose an American company. Finally, the Iraqi special forces will continue to be trained by the Egyptians, which will keep them more loyal to Iraq since an Arab company is training them instead of a Western one which may cause them to question their mission.”

Brian snorted. The Brazilians and Egyptians didn’t have the kind of experience to effectively train the Iraqis.

Brian had the TV turned to the local news channel for a change, which turned out to be a wise, or lucky decision.

“This is breaking news, large bodies of rioters are moving north from the city toward the university. There are reports that the rioters are armed. The National Guard is in Iraq right now, as are the national guards of neighboring states. However a state police detachment has been mobilized and is moving north to intercept the rioters and secure the college campus.”

Immediately Brian jumped up and called Hillary.

“What’s wrong Brian?” she said.
He told her about the news report.

“Oh my goodness,” she gasped.

“Hill, come over to my room now and bring your backpack with some clothes and stuff in case we have to get out in a hurry.”

“But we can’t leave just like that!”

“Hill, what if the police can’t stop the rioters?”

“But where would we go?”

“Hill you live in Manassas! Your house is what? An hour away?”

“But we don’t have a car! And my Dad is in North Carolina until Saturday!!!”

“Don’t worry, I think I might be able to find a vehicle,” Brian replied.

“OK Brian I trust you.”

“I love you Hill.”

“OK I’ll be right over!”

Chapter 3

Meanwhile down the highway about a mile from there, a relatively small detachment of state police had accosted the crowd of rioters.

“Men, fall back!” shouted police captain Matt Pruitt, at his troopers.

When the police had arrived, and maneuvered in front of the crowd, to stop their advance toward the college, everything had gone well at first. The crowd had begun to fall back under a barrage of rubber bullets. Then a group of men had overturned the State troopers only APC, as well as several of the police cars. The mob surged forward furiously, knocking down a few officers. Most of Pruitt’s men had then been overrun by the mob, and he and about twenty others ran back toward the three remaining cruisers as several members of the mob fired live rounds at them from mostly 9mm pistols.

Pruitt and his men could not identify where the shooters were so they could return fire.

Realizing that if they remained any longer they would die, Pruitt ordered a retreat. He needed heavy weapons if he was to hold off the mob anyway, and he didn’t have any with him. So reluctantly he instructed his small convoy of cruisers to drive away. I’ll be back with reinforcements, he yelled at the crowd. They didn’t seem frightened.

Back at the college, the campus police had barricaded the main entrances, but with only 40 officers on hand at the time, securing an enormous campus was impossible. And the college cops had no longarms or riot gear. They only had 9mm pistols and pepper spray.

When the rioters arrived, most were forced to abandon their posts after a short fight in which one officer was hit in the head with a rock and injured. Most of the officers took off to go defend their families, who lived in town. A few others actually fired live ammunition into the crowd, but eventually they fled too.

The crowd stormed the campus and began to burn down buildings, attack people, mob the food court looking for something to eat, etc.

Luckily Brian and Hillary lived in the section of campus farthest away from the highway so they had a little more time.

Hillary had arrived at Brian's room and they had decided to leave immediately.

Just then Brian got a call from his friend Steven. "Hey Brian, what should I do? It looks like the rioters are heading this way."

"Umm, well you can come with us if you want. Me and Hillary are leaving."

"Do you have a car?"

"No..I don't know what we're gonna do yet," Brian responded.

"Well I live in a different direction than you...I'm gonna try finding someone with a car who lives near me."

"Are you sure you'll be OK?" Brian asked.

"Yeah, I hope so."

"OK, well if you change your mind just call me...Hill just told me that you and your family can come to her house if it gets too dangerous up here."

"OK I'll keep that in mind."

"Stay safe, bye."

When he hung up, Brian said a prayer that his friend, as well as Hillary, would get through this alright.

He then called his best friend Todd and told him basically the same thing he told Steven.

"OK honey let's go!" he said go Hillary when he put his cellphone away.

Brian and Hillary rushed down the stairs of the building to the parking lot. The rioters were getting closer.

Brian wished he had a weapon to defend Hillary with, but he didn't so he picked up a wooden bar that was lying amid some random trash on the ground near a garbage can, feeling kind of helpless.

He didn't know what to do. The mob was approaching from several directions.

Brian looked around. The rioters were in view now and they looked very wild, and were committing horrible crimes.

There appeared to be now way out.

Terrified for his girlfriend's safety, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, you know how much I love Hill. Please help us get out of here."

He kept looking around but all he saw were parked cars. Then he noticed a police car off to the side poking out from behind a wall. Holding Hillary by the hand he ran over and opened the door. The keys were in the ignition, and the car was on. Brian said "Thank you Dear Lord!" and said to Hillary "get in the other side honey."

Then he jumped into the drivers seat and threw the cop car into reverse to get away from the wall. He yanked the wheel all the way to the left, making a hard right turn and nearly hitting a couple of rioters.

"Lock your door Hill!"

Then his cell phone rang and it said "Incoming – Todd."

Brian was extremely loyal to his best friend and quickly answered the call.

"Brian what are you and Hill doing about this! I think we're gonna die!"

"Calm down, don't panic" said Brian hoping Todd wouldn't be able to detect the fear in his voice.

"Where are you?"

"Outside my dorm"

"OK that's pretty close to where we are...just STAY there are I'll pick you up in two minutes!"

Brian sped around a corner with the back of the car swinging all the way to the other side of the road. He drove across the soccer field, and pulled up near Todd.

"What the hll man! You're in a POLICE CAR!!! Are you crazy???"

"Get in don't just stand there!"

Todd jumped in the back and Brian took off, driving over a curb and knocking over a stop sign as the police car roared onto the highway.

Chapter 4

“Patrol 4, what’s your location, over?” the radio in the police car crackled.

Brian looked down at the radio. He didn’t know what to do. Should he answer? What should he say? He figured that even in an emergency like this one, the police would not take kindly to someone commandeering one of their vehicles.

“Patrol 4, this is dispatch, what’s your location, OVER!” the radio repeated.

“Brian, you have to answer,” Hillary said. “You can’t just ignore him.”

Brian knew she was right. She’s always right, he thought to himself. She’s so smart, he said to himself. So much more intelligent than me. Thoughts flashed through his mind of all the times she had helped him study for math tests.

Brian picked up the radio microphone. He had no idea what to say.

“Patrol 4, COME IN, over!”

The dispatcher sounded like he was both worried and angry at the same time.

“Ummm...10-4?” Brian said hesitantly into the radio.

“Patrol 4, where are you, over? Why didn’t you respond to the last three transmissions?”

“Uh...I’m pursuing a suspicious car down the Interstate over”

“Is this officer Wilson?”

Brian considered saying yes, but if Officer Wilson, wherever he was, was injured or in danger, he didn’t want to lie. He knew he couldn’t.

He put the radio down, and ignored the repeated and urgent transmissions from the dispatcher ordering him to “return to base NOW.”

Brian kept his eyes on the road, driving around cars that blocked the way. Traffic was moving very slowly. Brian really hoped the traffic would clear up. He was running out of gas and he wanted to get to Hillary’s house in Manassas before nightfall. After dark, he knew things would be a lot more dangerous. He also knew that soon the police would be looking for the missing patrol car. He certainly didn’t want to be stopped and arrested.

The only concern occupying Brian's mind at the moment was to get Hillary home. He was scared out of his mind that she might get hurt by the rioters or by other criminals. Even the thought of her being hurt was more than he could bear. He just wanted to put his arms around her and hold her.

Hillary knew what Brian was thinking and how worried he was about letting her down. Every so often she would put her hand on his shoulder or look over at him and say "I trust you Brian" or "I know you'll get us out of this."

Todd wasn't talking much in the back seat. Brian assumed he was worried about his family and thinking about their safety.

"Why won't this traffic move faster!?" Brian shouted in frustration, slamming his hand down on the horn.

Then suddenly he remembered that the police car had a siren and a loudspeaker.

He pushed the button marked "siren" and turned on the loudspeaker.

"OK this is the police...um...everyone move to the side of the road immediately!!!"

Some people moved but most didn't have enough room to maneuver since the traffic was bumper to bumper. Realizing that this wasn't working, Brian turned the wheel right, piloting police Crown Victoria over to the shoulder, which was clear.

"YES!!!" He shouted in relief, as the cop car roared down the shoulder. Brian kept his speed at about 90 miles an hour.

Pretty soon they had cleared the traffic jam, but then there was another problem. The gas tank was almost empty, according to the gas gauge. Brian knew that there was a rest stop only a couple of miles ahead, and pressed his accelerator all the way down.

A minute later he spotted the rest stop and made a hard right, speeding down the ramp, almost losing control of the Crown Vic. He pulled up at a gas pump.

Brian opened the door of the car and looked around the area quickly, to make sure there were not any visible threats lurking. There was no other car at the pump.

"Hill, Todd, stay in the car," he said.

Then he walked up to the pump, pulled out his wallet, found his credit card, and swiped it. He then pumped a full tank of gas into the car.

When he was done he got back in.

“Brian, umm...” Hill looked at him, slightly embarrassed. “I have to go to the bathroom. I haven’t gone for while.”

D*mn, Brian thought to himself. He wished she didn’t have to go. Brian really wanted to get to Hill’s house before dark, and in addition, the only bathroom was in a small, very dirty looking building about 50 yards from where the pumps were. It seemed to have several entrances and looked like the perfect place for an ambush if there was anyone lurking there. No one seemed to be around. To make matters worse, Brian didn’t have any weapon.

“OK Hill I’ll go with you,” he said. Her look showed that she was very scared, and grateful for his protection.

They got out and after Brian and Hillary had walked a few feet towards the building, Brian changed his mind.

“Hill, I really don’t like the look of that building. Someone may be hiding there, and its very deserted. Can you go in those trees over there?” Brian asked, pointing to the woods on the side of the road.

“Yeah,” she said.

Brian didn’t like the idea of letting her go off into the trees by herself either. Anyone could be in those woods waiting.

“Hill, do you mind if I come with you? I’ll stay far enough away to give you privacy.”

“ Sure,” she replied.

Hillary knew that Brian would give her privacy. He was such a gentleman. That was one of the things she liked the most about him. He was very chivalrous and had very conservative views with regard to relationships. Brian strongly believed in waiting until marriage before sleeping with a woman. He even got very shy when she kissed him. He treats me like a princess, she thought affectionately. She knew he would always be loyal to her no matter what and she could trust him completely. She knew he would do anything to keep her safe.

When Hillary came back, she and Brian walked back to the car.

They got back in and Brian turned the key in the ignition.

Before he could switch gears from Park to Drive, Todd said “Umm..I have to go too, Brian.”

“OK, hurry up,” Brian replied in an exasperated tone. “I really don’t want to be stuck out on the road at night.”

“OK I’ll be right back.”

Todd disappeared behind some bushes and returned a moment later.

Glad they could get back on the road, Brian fastened his seatbelt and noted that Hillary had already done the same.

He drove back up the ramp onto the freeway.

There was almost no traffic on the roads. Only a few cars here and there. Brian wondered what that meant. There should be a lot of cars, he thought. It was rush hour. He looked at the clock on the dashboard. It said 5:18 PM. With a feeling of uneasiness, Brian kept driving.

He drove over a bridge, and then the road wound down into a valley. Brian kept driving, still keeping his speed around 90 miles and hour. He knew it would be safer to go slower, especially since the road was winding and had a lot of sharp curves. But he desperately wanted to get Hillary home before dark. He wasn’t too familiar with these roads, and didn’t want to get lost after dark. Also, he wouldn’t be able to see what was on the road after dark and certainly didn’t want to car to break down.

The sun was slowly sinking down behind the trees, and the glare made it hard to see the road ahead. Brian kept driving. The road crested a hill and then went back down into another valley. Brian saw a very sharp curve coming up and reduced his speed to 70 miles an hour. But it was still too fast. The car sped around the curve,

And right into a telephone pole that was down over the road.

SMASH!!

Brian felt the impact as his chest slammed against the steering wheel. Then the airbag deployed, forcing him back in his seat. The car came to a stop.

“Oh my God, is everyone OK? Hill, Hill, are you OK?” Brian asked in a terrified voice. If Hill was hurt he would never be able to forgive himself. I’m so stupid, he thought to himself. I shouldn’t have been driving so fast.

“I’m OK Brian” Hill said.

“Are you positive?”

“Yeah, I’m OK.”

Hillary knew what Brian was thinking and that he blamed himself for the crash. She put her arm around him and embraced him.

“It wasn’t your fault sweetheart. Don’t worry.”

Brian held her as tightly as he could and kissed her forehead.

“I’m OK too,” said Todd from the back seat.

“Alright, now what do we do?” Todd asked.

Brian was worried.

“I don’t know if this pole fell across the road or it was put there by someone who may still be waiting in ambush outside,” Brian said.

“I’m going to get out and inspect the damage to the car. Hill, get behind the wheel. If anyone approaches, I’ll jump in the back and you drive off.”

“OK,” she said. She admired him for thinking of all these scenarios for the fallen pole. Brian had very good critical thinking skills, she thought.

Brian cautiously got out and walked to the front of the car. The front was completely smashed into the pole. One of the tires looked twisted in the wheel well. Brian got back in the car and tried the engine. The car restarted, but it would not back away from the pole. He tried again, but it would still not back away. Brian got out and looked at the front of the car again. He got down on his knees and looked under the car. What he saw made his heart sink.

There was a puddle of gasoline under the car and more was leaking out every second.

Brian ran back to the drivers seat and shut the car off.

“It’s leaking gas,” he said.

“Let me get out and look,” said Todd. He got out of the car.

Brian was extremely concerned. He knew that with the car disabled, they would have to walk to rest of the way. Darkness was setting in and if they stayed where they were, anyone driving by could attack them.

Adding to his concern was the downed telephone pole. It didn't seem like anyone was around, but he didn't know for sure.

He voiced these concerns to Hillary and she started to cry. "I'm really scared Brian," she whimpered.

"Don't worry, I'll protect you," he said, but he felt very uneasy.

He hugged her.

"Let's get out sweetheart," he said.

They got out of the car. It was then that Brian remembered that Todd had gotten out. Brian looked around but his friend was nowhere to be seen.

A wave of terror swept over Brian. They were stuck in a valley in the middle of a forest somewhere and now Todd had disappeared. He looked wildly around for Todd or anyone who might be hiding.

Hillary was now shaking with fear. Brian knew that if there were multiple attackers he would certainly not be able to defend her successfully. He would die fighting before he let them hurt her, but he would not win. He imagined what they would do to the person he cared about more than anyone else in the world.

Brian began to pray. "Dear Jesus, my best friend, I'm so scared for Hill. Please help us. We're out here all alone and I'm so scared that someone is gonna attack us. Lord, I'm not scared for my own safety, I'm just so scared for her safety."

After praying, Brian felt a little better. He knew God had heard his prayer, and he had faith that Jesus would help.

He realized that no one had attacked them yet, and even though he assumed that there were bad people around, since he could not think of another explanation for Todd's absence, he decided that they could not just stand there.

"Hill, I'm scared that there are criminals out there in the woods but we can't just stay here. We have to keep moving."

"Alright," she said.

Brian tried the radio in the car again, but it didn't work. He figured that it had gotten busted in the crash.

He then opened the trunk of the car and found a canteen of water, some first aid gear, a powerful flashlight, and some flares. Leaving the flares, since he already had the clothes and food they had

brought with them to carry, he took the other things.

He then took Hill's hand and they walked cautiously into the woods. Darkness set in as the setting sun sank below the trees.

Chapter 5

Brian and Hillary had been walking through the woods for about half an hour when Brian decided to stop and check his map. The map was simply a road map, like you might get at AAA or somewhere like that. But Brian was using his compass to calculate which way they had to walk in order for him and Hillary to reach a highway that was right near Hillary's hometown of Manassas. From that highway, they could try to catch a ride from a police officer or something, or if worst came to worse, just keep walking to Hillary's house, since by then they would be in a familiar area.

The two young people took a rest for a few minutes, and took a drink of water. Then they continued on.

Soon it got dark, as the sun finally disappeared over the horizon. Brian wanted to turn on his flashlight, but he suspected that there might be someone else in these woods, since Todd had disappeared. On the other hand, they had not been attacked yet, and he had not been able to detect any sign that they were being followed.

Pondering the whole mystery, Brian just couldn't figure it out. If someone had kidnapped his friend from right next to the car after the crash, then why hadn't they attacked him and Hillary yet? The only logical explanation he could come up with was that whoever it was lurking, if there was anyone, might think that they had armed themselves with a handgun from the police car.

It had gotten so dark that Brian could not see anything in front of him.

"Hill, I don't like this," he said uneasily. "We should have hit the highway at least an hour ago."

"Are you sure we're going in the right direction?" she asked.

"Um, well I've been checking the compass and the map says that the highway is to the south of us, so as long as we go south, we should hit it."

Brian decided to turn on his flashlight. If someone was following them, they probably knew where he and Hillary were anyway, and they couldn't just blunder around in the dark. They might fall into a ravine, or walk into a tree, or be attacked by an animal with no warning. A light might scare off animals. Of course, the same light would attract humans to them and give away their location, but Brian felt that traveling at night in complete darkness was even more dangerous. Plus, if they had a light on, at least they could try to see if anyone was around them. And also, he had to keep checking the compass.

Brian clicked his light on. Immediately a very bright beam shone in front of them. The police flashlight he had taken from the squad car had full battery power, apparently. Brian thanked God for that.

They kept walking and about twenty minutes later Brian thought he saw light through the trees.

"I think that's the highway," he whispered to Hill.

They increased their pace and hurried toward the light. Brian briefly wondered if the light might not be the highway, but might be another flashlight or something, but he noticed that the trees were thinning and he heard the sound of a few cars speeding by.

They were about fifty yards from the highway when they heard branches snapping and leaves rustling loudly...it was clear that someone was charging right towards them.

Immediately, Brian turned off the light and pulled Hill off to one side, moving out of the pursuer's path. As quietly as possible, they hid in some thick foliage nearby.

Brian could hear the sound of a man's voice, cursing. Whoever was out there was slapping foliage, searching wildly for them.

Brian held the flashlight like a club, ready to smash in the head of anyone who threatened his beloved Hill.

However, he was very frightened. What if the man had a gun or knife? He only had a flashlight. He silently prayed that the man wouldn't find them.

But the man kept coming closer and closer, moving deeper into the thicket that they were hidden in. Brian silently moved from a crouch to a half-standing position, holding the flashlight in his right hand, ready to swing.

However at that moment, the man stopped moving, stood still, and listened. Brian heard the sound of something moving through the undergrowth off to one side, maybe fifty feet away from where the man was. Brian knew from the sound that it was not a human...maybe a deer or something? In any case, the man evidently did not know the difference between sounds that various animals make, and he charged noisily off toward the creature, whatever it was.

Brian and Hill stayed in their hiding place without moving or talking for another few minutes, until it became clear that the man had moved off. They could still hear him crashing through the underbrush as he moved away from them.

As soon as he felt the danger had passed, Brian and Hill got up, and holding hands, they moved as swiftly, but quietly as possible, towards the highway. Brian saw several stores in the distance, once they

reached the highway, and staying just inside the treeline, so no passing drivers would see them, they eventually reached town.

They walked down one of the main streets, and then down some side streets. Hill was very familiar with this area and knew exactly where she was going.

At last, they reached her house. Brian noticed that all the lights were on. Hill's dad's car was in the driveway. Apparently he had returned from NC a day early when he heard about what had happened.

Brian and Hill ran up to the front door and rang the doorbell. The door opened and Hill's dad appeared, wearing an AR slung over his back. Brian realized that it was his own AR, which he had purchased and entrusted to Hill's dad for safekeeping while he was at college.

Hill's mom came to the door too, and they were overjoyed to see Hill and Brian. Her parents embraced her, and then thanked Brian for getting her home.

Hill's dad had always liked Brian, since he appeared to be an honorable, gentlemanly young man, with values you don't see too much in kids these days. He had always trusted that Brian would do whatever it took to protect his daughter, and now his feelings were vindicated.

Hill's dad looked Brian straight in the eye, then embraced him. He knew he didn't have to thank Brian, since Brian loved Hill as much as he did.

"I'm proud of you son," said Hill's dad.

Hill's mom made dinner, and then Brian showered. He was covered in dirt and grime from hiking through the woods all night.

When Brian came back downstairs, Hill, her parents, and her little sister were sitting around the living room coffee table, watching the news.

"Rioting, mainly in urban areas, by people who are angry that welfare and Medicaid will be temporarily suspended due to the bankruptcy of the federal government, is spreading into the suburbs. Rioters from DC, some heavily armed, and traveling in large groups, have moved into residential areas in Maryland and Virginia, and there are widespread reports of murder, arson, rape, and theft. Some homeowners have defended themselves, and a small number of rioters have been killed. The MD and VA national guards are currently in Iraq, leaving those states unprepared to deal with such massive rioting. The governors have declared a state of emergency."

“Looks like the rioting is going to spread to out here soon enough,” said Hill’s dad. “Manassas is pretty close to D.C.”

“Well, when they come, we’ll be ready for them.” Said Brian, as he loaded mags for his AR-15.

Hill’s dad nodded grimly.

After reporting domestic news, the reporter on CNN then moved to what was happening overseas.

“China continues to deploy more tanks, soldiers, and missiles across from Taiwan. Meanwhile, the Chinese have offered peacekeepers to help quell the rioting in the United States, since our own military is in Iraq. President Bush has stated that American troops will “not leave Iraq to the mercy of terrorists. We can and will deal with this rioting with LAW ENFORCEMENT personnel.”

“The Democratic congressional leadership, meanwhile, has openly stated that they are considering the offer of peacekeepers, and Speaker Nancy Pelosi has been in close contact with UN Secretary General Bam, who replaced Annan recently.

“India, Indonesia, Brazil, and South Africa have also offered peacekeepers to the United States, while Russia and France have said they are considering an offer.”

“However, President Bush has remained firm that no foreign troops are allowed on US soil at this time.”

“We just have breaking news that North Korea, which tested a small nuclear weapon in early October, and a larger, 20 Kiloton weapon on Halloween, has announced that they will never give up their weapons of “national sovereignty” as the North Korean Defense Minister put it in a press conference just an hour ago.”

“North Korea continues to build up forces on its border with the South, but says that they are for a training exercise, not combat.”

“We’ll be back after a short break.”

For a few moments, everyone in the room was silent, just taking in all of the information that had been on the news and thinking about it.

Then Brian said, “Things look pretty bad, with the rioting and over in Asia, too. If things get worse, it might not be safe to stay this close to DC. If China or North Korea decided to nuke us, DC will likely be hit first, though I don’t know if the Koreans have missiles that can reach the east coast.”

“Well son, I agree with you, but where would we go?” Hill’s dad asked.

“Umm, I have some land in North Carolina that I saved up some money for and bought about a month ago, just in case something like this happened.”

Hill’s parents stared at Brian in surprise. Oh course, Hill already knew about the land Brian had bought, since he told her everything.

“Well that was mighty wise of you to do, son,” said Hill’s dad.

“We could all go down there if it gets to dangerous here,” said Brian.

“What about your parents?” asked Hill’s mom.

“Well they’re out West, they moved when I went to college, and with all the airports closed down because of the rioting, there’s no way I can get there. But even if I could, I wouldn’t leave Hill.”

Hill smiled affectionately at him.

“Ok then, that’s our plan,” said Hill’s dad. “If things get too dangerous here, we head down to Brian’s land in NC.”

Later that night, Brian and Hill’s dad decided to do an inventory of all the weapons they had. Brian had his AR-15 and 11 30 round mags. He also had a 1911A1, and 6 eight round mags, and his Glock 9mm, with 4 12 round mags. Brian had 5,000 rounds of .223, 1,000 rounds of .45, and 2,000 rounds of 9mm.

Hill’s dad had a .30-’06 hunting rifle, and 200 rounds of that caliber. He also had two shotguns, a Mossberg 500 and a Remington 870. He had about 1,000 shotgun rounds total of various kinds. Lastly, he had a Smith n Wesson .357 revolver, and 300 rounds of ammunition.

It was decided that tomorrow, they would go to the local gun shop and get a lot more ammo.

Over the next few days, things continued to deteriorate. In response to the rioting, the Democratic controlled legislature passed a law banning all firearms sales of any sort, as well as ammunition sales, anywhere in the country. The ATF was ordered to enforce this law as strictly as possible.

A bill that would ban all guns was introduced, and this law had provisions for confiscation as well.

“If the rioters do not have guns, the police will be able to stop the riots without being in danger of being fired on,” insisted Senator Meade of Oregon, the Senate majority leader.

This bill was ferociously opposed by conservative Republicans, who argued that banning guns would leave innocent civilians defenseless, but liberal republicans and democrats were uniting to rush the measure through Congress.

Meanwhile, Mexicans bent on murder, rape and destruction were flooding across the Southern border. The Border Patrol had all but abandoned their posts. The Mexicans, many of whom were organized into military units by gang leaders, and aided by Mexican Special forces, were attacking white ranches and killing and torturing the owners.

The Democratic dominated congress refused to act, calling for an amnesty program instead, and insisting the attacks on ranchers and their families were happening because the Mexicans were angry that they were not getting amnesty.

The President was happy to sign an amnesty plan into law.

As law and order fell apart more and more each day, the politicians in Washington began to talk more and more of bringing in UN peacekeepers. The Democrats seemed to prefer this idea than to bringing our own troops home from Iraq to enforce order.

Finally, on the day before Thanksgiving, with every major US city, and most suburbs, as well as the entire SouthWest and much of Texas, in anarchy, the President and Congress made a request to the UN Security Council for foreign peacekeepers.

Immediately, China offered to send 500,000 active troops, 200,000 reserves, and 250,000 police.

India prepared to deploy 370,000 active troops, and 200,000 reserves.

Indonesia offered 80,000 soldiers, 100,000 reserves, and 200,000 policemen.

Brazil announced that it was sending 95,000 regulars and 170,000 reservists to the US immediately.

And South Africa pledged 2,000 special forces.

France also informed the US they had 50,000 rapid reaction troops, including reservists, ready to go.

In all, the UN planned to send over 2.1 million soldiers to the USA as peacekeepers.

Russia was still considering sending some.

The UN peacekeepers also came with huge amounts of equipment to subdue any resistance.

China sent 1,000 tanks and 800 APCs as well as 800 artillery pieces. India sent 600 T-72 tanks and 500 BMP-1s. Indonesia sent 100 Scorpion light tanks and 50 helicopters. Brazil sent 200 Osorio tanks, a number of EE-9 and EE-11 APCs, and 12 Mirage 2000 and 30 F-5EF fighters.

France supplied air support, with 300 Gazelle helicopters, armed with missiles and guns. They also sent 150 Mirage 2000s for air-air and 100 Mirage F-1strike aircraft.

China provided 200 helicopters and 200 Su-27 fighters. India provided 48 MiG-29s, and 180 MiG-21 bisons.

The peacekeepers and their equipment were scheduled to start arriving in five days from the time the resolution was passed.

When they heard that UN peacekeepers would be arriving on the news, Brian, Hill, and Hill's family decided that it was time to leave. Between the rioters and rapacious, brutal, UN troops, it was no longer safe to stay in such a crowded area. Brian's land in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Western NC was remote, and far from large towns.

On Thanksgiving morning, after eating an early lunch, and saying a heartfelt prayer to God, they began to load up the vehicles.

Most of the sheeple neighbors were hiding in their homes in fright, with little food, not knowing what to do.

However, they noticed one man across the street who lived with his wife sitting outside his home in a chair, with a revolver in his belt.

He said he was going to stay and defend his home, and that he wished he had a semi-auto rifle. Brian felt sorry for him, but only had one semi-auto rifle, and even if he had more, wouldn't have given them away.

The man wished them luck. They said thank you.

Brian and Hill's family loaded up the two vehicles with food, water, all their ammo, Brians' NVGs, medical supplies, and some other stuff like books, walkie-talkies, tools, clothes, etc.

With the cars packed completely, they were finally ready to leave. Hill and Brian got in Hill's dad's Land Rover, which he trusted them to drive. Brian asked Hill to drive so he could act as shooter.

Hill's mom drove the other car, with Hill's sister in the back seat, and Hill's dad in the passenger seat armed with his revolver and the Mossberg. The 870 was in the backseat and the hunting rifle was in the

trunk.

Brian gave Hill the 9mm pistol and told her how to use it. He wished he could have given her some practice with it, but this would have to do for now.

He put the .45 1911 in a holster on his belt, open carrying it, which is legal in the Old Dominion state.

He also had his AR-15 and 10 spare mags.

Brian and Hill kissed and embraced for a moment, and then they backed out of the driveway, with the rest of Hill's family following in the Suburban. It was a long drive to North Carolina.

Chapter 6

They drove without stopping, Hill and Brian in the Land Rover and Hill's family in the Suburban, until they crossed the state line from Virginia into North Carolina. Then, Hill's dad came over the walkie talkie:

"Hey guys, I think we need to stop somewhere soon. We need a bathroom break and we should get something to eat."

"Roger that, there should be a rest stop about a mile ahead according to a sign we saw a minute ago. But as for getting something to eat, I don't think that's a good idea. We still have a pretty long drive ahead of us, and it might not be safe to stop somewhere we aren't familiar with to eat. After we take a bathroom break, just eat some of the snacks we brought with us. I really arrive as soon as possible. Things are falling apart quickly, and stopping for a while just isn't safe."

"Well alright, son, I think you're right," said Hill's dad. "We'll stop for only a few minutes to use the bathrooms."

"Roger that, and don't forget to keep your revolver with you at all times."

They parked a distance away from the rest stop building, in a part of the parking lot that was less crowded. Hill and Brian got out of the Land Rover, and Hill's dad, who had parked the Suburban in the next space, walked over to them."

"OK, how about this? First Hill and I will go over to the rest stop, and when we come back, you three go?"

"Sounds good to me."

Brian was pleased to see that Hill had taken the Glock 17 with her. She pulled her sweatshirt down over

it so no one could see it in the waist of her jeans. Brian took his 1911.

"I'll wait outside until you're done, and then you do the same," Hill suggested.

Brian was impressed with her tactical thinking.

They entered the building, and walked towards the bathrooms when they heard a voice behind them.

"Hey little b*****, you're hot!"

Brian and Hill turned around to see five dirty looking Hispanic men approaching. Two kept walking directly towards them, but the others moved to cut them off.

One of the men whistled.

"What you doin' with a whiteboy like that, cutie? I'm a give you some love Mexican style."

Brian was very protective of his girlfriend. He never allowed anyone to talk disrespectfully to her, and in the past had punched people for saying similar things.

"EXCUSE ME??" He said, taking a step forwards.

"What you gonna do you little mother*****" said one of the men.

"This is your last warning, BACK OFF!!!" shouted Brian.

Meanwhile Hill had reached under her sweatshirt and was ready to draw her concealed pistol.

One of the Mexicans pulled a wrench from his pants and charged.

Not willing to escalate the situation, Brian took a step to the side. The Mexican side stepped with him, and swung the wrench. Brian dodged the swing, and gave the Mexican man a right hook to the face. The man took a step backwards.

Meanwhile, three of the other men had backed Hill into a corner. One of the men reached out to grab her. Hill, realizing she had no alternative, drew her pistol.

The three Mexicans moved back a little, saying "f****!" But still blocked her from escaping.

There were still two Mexicans attacking Brian. When he had looked over at Hill, one of the Mexicans hit him over the head with the wrench. Luckily, Brian turned back in time to see the blow and ducked while

moving to the side. However, he still felt the effects of a glancing blow to the head, and fell to his knees. The Mexican raised the wrench again for the kill.

Brian pulled out his gun expecting the man to back off. Instead, while Brian still had his gun only halfway out, the man swung, while the other man kicked Brian in the chest.

Brian rolled to the side, halfway under a table near a Wendy's franchise, and the man kicked him again, in the side. The man with the wrench knocked over the table, and aimed a crushing blow at Brian's head.

With no choice left, Brian drew his .45 and while lying on his back pointed the gun up and shot the man with the wrench in the face. The man fell over backwards.

Hill had looked over upon hearing the shot, and one of the men who was trapping Hill used the opportunity to pull out a Bryco pistol. The man fired wildly at Brian. He hit the knocked over table with one round, and the wall with several others. With no time to take cover, and afraid that the man would next shoot Hill, Brian shot him in the chest twice.

The man fell against the wall, and slid to the ground, still alive but dying, and still trying to raise his weapon. Brian remembered the military saying "two in the chest, one in the head," and walked over to the man and shot him in the forehead.

Two of the other men had fled the scene after the first shot was fired. The third, seeing his two comrades dead, turned to run. Brian hit him with a flying tackle, rolled the thug over, and punched him in the face, knocking him unconscious. He then used the man's shoelaces and tied his hands behind his back. He did not want the man harming other innocent people, or ambushing them on their way back to the cars.

Then he and Hill walked toward the exit. At that moment the manager of the rest stop ran up.

"Hey, you can't leave!" He shouted. "You have to wait for the police."

"We are not staying around waiting to be attacked by someone else," stated Hill. "We are leaving and you cant do anything about it."

"Keep this man here until the police arrive, if they ever do," said Brian, pointing to the bound Mexican.

Then he and Hill walked back to the cars.

Having heard the shots, Hill's dad had realized something serious had happened. He had Brian's AR-15, and was holding it at port arms. Hill's mom was holding the revolver, standing next to her husband.

"What the hell happened in there!" He shouted, upon seeing Hill and Brian running back with pistols

drawn, and Brian's face and sweatshirt cut and stained with blood.

"Some Mexicans attacked us, it's a long story!" relied Brian. "We can't stay here, we have to go. We can stop somewhere on the side of the highway to use the bathroom."

Hill's dad gave Brian his AR-15 back. Then they got in their cars and sped out of the parking lot. There was still no sign of the police.

They stopped fifteen minutes later, driving down a small road that lead off the highway. They took turns using the bushes, while Brian held his AR-15 to his shoulder, pointing it towards the highway, and Hill's dad pointed his shotgun up the road.

Then they got back in the cars and left.

Finally, three hours later, after evading roadblocks set up by either the police or criminals, and traffic jams, they reached the rural area of the Blue Ridge Mountains near where Brian had land. It was dark by then.

Brian said "You can't see it now in the dark, but wait until tomorrow, Hill. It's SO beautiful up in these mountains, especially now that it's autumn. And the land I bought is on high ground and has a wonderful view."

A few minutes later, they arrived, and got out of the cars. Even though Brian felt that there was little danger of anyone lurking around in an area this rural, it didn't pay to take any chances.

"I think we're as safe as we possibly can get up here. There are six other families in the area, all of which are farmers. I've gotten to know them and we're good friends. People in this area don't take too kindly to outsiders, which is a good thing since we are considered locals now. We can trust our neighbors. They are all families with kids, they all go to church, and I think we can band together to help each other."

Hill wasn't surprised that Brian had fit right in with the locals. He was extremely conservative, and very religious, and he loved the South, and even had a Confederate flag (which he planned to put up the next day as soon as they got settled.)

"Well right now, this land is what they call unimproved. I haven't built anything on it yet. So we will have to stay in the cars tonight. Tomorrow we'll go into town and buy some wood, and building supplies, and we can erect a small house, and a shed. I mean to get some bricks, or cinderblocks, or maybe some stone and build a wall around the shed and house, so its fortified like a small medieval farm. Also we will need to stock up on ammo."

"Brian, do you think its safe to go into town with all that's going on?" asked Hill's mother.

“The town is at the bottom of the mountain,” said Brian. “It’s very small, and most of the people are locals. They won’t tolerate any lawlessness. The people who live here are different, and in my opinion, better, than the pathetic pacifists who live up north, even in Northern VA.”

That night, they slept in the cars. Brian wanted to arrange a watch, and have one person awake at each time, but all of them were exhausted, and plus, he felt they would be safe up in the mountains. He would sleep with his gun next to him.

Hill’s family slept in the Suburban, and Hill and Brian slept in the Land Rover. Hill’s parents knew Brian was a gentleman, and trusted him to share the Rover with Hill.

Hill and Brian returned to the Rover and locked the doors. Hill all of a sudden remembered that Brian had been hurt in the fight at the rest stop earlier in the day and had not had time for his injuries to be treated or taken care of.

“Brian, you’re hurt,” she said, touching his face. The cuts on his face had clotted up and the blood had dried, but Hill realized they could still get infected and should be treated.

Brian realized that he had forgotten all about his injuries in the course of the day.

“Wow,” he said, “I completely forgot.”

Hill got out the first aid kit and cleaned the cuts on Brian’s face. One cut had a small piece of glass embedded in it, which she removed. Brian also had bruises, but no cuts, on his side and chest.

“Thanks Hill,” said Brian, after she had finished cleaning his cuts. “I love you so much.”

“I love you too,” she said.

Then they lay down in the backseat, hugging each other, and fell asleep in each others arms.

Chapter 7

The next morning, Brian awoke early. His cell phone had died, and he wasn’t wearing a watch, so he didn’t know what time it was, but the sun was just coming up. It was early in the morning. Hill was still asleep in his arms. She looked so beautiful. He kissed her cheek, and then slowly and gently sat up in the car. Dawn in the mountains was so beautiful, he thought.

The sun had just come up, and he could see the leaves, orange, red, gold, yellow, and brown.

Brian mentally said his prayers, thanking God for getting them safely to the mountains, for giving him the wisdom to buy this land ahead of time, for giving him an awesome girlfriend like Hill, for everything.

Then he got out of the car, and walked over to where the mountain began to slope downwards. He had such an amazing view.

It was so majestically quiet he thought, looking around at the surrounding hills and valleys.

Brian had been thinking for a while, even before all of the events of the recent week, that he should propose to Hill. Especially now that everything was collapsing, he thought both of them should have one thing in the world that was certain. He decided that today he would ask her if she would marry him.

As if it was a sign, Hill came over a couple of minutes later and stood next to him.

“You’re right Brian,” she said, “it is really beautiful. I like how it’s so quiet. This might not make much sense, but I feel like I can think better.”

“No, that makes sense,” said Brian.

He took a deep breath and said, “Hill, umm, can I ask you something? I’ve been thinking about it, and I really want to...I mean...I love you so much and you’re my best friend and umm...will you marry me?” he said, making eye contact.

Hill didn’t seem very surprised by the question.

“Yes, Brian. Of course.”

“Yay!” said Brian, unable to contain his happiness.

He embraced her.

“Umm, when should we tell your parents.”

When they did tell Hill’s parents, they were very happy.

Hill’s dad was glad that she had chosen someone who still adhered to “old” moral values, and would be loyal to her for the rest of his life.

Hill and Brian were married that same day at the small Southern Baptist church in town. Brian had gone around to all the neighbors and invited them. He had explained that it would only be a small wedding, with no party afterwards until they got settled and actually had somewhere to live.

The neighbors offered to put them up until they had their own home, but Brian assured them that

wasn't necessary. They insisted upon helping him build the house and shed though. He thanked them for their help and said if there was anything he could do to help them, just let him know.

After the wedding, Brian and Hill went to the town's hardware store and picked up some lumber, some bricks, mortar, cement, some PVC piping, tools, and cinderblocks, as well as some bales. Hill's dad had emptied his bank accounts and taken all the money in cash before they left.

Brian planned on spending every single penny of the cash as soon as possible, since he didn't think it would have value for much longer.

The owner of the hardware store helped them load the Suburban with supplies, and then told them he would drop the rest off at their land with his pickup truck. One of Brian's neighbors had also brought their pickup truck to haul some of the lumber.

Then they stopped at a food store and bought a couple hundred cans of food. Hill saw water bottles being sold in packs of 30 and suggested they buy some of them. They bought 20 packs, which was about half of what the store had. Brian wanted to save some of the cash to spend on ammo, clothes, a wood stove, a refrigerator, and other things.

They also bought some more packaged food.

Then they went to the town's gun shop and Brian bought 1,000 rounds of .30-'06, for Hill's father's deer rifle, 1,000 rounds of .357 for Hill's dad's revolver, 1,000 shotgun shells of different sorts, 5,000 rounds of .223, and 1,000 rounds each of .45ACP and 9mm. For each type of round, he bought some FMJs and some JHPs. However, because FMJs were cheaper he bought mostly FMJs.

Brian also bought several camouflage outfits, in different patterns. He bought one of each pattern for Hill, himself, and Hill's dad. He bought fall pattern, winter (lot of snow), winter/early spring (some snow) as well as late spring and summer patterns.

He did not buy camo for Hill's mom or sister, because the sister was only a child and much too young to fight, and Hill's mom, he felt, since he knew her very well, would not be much use in combat, and would be better off staying at base (the house). Also, he did not have enough money to buy it for them.

Brian also bought a lot of Hoppes 9, and other cleaning supplies, as well as strong lubricants in case he ever had to bury the guns.

Brian was determined to spend all the cash (Hill's dad had entrusted his son-in-law with all their money to buy things they needed) on items that would be useful in the future, and that they could use or barter after cash had lost its value or it was no longer safe to go into town to buy stuff.

With the very last of the money, he bought seeds of various sorts for a wide variety of plants and

vegetables. He made sure that as many of the seeds as possible were ones that would reproduce. He also bought some thorny plants they could use to secure the perimeter of their property, some razor wire and posts, and 5 chickens, a cow, a mule, 3 goats, and a few rabbits. He also bought a pig from a local farmer.

Since he did not know much about farming, the neighbors promised to help him.

Then they headed back up the mountain, with an enormous amount of new supplies, but no money left.

Brian felt relieved. With all of these plants, seeds, animals, and supplies, they would be semi-self sufficient, and now that the neighbors had banded together with Hill's family (of which Brian was now a part) almost completely self-sufficient. All of the neighbors had larger farms, and raised animals and grew crops.

With the help of all the six neighboring families, the small house and shed, as well as the surrounding wall, were completed all within the same day. Brian and Hill thanked the neighbors profusely, over and over, but did not offer payment since they knew that would offend the neighbors. However, they did promise that whenever the neighbors needed help, they would be there.

While Hill's mom cooked dinner for all who had helped, Hill and Brian furnished the house. They had neglected to bring mattresses, but had sleeping bags. They hooked up the fridge to an old gas powered generator a neighbor who no longer wanted it had sold to them in exchange for some ammunition, and also hooked up some lights to the generator. The house had no heating or AC system. They would have to use the woodstove to keep warm, and maybe at some future time could barter for a heater that could be hooked up to the generator. The generator, however, was old and could not power a lot of appliances at once.

They had no TV but Brian did not consider that a real loss. They could get their news from his portable radio.

The small house had two bedrooms, a kitchen, and a living room. That was it. The house had a front door in the living room and a back door in the kitchen. There would be no furniture until Brian could make some out of wood. The wood stove was put in the kitchen, and Brian and Hill decided that Hill's parents would have one bedroom. The other bedroom would be for Hill and him, and Hill's little sister would sleep in the living room.

They finished furnishing the house, and went outside. Hill's mom had served the neighbors dinner, Brian noted, but she and Hill's dad were over by the edge of the woods arguing. Brian knew that Hill's parents didn't argue much. They went over to see what was going on.

Hill's mom was raising her voice.

“What’s wrong?” Brian asked.

Rolling his eyes, Hill’s dad replied, “your mother-in-law asked one of the neighbors if she could call her sister, to see if she was safe. Well, her sister is scared, and she lives in an area where there are riots. Her sister wants US to go pick her up.”

“Well, of course your sister is welcome here,” Brian said, “but it will be very dangerous to leave here and go driving through all the disorder to find your sister. She may not even be alive by now, as horrible as that might sound.”

“I just talked to her...I can’t let my sister die,” said Hill’s mom, bursting into tears.

“Where does she live?” asked Brian.

“In Massachusetts, Worcester,” replied Hill.

“Do you know how dangerous it will be trying to get there, forget about back?” asked Brian incredulously.

“It’s getting more and more dangerous every hour,” said Hill. “You saw the roadblocks that criminals and looters were setting up. There will be bands of thugs out looking for people to rob.”

Hill’s dad answered, “Hill, Brian, I agree with you but your mom doesn’t. She is determined to go rescue her sister.”

“It will be suicide!” said Brian. “And don’t forget, the UN troops, over 2 million of them, will arrive starting the day after tomorrow. You won’t be safe out there.”

“Well, maybe the UN troops will bring order.” Said Hill’s mom.

Hill’s dad stared at her as if she was crazy.

“Brian, you know that when my wife gets an idea in her head, there is no convincing her not to follow through with it. So I have to go.”

“Sir, you CAN’T! Both of you will most likely die! Things are different now, you can’t just go out there and try to drive all the way up to MA and back.”

“Would you go if it was Hill in Massachusetts?” asked Hill’s mom looking right at Brian.

“Hill is my wife, of COURSE I would go. If I wasn’t with Hill there would be no point in living for me.”

“Well I love my sister as much as you love Hillary.”

Brian didn't know what to say to that. He was silent.

“What if you and I go?” He said to Hill's dad. He nodded towards Hill and Hill's mom. “They can stay here in safety.”

“NO, I won't stay here if you go!” said Hill.

“Son, I can't ask you to do that, you've never even met my wife's sister, you shouldn't have to make Hill a widow for her the day after your wedding.”

“Well then none of us should go!” Brian looked at Hill's mom. “If you go, you will most likely die before finding your sister.”

“I'll take that chance,” said Hill's mom.

“Son, you see, there is no other way,” said Hill's dad. “I have to go with her. She insists on going. We'll leave tonight. The way things are going, we'd better try to get up there while there things have not completely collapsed.”

Hill looked at her mom. “Mom, I know how much you love Aunt. But you have no chance of reaching her.”

“Hill, I'm going to try...I know this sounds like a foolish thing to do, but you don't understand, I WILL NOT let my older sister, who was almost as much a mom to me as my mom when I was growing up, I cant let her die. She has no one aside from me. I have to do this.”

While Brian knew that it would be extremely dangerous, he admired Hill's mom for her determination to rescue her beloved sister.

“Are you SURE you don't want me to go?” he asked.

“If you go, I go!” Hill said.

“Son, I told you, I won't let my daughter come, and if you go, she will. Stay here. Pray for us. Hopefully we will make it back. Take care of Hill's little sister. Take care of Hill. I know how much you love her.”

Brian loved his in laws and tears traveled down his cheeks.

“Son, don't let me ever see you cry.” Said Hill's dad. “We'll be back.”

Hill's little sister ran over then and began screaming and whining that she wanted to stay with Mommy.

But Hill's parents both adamantly told her she had to stay. Furious and in tears, she ran back toward the house.

Brian helped Hill's parents load the car. Hill's dad took his .357 wheelgun and all their .357 ammo (since that was the only gun in that caliber they had.)

He also took his deer rifle, and half the .30-'06 ammo, and one of the shotguns and 200 shells. They took a weeks worth of food and water, and some medical supplies.

Brian went back to the house and got a piece of paper he had saved from a while ago when he had found it in a music book, since he played the piano. He loved this song.

He gave it to Hill's dad. "Sir, this is a hymn I've always liked, singing it makes he feel courageous when I am scared. Take this."

Hill dad thanked Brian. The hymn was "Eternal Father, Strong To Save."

Eternal Father, Strong to save,
Whose arm hath bound the restless wave,
Who bid'st the mighty Ocean deep
Its own appointed limits keep;
O hear us when we cry to thee,
for those in peril on the sea.
O Christ! Whose voice the waters heard
And hushed their raging at Thy word,
Who walked'st on the foaming deep,
and calm amidst its rage didst sleep;
Oh hear us when we cry to Thee
For those in peril on the sea!
Most Holy spirit! Who didst brood
Upon the chaos dark and rude,
And bid its angry tumult cease,
And give, for wild confusion, peace;
Oh, hear us when we cry to Thee
For those in peril on the sea!
O Trinity of love and power!
Our brethren shield in danger's hour;
From rock and tempest, fire and foe,
Protect them wheresoe'er they go;
Thus evermore shall rise to Thee,
Glad hymns of praise from land and sea.

When they were just about to leave, Hill's dad embraced his daughter and then Brian, and then when he released Brian, said, "Son, I don't have to tell you to look after Hill and her sister because I know you will. Hopefully we'll be back soon."

And then they left.

Brian and Hill sadly walked back to the house. They had gone from being a happy family on wedding day to being a split family the same day, with Hill's parents probably going to their deaths.

They ate dinner with the neighbors, who were still there, and then went into the house.

Then Hill said, "Where's my sister?"

They quickly looked in the house, but she was not there. Running outside, they called for her, and the neighbors helped search.

But they couldn't find her.

Then Hill exclaimed "Oh my God, she must have gone with my parents!"

Brian froze in terror. Then he ran to the Suburban. Hill ran with him.

"We have to overtake them and let them know!" Brian exclaimed. "She must have slipped into the Rover while no one was looking!"

Brian hit the gas and the car sped down the mountain road, in some cases taking the sharp curves on two wheels. They saw no sign of the Rover.

"They have almost a fifty minute head start on us," said Brian.

They kept driving until they reached the Blue Ridge Parkway. It was empty of traffic in either direction.

"Your dad is probably driving at top speed. If we haven't overtaken them by now, we never will. Hopefully they find your sister before it's too late and turn around."

Worried sick, they returned home. When they got back Brian realized that both he and Hill had run to the Suburban and driven after Hill's parents without taking any gun. He kicked himself for being so careless.

Chapter 8

Brian and Hill told the neighbors what had happened and they said they would pray.

Then Brian, after saying a prayer for Hill's family himself, turned on his radio. The neighbors and Hill all sat around and listened to the news.

"UN peacekeeping forces are on their way, and will arrive in two days in the United States. The force, which is over 2 million strong, will begin by restoring order to major US cities, and then, by the second week, move into smaller towns, to enforce order in more rural areas.

"The president has warned that any resistance to the UN peacekeepers, who are, as he put it "here for our protection," will be dealt with severely.

"The peacekeepers will also police the southwestern United States, where rancher militias have banded together to defend themselves against what they say are attacks against their families and property by Mexican gangs.

"The president has repeatedly said that the Mexicans are moving into the US in search of better jobs and more freedom, and has warned that any "racist" attempt to stop such immigration will be considered a serious crime. The president maintains that it is the job of the Border Patrol to enforce immigration law.

"The president has declared that martial law is in effect for the entire United States, and citizens are ordered to turn in their private arms to the UN troops, once they arrive.

The Democratic Congress, in a rare bipartisan gesture, has lauded the president for inviting in the peacekeepers."

Brian shut off the radio in disgust. He, Hill, and the neighbors were all of the same mind. They decided to band together and if necessary, fight the UN peacekeepers. Until then, they would help each other, and try to keep a low profile. No one even considered turning in their guns.

Brian said, "We should all get two way radios so we can communicate. Hill and I already have two. I'm sure the stores in town must still have some."

Everyone liked this idea. If all of the seven families could keep in communication with each other, they could warn each other if suspicious people were spotted in the area.

Another man spoke up, "The only way anyone can reach our farms by vehicle is the two lane state road that winds its way up the mountain. If need be, we can block off the road, or at least set up a guard post at the top of the road. The post would be able to see all the way down the mountain, and if someone is coming they can warn us."

"Well I don't think we have to man that post 24/7 just yet, but that's a great idea."

They all decided not to set a watch for the post at all times just yet. They did not feel as if the danger had spread to their area yet.

It was almost 3:00 AM when the neighbors left, after a long discussion of how they would work together in the hard times ahead.

When Brian and Hill returned to the house they were still sick with worry for Hill's family.

They were so worried that they didn't even remember it was the first night of their marriage. They just crawled into a sleeping bag and fell asleep.

Chapter 9

The next morning, they awoke, got dressed, ate a quick breakfast, and then fed the animals.

Later that day, Hill helped Brian make a crude table out of some fallen wood, as well as some chairs and a bench. Eventually Brian wanted them to have a bed, but they had no mattress, and he wasn't skilled enough to make a bed frame.

Brian and Hill also began to fortify and secure their property against intruders. Brian planted some thorny plants (blackberries mainly) around the base of the walls around their house, and since by then they had run out of thorny plants, Brian decided to secure other parts of the property using barbed wire.

They spent the next several hours pounding the wooden posts into the ground and running three strands of razor wire between the posts. They had enough razor wire to secure all their land with the three strand fence.

Brian made sure he put enough razor wire aside to run along the top of the wall that surrounded their house and shed, if the need ever arose.

They decided that during the winter, the mule, goats, cow, chickens, and rabbits could be kept in the shed at night. They would all fit, but only just. Thanks to the materials that the shed was made of, it would be warm enough inside that the animals wouldn't freeze.

Next, Brian and Hill took stock of their armory. They had four guns: The Glock 17, the 1911, the AR-15, and the Remington 870. They certainly had plenty of ammunition for each gun. Brian wished he could have standardized their weaponry by trading the 1911 in for another 9mm Glock. He also wished they had another MBR. But they would have to make do with what they had.

Later, Brian showed Hill how to shoot the pistols, shotgun, and rifle, and how to reload and clean them. He taught her the four rules of gun safety.

After that, they stopped by a Mr. Daniels, one of the neighbors, to help him fix the roof on his barn.

By that time, it was night. They ate dinner with Mr. Daniels' family. He had a wife and two young daughters, aged 9 and 7.

After dinner, the Daniels, Hill, and Brian listened to the news again.

"The UN peacekeepers will arrive within hours from now. Their equipment is on the way as well. A Chinese general has been put in overall command. There are two assistant commanders, a Mexican and an Indian.

"Rioting has reached stratospherical heights in Charlotte, Raleigh, and other major cities, as well as in larger towns. Rioting is occurring in smaller towns as well. Three policemen were killed by looters armed with AK-47s when their patrol car was ambushed in Raleigh. All three died before they could draw their weapons.

"Washington DC is in chaos. The president has fled, and since the VA and MD national guards are in Iraq, there is practically no one left to keep order in the city. The DC police department has disintegrated, with only 1% of officers reporting for duty yesterday.

500 California NG military police were brought in, since most other national guard ground units from most states are in Iraq, but they could not prevent rioters from torching the white house and the Supreme Court building.

The president has vowed that 50,000 Chinese and Indian troops will be in Washington by noon tomorrow, and the riots will be put down."

"We're in for a lot of trouble," said Mr. Daniels. "This is the first time since the war of 1812 that foreign troops have set foot on US soil. Our lives have changed. Things will be different for a long time, if not forever."

"I'm worried about the future too," said Brian.

"But as long as I have Hill in my life, that's all that matters. "

"I'll always have her, no matter what happens." He added.

Mr. Daniels smiled wanly. He felt glad for the newlywed couple and was saddened that the days following their wedding would probably not be happy.

"I wonder what people will do about the UN invaders," he said.

"I think eventually we will have to fight them to free our country," Brian replied.

"I agree" said Mr. Daniels, "will you be willing to fight?"

"If there must be conflict, let it be in my day, that my child may have peace," replied Brian, quoting Thomas Paine.

"That's a good quote," said Mr. Daniels.

"Here's another one I like," Brian said. "The difference between the American Christian and every other person on earth is that he would rather die on his feet than live on his knees."

"George Washington said that"

After talking a little more they said bye to Mr. Daniels and walked back home. Brian unlocked the gate in the wall around their house, and then locked it once they were inside the compound.

Before going to sleep Brian got on the radio.

"This is Brian, over, is everything ok?"

Six replies of yes, or "affirmative" came over the radio.

Brian and Hill then got ready for bed. Since they had been so tired the previous night, tonight would be their honeymoon.

Brian looked shyly at Hill as she kissed him. Then they got undressed and got into bed. Brian was so glad then that he had waited until marriage. He wouldn't want to share such an intimate experience with anyone else in the world except the girl he loved enough to die for.

Chapter 10

The next morning, Brian and Hill had a picnic for breakfast. They went outside, over to near the edge of the mountaintop, where the ground began to slope downwards, where the view was the most beautiful.

They brought a blanket to sit on, and a basket of bread and fruit.

After they were done eating, they lay on their backs, staring up at the sky and talking.

They decided that today they would go hiking in the woods and check out the mountain trails near their property so they could identify chokepoints, observation points, caves, and other points of interest. They thought it would be a good idea to be as familiar as possible with the surrounding terrain, especially if they had to fight in it, if the UN troops ever showed up.

As they lay there, they heard the sound of fighter jets overhead. Three fighter jets appeared. They were pretty high up, but Brian identified them as Russian made MiG-29s, probably Indian since China, Brazil, etc did not use that model.

They went back to the house, checked on the animals, and then dressed themselves in their fall pattern camouflauge.

Brian took his AR-15 and .45 and Hill took the Glock and the shotgun. Then they began to explore the surrounding area.

They traveled along several trails, and noticed several spots that would be good for potential ambushes, fallback points, places for a last stand, etc.

However they did not notice any caves.

Finally, they came to a cliff that overlooked the town down below. Brain raised his rifle so he could look through the scope. They did not have any binoculars. Brian did have a PVS-14 nightscope, however, back at the house.

Brian looked through the regular scope that he had mounted on the carrying handle of his rifle.

Everything looked normal on the edges of town, but when he moved the scope towards the center, he gasped.

There, sitting in front of the town hall, was a T-90 tank, its turret rotating from side to side. The town's gun shop, on the same street, was being emptied of all it's contents. The UN peacekeepers were confiscating the few remaining guns and ammo, as well as NVGs, camoflage, etc.

The gun store owner was being held at gunpoint by a soldier with an AK.

Brian noticed several APCs and trucks on side streets around the town, and a number of soldiers standing around. About a full company, he judged. Around 100 men.

Brian was surprised that the UN forces would be able to move into such a remote town so soon, but there were 2.1 million UN peacekeepers, probably more than enough to occupy every town in the country.

At that moment Mr. Daniels came over the two way radio, "Brian, this is Mr. Daniels, do you copy over? We have a UN vehicle and supporting infantry moving up the road towards the mountaintop. Repeat, a UN vehicle is approaching our homes."

"I'm on my way," replied Brian.

Then he and Hill rushed back to the top of the mountain, where the neighbors, carrying a variety of firearms, had assembled.

Chapter 11

Brian and Hill hurried back up the trail toward the mountaintop where their home was located. They wondered why the UN vehicle Mr. Daniels had told them about over the radio had left the town and traveled deep into the mountains where they and their neighbors lived.

The town at the bottom of the mountains was the nearest town to them, but it was a good half hour drive in an APC from the area in the mountains where they lived.

Running back up the trail, Brian and Hill arrived at the two lane county road that the UN vehicle was traveling up. Mr. Daniels was already waiting, as were Mr. And Mrs. Webber, and Mr. Blackwell and his two teenage sons. Several other neighbors arrived a minute after they did. All of them were armed with various firearms, ranging from pheasant shotguns to deer rifles to semi-autos. Mr. Webber was holding an AK-47 and was wearing a outdoors vest that had ammo pouches which he had filled with eight spare mags. His wife was wearing a holster with a Glock 9.

Mr. Blackwell had a Remington 700 bolt-action, and his sons had pump shotguns. He and a number of the other men had told their wives and daughters to stay inside.

Of the other neighbors who had just arrived, there was an old man, who had a very old looking bolt-action rifle. Brian didn't look at it long enough to determine what kind it was. He also wore a silver revolver in a holster on a leather belt. Even though the old man, Mr. Burns, didn't have a fancy semi-auto "Main Battle Rifle," Brian had been hunting with him, and knew he could accurately hit targets from very long ranges.

The McCalls and the Jacksons were the remaining families in the area, and alerted by radio, they showed up right after Brian and Hill. The Jackson family was made up of a Vietnam veteran man, who had an AR-15, and his wife, who had an SKS but by the way she was holding it, didn't look like she knew how to use it. Mr. Jackson also had a Colt 1911A1 in a drop leg holster. The McCalls were a couple in their early thirties, with two young sons and a young daughter. However a few minutes later Mr. McCall (or Pete, as he liked to be called) sent his wife and young kids back to the house, since he didn't want them to be in danger if the UN troops opened fire. Mr. McCall had a Sig 9mm pistol and a semi-automatic riot shotgun, and wore a bandolier with shells in it. He said he had a rifle back home but had left it with his wife so she could protect herself if necessary.

When everyone was there, Brian reported what he had seen through his scope a few minutes before.

Mr. Webber spoke up. "So, what are we gonna do about the UN troops? When they get within ranger, should we just start shooting?"

Mr. Jackson replied, "No, that would invite a reprisal from the remaining UN troops in town. From what Brian has told us, they have at least a full company, reinforced with APCs and at least one tank. Earlier today we saw planes and one helicopter pass overhead, so I think it's fair to say they have air support too. We don't have the strength to fight off 100 men, and even if we did, they could call for backup."

Mr. Jackson's opinion was highly respected since he had served in Vietnam.

"I agree Bill," said Mr. Blackwell, addressing Mr. Jackson. But we just can't wait until they come up here and surround us."

"Well I think it would be a mistake to shoot them on sight," said Mr. McCall. "Bill's right, that would only lead to the rest of the blue helmets coming up here to kill us all."

Brian was thinking about what they should do, and he had an idea. He stepped forwards.

"How about this?" He asked. "There are twelve of us here, all armed. We could have one or two people stand out in the open, armed only with concealed handguns. The rest of us will hide in the trees and train our long guns on the enemy troops. There can't be too many of them, they have only one vehicle. If they act in a threatening manner, those of us in cover can either announce our presence and show them that they are surrounded, or just open fire. Either way, they will not know how many of us there are."

"Now that's a good idea! It makes sense to me," said Mr. McCall.

"I don't think it's a perfect idea but I cant think of another one," said Brian.

"Which of us will be the greeting party for the UN?" asked Mr. Daniels.

Mr. Burns, the old man, spoke up. "I will, since I probably look less threatening," he said.

He gave his bolt gun to Mr. Webber's wife, who only had a sidearm.

At first Mr. Jackson had volunteered too, but the rest of them convinced him to be one of the hidden shooters, since he had one of the semi-auto rifles, and was a good shooter and had military experience.

"Since it was my idea, I'll do it," said Brian.

The rest of the neighbors nodded approvingly in appreciation for his courage. Hill hugged him.

“Be really careful, sweetheart. If any of them hurt you I will shoot them in the face!,” she said.

He embraced her as tightly as her could and kissed her. God, he loved this girl.

“Here’s my AR-15. I showed you how to use it. Use this instead of the shotgun.” Brian gave her his tactical vest with 10 spare mags and the bayonet for the rifle, as well.

Then it occurred to him that he was in camouflage, and that the UN troops might mistake him for a soldier and shoot him on sight.

He told his concern to the old man, Mr. Burns, whose house was nearest. Mr. Burns went to his house and returned with overalls and a white T-shirt. Brian quickly put these on, folded up his camo and gave it to Hill.

He gave Hill his .45 and stuck the Glock 17 under his shirt.

Then Brian and Mr. Burns stood in the road waiting for the UN to show up.

A minute later, they did.

Brian had been expecting an APC but instead the UN vehicle was a large flatbed truck, with a cloth roof. On each side of the truck, two foot soldiers were walking. They looked like Chinese and were carrying AKs.

The truck stopped and eight more soldiers poured out of the back. They were all Chinese and armed the same as the ones who walked next to the truck. There was one junior officer, who had a pistol in addition to his AK.

The Chinese soldiers formed a circle around Brian and Mr. Burns.

“Can we help you folks?” asked Burns.

“We are UN peacekeepers. We are tasked with the enforcement of order in this sector. We are in charge, and your president has put all local forces under our control. If you do not want trouble, you will obey us.”

A Chinese corporal had read this statement from a sheet of paper. He was clearly a translator, reading a prepared statement.

“Any questions?” asked the translator.

Brian and Mr. Burns wanted to avoid a confrontation, especially since they were completely surrounded. Brian couldn’t help noticing the poor tactics the Chinese patrol used. The driver had remained in the

truck, and the rest of the troops were all encircling him and Mr. Burns, facing inwards.

There was no one keeping a lookout or facing towards the woods.

“No questions.” Said Mr. Burns.

The translator continued with the statement.

“From now on, no civilians are allowed to own guns. As UN peacekeepers, we will enforce the law and protect the civilians.”

At this, the only two other Chinese soldiers present who understood English chuckled and looked knowingly at each other.

“All guns must be turned in to us within 24 hours. We will deal most harshly with any who do not follow this order, which has been signed by your president and the UN secretary general. We have confiscated the records of gun permits and carry licenses from the local sheriffs department, and also gun records from the local guns stores. So if you have guns, we will know about it.”

Brian had bought his guns in Northern Virginia, but they were still papered, and he wondered if the UN would compile all gun purchase lists into a national database. If that was the case, he would be in trouble.

“Also, the UN secretary general has given us permission to take whatever we need, including food and lodging, from American civilians. These civilians will be justly compensated later.”

The translator finished speaking. Then the Chinese officer said something to him. The translator looked at Brian and Mr. Burns and said to them,

“Do you know anyone who has guns?”

“No, sir,” replied Mr. Burns. Meanwhile Brian didn’t like the way this conversation was going and was moving his hand slowly towards his, ready to draw at a second’s notice.

“We aren’t gunowners in these here parts, just peaceful farmers.” Mr. Burns continued.

“Farmers, yes? You have extra food? We have not received food shipments yet, and we are hungry.” Said the translator.

“Oops, I shouldn’t have said that, what should we do?” whispered Mr. Burns to Brian.

“Stop whispering!” ordered the translator in an angry voice.

At that moment, the driver of the truck called to the officer in Chinese. The officer went over to the truck for a minute.

Then he returned. He told the translator something.

“Our logistics officers have finished compiling a list of the local gun purchasers and license holders. We will be returning to town to receive a copy of this list and then in 24 hours deal with those who have not surrendered their guns. If you two have lied to us, you will be sorry. And we will be back for food!”

Then the troops returned to the truck, with none of them covering the others. They just turned their backs on Brian and Mr. Burns, and walked back to the truck and got in. The truck drove off.

As soon as the truck left, the others broke cover and walked over to them. Brian and Mr. Burns told them what had happened.

“This certainly does not look good. We may have to fight them sooner than later.” Mr. Jackson opined.

“Yep.” Said Mr. Burns.

“We don’t stand much of a chance against them. Let’s not use violence unless we really have to,” replied Mr. Webber. “Don’t think I’m a pacifist or a coward, but I am worried what will happen to my family if we fight.”

Brian and the others nodded. They knew how he felt. Brian was willing to fight for his country, but he was terrified of what would happen to Hill if he was killed. He knew they would probably target the families of resistance fighters as a terror tactic.

He wanted to make sure he was always with her in these dangerous times, to protect her.

“OK, I think we should hide our food, and other valuables. That will give them less reason to come up here a lot, if they see we don’t have anything of value,” Mr. Daniels suggested.

“What about our guns?” asked Mr. McCall. “I bought all my guns in town, and I have a NC pistol permit and concealed carry license. Now that the Chinese have the records, they will know I have guns! What should I do? Should I turn them in?”

“Yeah, I’m in the same situation,” said Mr. Blackwell.

Some of the others nodded in agreement.

“OK, who isn’t on the list?” asked Mr. Jackson. “Mine aren’t. I made sure of that and I think Mr. Burns

bought his old hunting rifle and six shooter before they started keeping records.”

Everyone laughed at that one.

“Well, mine are papered, but I bought them in Northern Virginia, not NC. Until they compile a national database, if they ever do, me and Hill should be OK. Also I am under 21 so I have no CCW permit.”

Everyone else had at least some guns that were papered, or had a pistol purchase permit or CCW permit recorded at the sheriff’s office.

They were at a dilemma as to what should be done. No one wanted to turn their guns in, but the Chinese translator had promised that the UN troops would deal “harshly” with anyone who didn’t comply. No one wanted to put their families in danger either.

They had less than 24 hours to decide what to do.

Chapter 12

Hill and Brian walked back home, worried for their neighbors who had guns that were on the lists the Chinese had seized.

When they got home, they were tired from the long hike through the woods they had taken earlier, so they got into their sleeping bag and snuggled together. Brian put his arms around Hill and kissed her. He wondered if there would be fighting tomorrow and was terrified what might happen to his wife. They fell asleep holding each other.

When they awoke a few hours later it was night already since the sun set early in autumn. They got up and checked to make sure the animals had enough food and water.

Then Brian made an open fire outside and cooked dinner, which took the form of a rabbit he had shot. Hill thought it was funny that in most families, it was the wife who cooked, and most husbands expected that, but Brian didn’t, and he really liked to cook, and seemed not to mind doing other household chores as well.

“Can I help?” she asked.

“Sure, Hill! Thanks!” said Brian. “I picked some vegetables from the garden. You can make a salad with those if you want.”

Brian loved eating natural food. He loved growing and hunting his own food rather than buying it from the store.

When the rabbit was done grilling, and the salad was made, they sat down, said a prayer, and enjoyed their meal.

"I wonder if my parents are OK," Hill said.

"Honey its only been two days, they probably haven't even made it up to MA yet."

"I'm so worried for them."

"Me too Hill."

They both prayed for the safety of Hill's parents and sister.

They then talked about other things, remembering college and all the times they had together before they got married. Brian told Hill how glad he was to marry her.

They were still sitting there, with the fire dying down, when they heard sticks cracking in the nearby woods.

"Someone's there. Not an animal!" whispered Brian.

He and Hill didn't bother asking "who's there?" because they knew if it was a friend, they would announce themselves, and if not, then it was better if the intruder didn't know they had been detected.

Brian and Hill ran back through the gate in the wall of their compound. Brian was glad he had built a wall around their house and shed. The garden, animals, and their home were all inside the walls.

He shut the gate and locked it, and they went into the house quietly.

Brian realized he should have taken at least a handgun out with him when they had been eating dinner. He picked up his AR-15 and climbed up onto the roof of their house. Maybe he would build a watchtower sometime, he thought to himself.

Brian helped Hill up onto the roof. She had taken the Glock along with her. He looked through the nightscope of his AR-15, sweeping it in a circle.

"Maybe it's UN commandos," whispered Hill.

"Or criminals," replied Brian.

He couldn't see anyone. If there was anyone out there, and he was pretty sure there was, they were either well hidden or had passed or had melted back into the trees.

He looked again and this time saw something out of place. There was a large clump of foliage at the edge of the trees where it didn't belong. The foliage did not match with the plants that surrounded it. Brian could tell this through his generation 3 PVS-14 nightscope.

He yanked back the charging handle of the AR-15 to chamber a round, and clicked off the safety.

He aimed the gun at the clump. He wondered if he should fire. If he did, it would alert the neighbors and probably send them running. But what if there were intruders in other places on the mountaintop, ready to attack his neighbors. When they came to his aid, at the sound of the gunshot, their own families would be left unguarded. Brian was glad he was on a sloped roof, on the opposite side from the enemy. He was only poking the rifle and the top of his head over the roof, which would make it hard for them to see him even with NVGs unless they were looking at the roof.

Brian knew that only a military unit would be wearing ghillie suits and expected an attack. Why else would they be here? Looking carefully, he could spot two more soldiers in ghillie suits. Scouts maybe?

"Hill, I don't want to let them out of my sight. Go in the house and radio the others and tell them what we see."

Hill did so.

Then she climbed back onto the roof.

"They were all really scared, especially the Daniels and McCalls, who have young kids. But the others were really scared too. Except Mr. Jackson, who said he has a few surprises ready for them."

"I really want to go help the neighbors, but how would we choose? They are all too spread out, too far away from each other. And it would be insane to venture outside with those wackos in ghillie suits running around."

Brian and Hill advised the neighbors to stay in their homes. But he warned them that the Chinese are probably listening in, since they are talking on a regular frequency.

We have to establish codes, if we ever get a chance, Brian thought.

Brian had decided to get off the roof in case there were any enemies approaching from the other side of the house. If there were, they would have an easy shot at him if they had NODs.

All of a sudden the radio crackled.

“Brian, this is Jackson, over...I have night vision and I am observing a detail of armed men in ghillie suits crossing an open area in front of my house. They do not appear to be headed towards my house, over. They are moving towards the McCalls.”

“Oh my God! Oh my God!” stammered Mrs. McCall on the radio.

“I read you over,” said Brian. “What should we do?”

He realized that even if the Chinese were listening in there was nothing they could do about it and they had to communicate.

“I am willing to go out and try to ambush them from behind,” said Mr. Jackson.

“Want my help?” asked Brian.

“You’re not going ANYWHERE!!!” Hill said, with a determined look in her eyes that Brian had never seen before at least to this extent.

“Calm down honey, we haven’t decided anything yet.”

Brian picked up his walkie-talkie. “Mr. Jackson, what have the others said?”

“No one else has night vision so they don’t know if they are being surrounded or if there are intruders on their property. And they are obviously not going to venture outside to go check. Everyone with a wife and/or kids is staying to protect them, which is understandable. Except for Burns. He and his wife don’t think they will be targeted since they are so old and...hey, I am out in the forest now...I am gonna try to make my way to your place so we can talk in person, alright? The d*mned blue beanies are probably listening in.”

“10-4,” said Brian.

He would never leave his wife unprotected and realized that despite what he had said to Mr. Jackson he would not be leaving to help the McCalls.

“Honey,” he said, “I won’t leave you here. I’m gonna stay here with you. I wish I could help the McCalls, though.”

“I know how you feel Brian, don’t feel guilty, it’s not your fault,” she said.

Brian felt that Mr. McCall was a reasonable person and would do what was best for his family. Brian

thought about what he would do if the men in the ghillie suits knocked on their door.

His first instinct would be to scream “MOLON LABE!!!” and go down shooting and if he was unmarried, that is exactly what he would have done.

But he had Hill to think about, and she meant more to him than anything in the world. There was no way he would put her in danger.

He hoped the Chinese or whoever was out there would leave them alone.

He remembered a quote from the movie Patriot, where the main character had said that as a parent he didn't have the luxury of principles, and had to put his family first and stay out of the war, even though he wanted to fight.

Brian knew in his heart that if he shot back, the UN soldiers would kill not only him, but his beloved wife. He came to the conclusion that he would hide his guns if they ever came to search.

At that moment, Mr. Jackson came over the radio. “Brian, I'm outside! Don't risk opening the gate, I'll climb over the wall.”

“There are thorny blackberry bushes planted around the wall. Climbing it would be a bad idea. Wait until I open the gate.”

Chapter 13

Brian realized that Mr. Jackson may have been taken prisoner and forced to radio that message. If that was the case, he didn't want the Chinese to see that he had a gun when he opened the gate.

“Hill,” he said, “You know we can never give up our guns right? If we do, they will be able to do anything they want to us. So we have to be careful to make sure they don't take them either. Take the Glock and the AR-15 and cover me. If whoever is out there attacks, shoot at them. If they don't attack but demand to search our property, hide the guns in the shed under all the hay. I cant think of a better hiding place now.”

Brian opened the gate and Mr. Jackson hurried in, moving in a military style half crouch. Brian didn't have his nightscope, and couldn't see if the enemy soldiers were still lying outside in the trees.

Mr. Jackson had a Vietnam era helmet on his head, which he had covered with plants native to the area. He was also wearing camo pants and a tactical vest filled with mags over a green T-shirt. He had his AK, with a spare mag taped to the engaged mag. A bayonet was fixed to the barrel of the AK. Jackson was wearing his .45 and had 4 spare mags on his belt for that, too. He was wearing PVS-7 NVGs on a helmet

mount.

“Is your wife all by herself? You’re taking a risk.” Said Brian.

“She’ll be fine, she knows how to shoot,” said Mr. Jackson.

“Look Brian, I think you need to protect your wife. Stay here. You just got married. Your responsibility is to your wife. Judging by McCall’s personality, and I’ve known him for a while, he’ll hand over his bolt action rifle, pheasant shotgun and pistol without too much of a fuss. He likes guns, but they aren’t that important to him. We, on the other hand, know that giving up our guns is basically a death sentence.”

“I’ve come to pretty much the same conclusion myself,” said Brian. “I already decided to stay and protect my wife. I wouldn’t leave her alone for anything.”

“A wise decision son. I’m about to do the same thing. But first I am gonna see what the Chinese are up to. If they just take McCall’s guns and he gives them up without a fight, then I won’t open fire. But if they try to harm his family or anyone else’s family then I will hit them and try to distract them so they leave the family alone.”

“OK, God bless Mr. Jackson.”

“You watch your six, son.”

Chapter 14

Brian went back to the house and told Hill what had happened.

They sat tensely wondering what would happen.

Then a few minutes later they heard a burst of small arms fire. That burst was followed by a single rifle shot, and then a fusillade of fire followed by return fire.

Brian grabbed the radio.

“Mr. Jackson, anyone, this is Brian, come in!”

There was silence for a minute and no response, then Mr Jackson said:

“Brian, I guessed wrong about what McCall would do! I hid in the woods near his house and watched. About 10 Chinese in ghillie suits approached his house. Two hung back near the trees to cover the others and two guarded the back door. The remaining six went up to the front door and when McCall

answered it demanded to search the house. From what I could tell, he had tried to hide his guns in his oven, of all places! When they found them, he pulled his Sig and shot five of the Chinese in close quarters before they could lift their rifles!! The remaining one shot him and wounded him in the legs, but then his wife grabbed the shotgun out of the oven and wasted the remaining Chinese.”

Mr. Jackson was quiet for a few seconds. It sounded as if he was trying to E & E. Then he continued in a much lower voice:

“So as soon as the first shots were fired, I took out the two who were covering the front door. The two in back came running around to the front, and I shot them too. Then I ran into the house. Right now I’m helping the McCalls over to Daniels’ place, he’s nearest. I think -----

At that moment Mr. Jackson’s voice was cut off and he stopped talking.

A second later there was a deafening explosion, and Brian and Hill were knocked to the ground.

Chapter 15

Brian lifted himself up onto his knees. His lip was bleeding where it had hit the floor when he was knocked over. His first thought was if Hill was OK.

He looked over and saw she was sitting up.

“Are you OK Hill?” he asked.

“I’m fine Brian. What was that?”

Brian picked up his AR-15 where it lay on the floor and charged out of the house, yelling over his shoulder.

“Hill stay inside, get down on the floor!”

Brian saw that the gate to their compound was blown to pieces, probably by an RPG. He lifted the rifle and looked through the nightscope. Several enemy soldiers, a couple in ghillie suits but most not, were charging the breach.

He clicked off the safety and fired the rifle. BANG BANG BANG BANG

With his first four shots, he hit one soldier with the first two, and another with the third. The fourth missed.

Out of the corner of his eye, Brian saw movement. He looked to his left and saw a the top of a ladder visible over the compound wall. A soldier appeared, and tried to swing over the wall. He lost his balance and fell before Brian could shoot him. Another soldier appeared at the top of the ladder, desperately trying to point his AK at Brian with one hand while holding onto the wall with the other.

Brian shot him in the head, and he fell, the ladder toppling over with him.

All of this had happened in a few seconds. Brian turned back toward the gate, and saw that three Chinese were nearing the entranceway. He aimed his gun as quickly as he could and pulled the trigger. One of the Chinese fell, and the other two hit the dirt. One of them then started to jump up and charge again, but before he could get off his knees Brian put three rounds through his torso.

Then Hill screamed from inside the house, "Brian, behind you!!"

He whirled around and saw that there were soldiers climbing over the back wall of the compound. Obviously they had another ladder. He vaguely noted that these troops were dressed differently than the Chinese soldiers but didn't have time to study them further.

Two soldiers were already on the roof of the shed, and as Brian whirled to meet this threat, he saw another drop into the garden. A fourth was straddling the walltop. Brian shot the one who had jumped into the garden and then wildly swung his rifle up to the roof of the shed. He shot one of the soldiers up there, and then the bolt of his gun locked empty.

With no time to reload, Brian pulled the Glock from his waistband and fired at the soldier on top of the shed at the same time that soldier fired at him. The bullet grazed Brian, and he saw that he had hit the enemy soldier on the shed in the torso, but the soldier barely flinched, and fired at Brian again. The soldier was trying to keep his footing on the sloping roof of the shed at the same time, so he missed this shot.

Then the soldier clutched at his chest and toppled off the shed. Brian swiveled around and saw Hill standing behind him holding an AK she had picked up from one of the dead Chinese.

He had no time to say anything. The Chinese soldiers in front had repositioned the first ladder, and two more had climbed over the fence on that side. Another Chinese soldier had entered the compound through where the gate had been, and more were climbing onto the roof of the shed.

Brian knew that Hill had just saved his life but just the same he wanted her out of danger. As he whirled toward the Chinese soldier near the gateway, he yelled "Hill, get back inside!"

Then he realized that too many soldiers had breached the compound. Brian picked up a fallen AK and shot the one near the gate. He was amazed he had not been hit yet.

But perhaps since they had never actually fought in combat before, the Chinese soldiers were unused to being fired on especially in a scenario like this.

“Hill! There are too many! We have to break out!” Brian screamed.

Hill ran to his side. Brian looked towards where the gate had been. There did not appear to be any Chinese left there.

“That way!” He shouted.

He turned and pointed the AK at the two Chinese who were near the shed and sprayed blindly at them.

As he expected, they hit the dirt, taking cover, and got behind the shed.

The two enemy soldiers on top of the shed were still trying to get off the sloping roof onto the ground and were not shooting at him. Apparently they mistakenly assumed that there were other soldiers who would take care of Brian and Hill, and that they could concentrate on getting off of the shed. Brian fired the rest of the mag at them, and saw that they slid off onto the ground. He knew he hadn't hit them, though. He reflected that they would probably not give chase since for all they knew, there were still people inside the compound. He threw the empty AK aside, since he had no more ammo for it, and he and Hill ran.

Brian and Hill charged into the trees, running deeper and deeper into forest. Finally after about 10 minutes of running, Hill fell.

Brian ran over to her, terrified that she was hit.

“Are you hurt? Oh my God! Hill! Are you hit!”

She lay on her back breathing heavily.

“No, I'm fine. I'm just really tired. I can't run any farther. My side really hurts.”

Brian, still worried, checked her for injuries just in case, at the same time listening for sounds of pursuers. He didn't hear any.

Brian said a silent prayer in relief. Hill was OK. He figured her side hurt from running so far.

He cradled her in his arms.

Brian checked himself for injuries. Aside from the bullet that had grazed his shoulder, another had been stopped by his tactical vest. It had hit a spot where he had put two mags in an ammo pouch. The bullet had struck the mags, and had been stopped. One of the mags was badly damaged though.

Another bullet had grazed his side, and he realized that he had a few small glass shards in his face, from when the windows of the house had been shattered by the explosion.

Brian wished he had some water to give Hill. She wasn't used to running distances, and she looked really tired.

Not knowing what else to do, Brian decided that they should stay put til morning. They crawled into some deep foliage. Pretty soon Hill and fallen asleep. Brian tried to stay awake and keep watch but he had lost a lot of energy from the busy day and from the fight, and from running. Gradually, he fell asleep.

Chapter 16

The next morning, Brian awoke and got up and looked around the area, hoping to spot a stream. He didn't see one, but he recognized where they were. He was glad that before this had all started they had taken the time to get to know the land. Brian and Hill eventually made their way to their stream. Hill removed the glass shards from Brian's face and he splashed water on his wounds.

Brian and Hill moved slowly and carefully, and as silently as possible, back towards their house. He was down to his last mag for the AR. He still had three mags for the Glock, which Hill was carrying. Finally the house came into view.

Brian told Hill to stay in the woods while he moved to the compound to make sure all was clear. It was and he motioned for her to come over.

The house and shed had been burned to the ground. The walls of the compound were knocked down by an armored vehicle judging by the tracks in the ground. The whole compound was gutted.

The mule was missing, as was the cow and the pig. The chickens were roaming around the yard, or at least some of them were. Some were clearly gone, as were all the goats and rabbits.

The Chinese and other UN troops had removed their dead, and taken all of the fallen gear with them. After a quick search it became clear that they had taken the rest of Brian's ammo, and everything else of value. The Suburban had been torched as well and only the frame remained. What they hadn't taken they had burned. There was nothing left.

Hill started to cry. First her parents and sister had gone, and were maybe dead by now, and now they had no home, no food, nothing but the clothes they were wearing, a rifle with one magazine of ammo, and a handgun.

Brian hugged her, pressing her head gently against his chest. He kissed the top of her head.

“We still have each other Hill, that’s what matters more than anything.”

“I know Brian.”

“We’ll be OK, I promise.”

“I trust you Brian.”

Brian couldn’t remember how many times Hill had said that to him since all the troubles had started. He wondered if he had failed her. He felt determined to live up to the trust she had for him.

Chapter 17

“We should go over to the Jacksons and the other neighbors and see if they’re alright or if we can help them in any way,” Brian said to Hill, who agreed.

They decided to travel through the woods rather than across the open area at the top of the mountain. Before long, they had reached the Jackson home.

“Oh my goodness!” exclaimed Hill. “It’s been burned down, just like ours.”

At that moment Brian heard footsteps behind them and turned. A man was approaching them, walking up the mountain trail. Brian started to lift his AR, but then recognized Mr. Jackson and pointed his weapon at the ground.

“Hey, Brian, are you and Hillary alright?” asked Mr. Jackson. He had a blood-stained bandage over his head.

“We’re fine, but they burned down our homestead,” replied Hill sadly.

“Yeah, they did that to just about everyone, except Mr. Burns. I guess since he’s so old they figured he isn’t much of a threat.”

“We thought they shot you last night when your radio message was cut off,” Brian said.

“Well, a ChiCom soldier bumped into me while I was helping the McCalls escape. It was too close to bring my rifle into play, but he couldn’t raise his either. He tried to give me the old buttstroke, but he only hit me a glancing blow to my forehead. Then I shot him with my pistol.”

“Well I’m glad you’re OK. How’s Mrs. Jackson?”

“She’s fine. There’s a pretty deep cave I know of on this mountain. My wife is waiting there for me, along with the McCalls and the Mr. Daniels, his wife and their two daughters. Mr. Burns is there too, with his wife.”

“What about the Webbers and the Blackwells?” asked Brian.

Mr. Jackson shook his head sadly and looked at the ground.

“Dead,” he said softly. “At least the Webber and his wife are. The Chicoms set his house on fire and shot him and his wife when they tried to escape. Blackwell and his two sons were shot to death when the chicoms stormed their house. They took his wife prisoner. I was helping the McCalls escape so I couldn’t get over to the Blackwells until it was too late. I watched them put the wife in a jeep and drive off but there were too many of them and they had APCs by that time. There was nothing I could do.”

Brian said a silent prayer for all their dead neighbors and for Mr. Blackwell’s wife who had been captured.

“Well let’s get over to the cave. Hopefully we’ll be safe there, at least for a while.”

Mr. Jackson led them through the trees and across a stream, and then down a steeper, more rocky part of the mountain that Brian had never been to before.

They slowly made their way down until Mr. Jackson pointed to a dark opening in the mountainside that was partially concealed by a few bushes. Brian mentioned to Mr. Jackson that they should probably camouflage the entrance better. Mr. Jackson agreed, and said that he had been planning to do so when he returned from scavenging around the burned down Jackson farm for anything of value.

The cave was cool inside, and from somewhere deeper into the cave came a dripping sound.

A voice called out, “Rick, I’m so glad you’re back! Brian, Hill, thank God you’re OK!”

It was Mr. Jackson’s wife, Kristin. She was wearing BDUs and carrying her husband’s AK-47 on a sling.

After talking a few minutes with Mrs. Jackson, who was on guard duty, they made their way farther into the cave, which eventually opened into a large area, with several passages leading off of it.

In this main area, Mr. McCall lay on some blankets. It looked like Rick Jackson had done a field bandaging of his legs. He appeared to be unconscious, and his wife and young kids were sitting next to him. Nearby was the Daniels family, who quickly got up to greet Brian.

The group of neighbors ate a meager meal, which consisted of MREs provided by Rick Jackson.

Afterwards, Brian volunteered to pull guard duty at the mouth of the cave. Mr. Jackson went with him. They sat down on rocks near the entrance.

“Wow, things have really fallen apart over the last few days,” reflected Brian.

Mr. Jackson nodded in agreement.

“We’ll need to formulate a plan of action,” said Brian. “I don’t know how long we can safely stay in this cave. The UN troops lost a lot of people last night, and they know a good number of us escaped. They are going to be back here to search for us.”

“I agree that we can’t stay in the cave indefinitely, but what else can we do? I’m very worried about Pete McCall. He was hit several times in the legs, and they may need to be amputated. He lost a lot of blood and needs medical attention. None of us are doctors. We can’t leave him here, and he can’t be moved. Anyway, I can’t think of anywhere else to go.”

“Our group could send a couple of people to some of the other farms and homes in the area. We could try to find people to form a militia with, and fight back.”

“That’s not a bad idea,” responded Mr. Jackson pensively.

“We won’t survive long operating out of a cave that’s so close to our homes. If we ally ourselves with other people in the area, we will be able to hit the blue beanies, and then have a variety of places to hide.”

“Well I certainly think that’s a good idea, son,” replied Mr. Jackson.

“Thanks.” Brian said.

They decided that Brian would be the one to go around to the nearby homesteads and farms and try to find friends. Brian had initially suggested that they both go, since Mr. Jackson had military experience and knew the area, but Mr. Jackson had vetoed that idea, saying that since they were the only two who were reasonably good fighters, at least one of them should stay at the cave. Brian concurred.

Mr. Jackson suggested that Chester Daniels go along with Brian. Mr. Daniels knew almost everyone in the area since he was a native. When Brian asked him, he quickly agreed to go with them.

“What’s our situation with supplies?” Daniels asked Jackson.

“Well, for years I’d planned to store a lot of supplies in this cave but I never got around to it. I wish I had. I managed to rescue some things from my house before they came back and burned it. We have maybe

three days worth of MREs. About 600 rounds of 7.62, 100 shotgun shells and 400 rounds of .223. I didn't have any time to grab any handgun ammo. We have some limited medical supplies, and some blankets. Water won't be a problem because of all the streams in this area."

"OK, so we need a lot more supplies, especially food and ammo," said Brian. "While we're out there I'll see if we can acquire some."

Brian and Chester Daniels were almost ready to leave on their mission to visit the surrounding farms and try to recruit people for the militia.

Brian went over to Hill, who had fallen asleep. Brian gently woke her up.

"Sweetheart, I have to go for a little while, but I'll be back soon. Me and Mr. Daniels are going to try and find some people to help us fight the UN troops. Also, we need supplies."

"Brian, I'm coming too." Hill stated.

Brian was worried about leaving Hill since the Chinese might return and discover the cave while he was gone, but he didn't want her to come on such a dangerous mission.

"Hill, I want you to come too, but I don't want to risk you getting hurt."

Hill initially refused to be separated from Brian, but eventually agreed reluctantly after Brian reasoned and pleaded with her for about 10 minutes.

After kissing Hill goodbye, Brian went outside to where Chester Daniels was waiting for him. Rick Jackson had armed Chester with his wife's SKS and given him five thirty round magazines. Brian had his AR-15 and Hill's Glock 17. He had three loaded mags for the Glock, not as many as he wanted, but he would have to make do.

Mr. Jackson gave Brian eight loaded 30 round AR mags since Brian had only one mag left. Brian and Chester said bye to Mr. Jackson and then they left.

Brian looked up at the sky. It was almost dusk, but not quite. Brian and Chester moved through the woods with Brian in the lead. Brian kept his eyes open for staining, displacement, and other indicators that someone might be lurking, or have passed through their same route.

Dusk was setting in when they came within sight of the first farm, some distance below them in the valley. Brian peered through his scope/PVS-14 to see if anything was amiss. Nothing appeared to be. He motioned for Chester, who was ten yards behind him, to move in. Brian had explained to Chester the basic principles of bounding overwatch in case they needed to use that technique.

Brian felt that it would be prudent to use bounding overwatch to approach the farm, which they were

unfamiliar with.

Chester, hunched over as Brian had shown him, moved up to where Brian was. Brian motioned for him to keep going, and pointed to an old wooden outbuilding that lay at the edge of the farm perimeter. Chester moved up to the outbuilding and covered Brian as he moved past Chester to where a pickup truck sat at the end of the driveway. He motioned for Chester to join him.

“OK, now we’re gonna have to take a chance and walk up to the front door and hopefully the people who live here won’t shoot us on sight. We don’t want to alarm the folks by sneaking up.”

Brian slung his rifle over his shoulder, as did Chester. They walked up to the front door and knocked on it. From inside, there was the sound of a dog barking.

“Who’s there?” came a stern voice from behind the door.

“Chester Daniels, and my friend Brian, who recently moved to these parts” said Daniels.

The door opened, and a stout, red-headed man of about thirty-five stepped outside. The man was carrying a side by side shotgun and was wearing a .357 revolver in a holster.

“Boy, am I glad to see you, Chester. What with all the shooting going on last night, I had no idea what was going on! Is everyone alright? Did the Chinese attack?”

“I’m afraid they did, and they killed the most of the Blackwells and the Webbers, too.”

He proceeded to explain what had happened, and in the course of his story introduced Brian.

“Glad to meet ya,” said the man, whom Chester had introduced to him as Dan Collins.

Dan invited them to meet Mrs. Collins, as well as their 17 year old son and 15 year old daughter.

He invited them to stay for dinner and also congratulated Brian on his marriage and wished him the best.

While they were eating, Brian explained his idea of forming a militia unit to fight the UN soldiers.

“I’m with you!” declared Dan. “Who knows which of us they’ll attack next. We have to band together and fight them!”

Dan said that he knew of at least two other men he was friends with who would also be interested. Chester asked if he had any ammo he could spare.

“I’m sorry I can’t help you with ammo...I don’t have any guns in .223 or 7.62 mm. I have my shotgun, a

.22 varmint rifle, a deer rifle in .30-'06 and my .357 revolver. And I have less than 100 rounds for each of those weapons. I should have stocked up on ammo when the riots started but I didn't think we would have trouble out here, not to mention rampaging UN troops."

Dan suggested that they try another farmer that he and Chester knew who was more of a gun enthusiast. Before leaving, they discussed having a meeting of all the people who were willing to fight the UN troops. Dan volunteered his place, and suggested they meet the next night after dark.

"That's great! We'll let everyone else know." Said Chester.

Then they said bye to the Collins family and left to visit the other families in the area. By the end of the night, they had visited fifteen more farms, and at every one of them, the farmer voiced his support and promised to be at the meeting, except for one, where the farmer and his wife were out somewhere, but their teenage son promised that his parents would go to the meeting.

Brian was extremely heartened by their success, and was glad to have such patriotic and courageous neighbors. He bet that in Massachusetts, not only would none of the neighbors agreed to fight, but they would have reported him to the UN troops, too. He was glad he lived in Western NC.

Brian and Chester were on their way back to the cave, and had gone back up the mountain pretty far, when Brian spotted activity way below them in the valley.

He and Chester decided to approach it cautiously, to see what was going on. They moved quietly through the foliage until they were a mere 300 yards above the two-lane road.

Brian put his nightscope to his eye and saw that the activity they had spotted was in fact a UN checkpoint on the road. There was a Humvee type vehicle, probably taken from a National Guard armory, and also a Russian made BTR-80 armored personnel carrier. Brian spotted four soldiers standing around, out in the open, obviously oblivious to his presence. There were most likely more soldiers in the vehicles.

Brian felt a burst of anger, as he remembered how just last night the UN troops had killed his neighbors and almost killed his beloved wife. He saw an opportunity for vengeance.

"Let's get them back for last night," he whispered to Chester.

"Are you sure Brian? They have an APC and a Humvee. There are only two of us."

"Trust me, we can take them. I'll cross the road behind the bend back there where they won't be able to see me. Then you fire on them from this side of the road. That'll make the soldiers out in the open take cover behind the Humvee, where I can hit them from behind. Take out the soldier manning the CSW in the APC first."

“CSW?”

“Crew-served weapon. That machine gun in the turret of the APC. And Chester...”

“What?”

“Make sure you don’t hit me, OK?”

“Got it.”

“Right.”

Chapter 18

Brian slipped quietly through the woods until he around the bend in the road, then crawled across on all fours, to minimize his chance of being seen. He doubted that either of the UN vehicles had FLIR. When he got across the road, he stood up moved through the trees stepping heel to toe, and being careful not to break any twigs with his boots. He felt the ground in front of him with his toe before taking each step, and as an additional precaution, squinted his eyes to avoid being detected. A few minutes later, he was in position parallel to the Humvee which was parked on the near side of the road, which he expected the UN troops to take cover behind. The APC was parked on Chester’s side of the road.

When Chester guessed that enough time had gone by and Brian was in position, he took aim and fired one shot at the soldier manning the 12.7mm machine gun on the APC. He was 100 yards away from his target and there was basically no wind. His shot hit the soldier in the face, and the soldier slumped over in the turret.

At the sound of the rifle shot, the four soldiers in the open dived behind the Humvee, just as Brian had predicted. They look like Indians, not Chinese, he thought. Brian was only twenty yards from the soldiers behind the Humvee, and he raised his AR-15 and fired. One of the soldiers fell. He fired again. Another collapsed to the ground. The other two soldiers whirled around, realizing they were under attack from behind.

Meanwhile, the back doors of the BTR opened and soldiers jumped out. But Chester hit the first one out in the torso, and the other four retreated back into the APC, leaving the rear doors open so they could fire out.

Brian shot the two remaining soldiers behind the Humvee before they could shoot him. Taken by surprise, they never had a chance.

Brian made a desperate dash from his position in the woods to the Humvee, which he crouched behind. The four dead Indian soldiers were all wearing orange berets, he noticed. He grabbed a grenade out of the tac vest of one of the dead Indian soldiers, and crawled until he was behind the front wheel of the Humvee, which offered him limited cover from any fire that might come from the APC. However it seemed that the soldiers in the APC did not know he was there.

Brian pulled the pin out of the grenade and tossed it diagonally across the road at the doorway of the APC. The grenade hit the far wall of the interior of the BTR just inside the rear entrance, and bounced deeper inside, then went off.

And that was the end of that.

Brian stood up and moved diagonally across the street to the APC, staying out of the line of fire from the rear doors just in case anyone was left alive. But no one was.

The APC was not destroyed but everyone inside was. The inside was too messy to try to salvage any equipment from. Brian looked away, feeling nauseous.

Meanwhile, Chester reached the road.

“You should have stayed in the trees covering me in case there are any UN patrols that might approach,” Brian admonished him.

“Sorry.”

“It’s OK. Let’s just be quick. See if we can find anything of value.”

Brian and Chester were able to recover 6 select fire AK-47s, two 9mm pistols, one belt fed 7.62mm machine gun from the turret of the Humvee, 10 grenades, and a total of 10 pistol magazines and 60 rifle magazines, some of which were in the back of the Humvee. They also recovered communications equipment and 3,000 rounds of 7.62mm belt feed, 1,800 rounds of 7.62mm in mags, and 500 rounds of 9mm including some in a box in the Humvee.

“Chester, run back to Dan’s and tell him to bring his truck. Hurry!” Brian said urgently.

He knew that UN reinforcements might arrive at any moment. He took up a position in the woods, watching the road.

Dan’s was not far, and about five minutes later, his pickup truck roared up. The three of them quickly piled all of the captured equipment in the bed of the truck, got in, and sped away. They drove to Dan’s barn and hid the weapons behind hay bales. Brian wished that they had captured at least one RPG but

he was thankful for what they got.

He said a prayer of thanks to the Lord.

Then Dan, Chester, and Brian ecstatically high fived each other.

“That’ll show those UN stormtroopers!” exclaimed Chester jubilantly.

It was after midnight and Brian wanted to get back to Hill. Even though he’d only been away from her a few hours, he missed her so much.

He and Chester carefully made their way back to the cave, trying to avoid leaving any unnecessary signs or tracks that someone might notice.

When Brian went into the cave, Hill saw him come in and ran to him.

They hugged.

“Hill, I’m so glad to see you! I love you so much!”

“I missed you, Brian.”

Brian had a quick MRE meal, and then feeling exhausted, fell asleep with Hill in his arms. He loved holding her in his arms, he felt as if he was protecting her.

Before he fell asleep, Brian thanked God he had a sweet, loving wife.

Meanwhile, outside, Mr. Jackson, who was on guard duty, finished smoking his cigarette and threw it away. He felt the cool autumn mountain wind rustle his hair and sighed.

He heard an owl hoot in the distance, and the rustling of leaves.

Suddenly, Mr. Jackson felt a gun muzzle being pressed against his head.

Several shadowy figures appeared out of the darkness.

Brian woke up to find that it was still dark inside the cave. No traces of daylight had penetrated the entrance to the cavern where the small group was sleeping. Hill was still asleep in his arms.

Brian heard a scuffling noise near the entrance to the cavern, and since it was completely dark, he raised his nightscope to his eye. A group of armed men were at the entrance to the cavern. Quietly, they began to fan out along the cavern’s walls.

Brian mentally cursed. Who are they and how did they get in here? He thought to himself.

But he had no time to keep watching them. Silently, he shook Hill awake and put his mouth to her ear.

“Don’t make any noise, someone’s in here,” he whispered.

Brian mentally noted that a passageway leading deeper into the cave was located only about ten yards from where they lay. So far, none of the men had reached it. Brian could see the red dots of laser pointers on the rifles of the men.

Frantically he thought “What should I do? Should I just open fire? Should I shout DANGER?”

He rapidly decided that the intruders must be enemies, since they were surrounding the sleeping group, obviously hoping to trap and capture them. Also, Mr. Jackson was nowhere to be seen, which led Brian to assume that he had been captured or eliminated.

All of these thoughts flashed through Brian’s head within seconds. He decided that he needed to attack the enemy before they completely surrounded the group, and he needed to alert the others.

Brian quietly clicked off his safety. He already had a round in the chamber. Lying next to him, Hill (who had no rifle) was holding her Glock, ready to fire.

Brian aimed his rifle at one of the shadowy armed men who was wearing a radio on his back. In a flash, Brian realized he was the RTO and that the man next to him with a submachine gun instead of a rifle must be the CO.

He centered his target in his scope and fired twice, then took aim at the CO and fired three times. Both men crumpled but Brian didn’t have time to see if he killed them.

“HILL, RUN!” he shouted, pushing her in the direction of the passage leading deeper into the cave.

There was an enemy soldier near the passage. He fumbled wildly, trying to bring his rifle to bear on them.

Hill shot him twice with the Glock and he fell.

Automatic weapons fire erupted around them as the other enemy soldiers opened fire. A couple of bullets struck the backpack Brian had slipped on while he was lying on the ground. The pack contained spare mags, ammo, medical supplies and other equipment. All of these things stopped the bullets so Brian was not hurt.

Brian kept Hill directly in front of him as they ran so he would stop any rounds that might hit her.

They rushed around a bend in the passageway and then Brian turned around to cover their retreat and hold off any pursuers. He hadn't noticed whether any of their neighbors had been able to escape. He felt guilty that he and Hill had fled and abandoned their neighbors, but Hill's safety came before anyone else's, and as her husband, his primary responsibility was keeping her safe. Also, he knew that if they had stayed to fight, they would have been shot before they could even empty a single mag. It looked like there had been at least twenty enemies inside the cavern, and there were probably more waiting outside the entrance to reinforce their comrades if needed.

Three soldiers had charged after them into the passage. Brian leaned around the bend and opened fire.

The FMJ bullets blew through the first man and brought down the soldier directly behind him, as well. The third soldier pointed his AK-47 at Brian and sprayed bullets at him.

Brian dodged back behind the bend. The enemy soldier emptied his entire mag with one burst.

When the firing stopped, Brian immediately peered back around the corner. The soldier dropped the empty mag on the ground and reached for a fresh one.

Brian shot him before he could fit it in the mag well.

Now more soldiers were piling into the passageway.

"Run Hill, run!!! I'll catch up with you!"

Hill stood there, unmoving. Brian wondered if she was in shock.

"GO HILL! NOW!"

"Brian..." she started.

"Hill listen to me, RUN!"

Brian turned his head back toward the passageway and fired at the oncoming enemy soldiers, who had choked up at the entrance to the passage.

Brian fired into the jumbled group of men. One fell, and then two others tripped over him. One regained his balance but then Brian shot him. The other went sprawling.

Brian's AR locked empty. He unslung his backpack, and rummaged around for a new magazine. Finding one, he slammed it into the mag well, yanked the charging lever back, and resumed firing.

He knew that he would soon be overrun. Two soldiers were lying prone, firing at him. He jerked his body back behind the rock wall of the passageway as bullets ricocheted around him.

A few other soldiers were inching along the near wall, where he couldn't shoot at them without exposing himself.

Brian decided to retreat deeper into the passage. He emptied his AR, grabbed another mag out of the backpack, and sprinted down the passageway into the darkness as automatic weapons fire lit up the passageway behind him.

Chapter 20

Brian hurtled along, not stopping to check how close his pursuers were. He saw no other passages and had to keep going. Brian could not see anything, since he had no time to look through his nightscope.

Suddenly, Brian rushed into thin air, and then fell.

WHUMP!

He landed on his stomach, and his AR hit the ground next to him and skittered off into the darkness.

Brian lifted his head. He was out of breath and his chest hurt. But he didn't stop to think about that.

He tasted blood in his mouth and spat it out onto the floor of the cave.

Where's Hill??? Did she fall too? Is she OK?

Brian felt around for his AR but could not find it, and thus, could not look through his nightscope to inspect his surroundings.

He seemed to be in another passage, only much wider. The passage descended steeply into the earth.

"HILL?" Brian called out. "HILL?"

He knew that the enemy soldiers were close behind, so there was no point in keeping quiet.

There was no answer.

Crawling on his knees, Brian felt around to see if Hill was lying unconscious somewhere in the vicinity. He felt nothing. He hoped she had gotten up and continued along the passage.

Brian knew he couldn't stay there. He hoped the fall would slow down his enemies, too, but figured they had an advantage over him since they had night vision.

Brian stumbled down the passage, taking smaller steps to avoid falling again. He felt kind of dizzy.

About a minute later, Brian tripped over something and fell. It was a fallen piece of rock.

Pain surged through Brian's knee and he realized he had cut it. However the bone did not seem damaged, since he could still move his leg without the bone hurting.

Brian continued down into the cave. He kept calling out "Hill! Hill!"

He heard voices behind him, but they were low and sounded far off. The cave amplified sounds and made them seem closer than they were, so he figured the soldiers were at least a few minutes behind him.

Brian zigzagged from one wall of the passage to the opposite wall as he walked. He did this so if there were any side passages, he wouldn't pass them by.

Brian was terrified for Hill. He wondered where she could be. He was so scared that the soldiers would capture her.

Brian stopped and shouted for what seemed like the hundredth time "HILL!"

He listened carefully. He thought he heard a low reply.

He nearly tripped over his own feet as he desperately rushed toward the sound.

"Brian?"

It was Hill's voice.

"Where are you?" he shouted.

He knew that the enemy soldiers were somewhere behind him, and he had to get Hill out of there before they arrived.

"Brian!" The voice was stronger this time. It sounded very close.

"Brian!"

At that moment a blinding light filled the passageway.

Brian instinctively squinted, and then opened his eyes as they adjusted.

Hill was only a few feet in front of him, and had turned on a flashlight.

“Oh my goodness! Are you OK? I was so worried for you!” Brian gasped out as he hugged her to him.

She wrapped her arms around him.

“Brian my leg hurts, I mean, my knee. I fell and I crawled this far but then I had to stop.”

“Can you bend it?” Brian asked. He didn’t know much about medicine, but he recalled hearing somewhere that you could tell if a joint was broken if you couldn’t bend it.

Hill gasped in pain.

“I can bend it, it hurts a lot though.”

“OK, OK...we’re going to be alright,” Brian told her as he frantically thought about what he should do.

It sounded like the soldiers were getting closer, and Brian was unarmed.

“Hill, can you stand up?”

He helped her to her feet. She fell against him.

“Do you think you can try to walk?”

She took a step.

“I...I think so. It hurts so much though.”

“Ok...don’t worry, I won’t let you fall down. We have to move though, they’re getting closer.”

Together, they stumbled down the passage, guided by the flashlight. Brian didn’t care if the soldiers could see the light. If they had night vision, it wouldn’t matter anyway, and he needed to see what was in front of them. He didn’t want them to fall again. They continued to walk as fast as they could.

Then they came to a fork. Two passages stood in front of them.

Brian shined the light down each one. The soldiers sounded very close now. He had to choose which way they should go.

One passage went down, farther into the ground. The other one appeared to slope upwards.

Brian decided to go with the upward path, hoping that it would lead to the surface and they could get out. He planned to take Hill to Dan Collin's house, where they had stashed the captured supplies the day before. He felt he could trust Dan and his family, and she would be safe there. He said a quick prayer that he had chosen the right path.

Hoping to delay the pursuing soldiers, he felt around in his pockets and came up with his small two-way radio Mr. Jackson had given to him the day before, when he and Chester had gone on their mission. The radio looked like it had been broken when Brian fell. He tossed it down the passage that sloped downwards. Then he helped Hill up the other path.

The passage swerved sharply, but continued upwards. Brian was glad the path had swerved, since it would hopefully decrease amount of light from their flashlight that would be visible to the soldiers. Then Brian felt wind across his face and realized that there must be a way out nearby. He turned off the light to see if he could spot a glint of natural light that would lead them to an exit.

He thought that it must be about dawn by now. Brian spotted a glimmer of light off in front of them.

He turned the flashlight back on and looked at Hill. Her eyes were half shut, and she appeared to be only semi conscious. Brian stuck the flashlight in his belt at a forward angle, and picked Hill up and cradled her in his arms.

He then hurried in the direction the light had come from.

A minute later, they had emerged into a large cavern, the ceiling towering at least a hundred feet above them. At one end of the cavern, there was a steep, gravel-covered slope, which led to an opening through which Brian could see the dawn sky. The opening, large enough for a car to pass through, was at the top of the slope, near the ceiling of the cavern, a hundred feet above them.

To reach the opening, he would have to scale the steep, gravel-covered slope, while carrying Hill. The slope was far too steep to walk up, and climbing it would be hard, since it would be difficult to gain traction in the gravel.

Chapter 21

Brian was rapidly tiring. He carried Hill to the foot of the steep slope, and set her down.

He knew that he had no time to take a rest. Looking up at the hundred-foot slope, Brian decided that the best way to get both of them to the top would be if Hill could hold on to his back, as he climbed.

He gently shook her. She seemed to have regained consciousness, and looked up at him with wide, pain filled blue eyes. She looked as if she was about to cry.

Brian kissed her forehead and hugged her.

“Hill, I know it hurts, but we have to get up there to the entrance. Do you think you can wrap your arms around me and hold on as I climb?”

She nodded.

“Ok.”

Brian put the flashlight aside, and removed the Glock from Hill’s belt. He had forgotten all about it. He stuck the Glock in his own belt, and flattened his body against the slope. Hill put her arms around him, under his arms.

Brian started to climb, but he could find almost nothing to gain traction with. He grabbed at the slope, only to find himself with a handful of gravel.

However, he soldiered on, slowly pulling his way up the slope. Falling gravel struck him in the face. He hoped it didn’t hit Hill. Jagged rocks tore Brian’s shirt and cut his chest and stomach, but still he continued. He knew he had to get Hill out of there.

Several times he slid back down several feet, but eventually he pulled himself up to the top. Hill had bravely clung to him the entire time. He admired her for her strength.

When he reached the top of the slope, he rolled over on his side and pushed Hill gently out of the cave onto the grass outside.

He was about to hoist himself out, when he heard a shout from below him.

Two Indian looking soldiers were in the middle of the cavern. One was pointing an RPG at Brian.

Brian reached for his Glock as the soldier fired the RPG.

BLOWM!!!!

The slope right below Brian exploded, spraying gravel everywhere. Brian lost his grip and slid about thirty feet down the slope. The Glock landed five feet below him.

Clearly hoping to capture Brian alive the two Indians had charged the slope, and were furiously

struggling to reach him.

Brian allowed himself to continue sliding until he could reach his Glock.

Seeing what he was doing, one of the Indians struggled to bring his Kalashnikov to bear on Brian with one hand, while clutching at the slope with the other.

BAP BAP BAP BAP BAP

Gravel was tossed in the air as the Indian fired. However he could not even maintain traction on the slope, much less aim accurately. His rounds struck the slope about ten feet to Brian's left.

Brian reached his Glock, and took aim at the Indian nearest to him, as he continued to slide towards them.

BLAM!

Brian fired. One Indian limply slid down the slope.

The other was still wildly firing his AK one-handed, while still trying to climb.

BLAM

Brian shot him in the shoulder, and then the slide locked all the way back. He stuck the empty pistol in his belt.

He looked down at the Indian, who had let go of his AK, and fallen all the way to the bottom of the slope. The soldier lay there, clutching his shoulder.

The AK was too far down for Brian to reach without risking sliding all the way to the bottom.

Exhausted but desperate to reach Hill, he hauled himself back up to the opening of the cave. Brian crawled over to where Hill lay on the grass. She was completely awake now, but breathing heavily, and crying because of the pain.

Seeing his beloved wife and best friend cry made Brian want to cry himself, but he choked it back.

He ran his fingers through Hill's blond hair and kissed her.

"Don't worry, you'll be OK, sweetheart."

He wished he could do something. She seemed to be in so much pain.

Brian was completely exhausted, and his chest and stomach were bleeding, as they had been cut by the gravel and jagged rocks. His knee was badly cut as well, and he figured his face was bruised and cut.

He struggled to his feet. They couldn't stay there. It wasn't safe. Enemies all around, he thought in a blur.

Brian blinked to clear his vision, which had suddenly blurred for a second. He felt really dizzy. But he couldn't just stay there. He had to get Hill to safety.

He picked her up and started to walk down the mountain.

Struggling to keep from collapsing, Brian stumbled across a small stream, and through the trees.

He and Hill emerged from the tree line into a large open area in the forest. He kept going. When they had neared the center of the open area, figures suddenly emerged from the trees in front of them.

Still carrying Hill in his arms, and with only an empty Glock in his belt, Brian turned around.

Camouflaged men carrying rifles were approaching from every direction, converging on them.

They were completely surrounded.

Chapter 22

Brian watching helplessly as the armed men approached. He prayed they were not enemy soldiers. As they got closer, he noticed that they appeared to be Caucasian.

Seconds later, the group of men converged in a circle around Brian, who was still carrying Hill in his arms. One of the men stepped forward.

"I'm Major Thomas McGavin of the 82nd Airborne Division out of Fort Bragg," said the man.

"Brian Lowe, I live around here. This is my wife, Hill. She's been injured."

"We heard gunfire and decided to come investigate," said Major McGavin.

"I'm glad you did. The UN soldiers attacked our homes, so a group of us took refuge in a cave. But they found us, and tried to ambush us. I don't know what happened to everybody else."

"Well, you can tell me the rest of your story later son. Right now we need to move out of this area in

case they track you from the cave you mentioned. We observed a pretty big group of soldiers up by that cave, at least a full battalion, with a tank and two APCs.”

“Do you have a medic that can take a look at my wife? I think she may have broken her leg,” said Brian.

“Of course. I’ll have the Doc look after your wife as soon as we put some distance between us and the Chicom troops. Do you think you can carry her a little longer?”

“Yessir, I think I can make it.”

“Alright, then let’s move,” replied the Major.

The group stealthily slipped back into the treeline and made their way through the dense forest. Brian thanked God for this unexpected turn of events.

After about thirty minutes of walking in silence, using mainly hand gestures to communicate, the Major signaled a halt.

“We’ve put enough distance between us and them to stop and rest for a while,” said the soldier walking next to Brian.

“Yeah, this is densely wooded country, they’ll have a hard time tracking us in here, and they’ll be worried about an ambush,” Brian replied.

He introduced himself.

“Nice to meet you, I’m Bill,” the soldier replied.

“Brian, bring your wife over here, my medic will take a look at her,” called Major McGavin at that moment.

Brian carried Hill over to where the Major and some other men were. Most of them had put down their equipment and were preparing MRE’s or taking a drink from their canteens. Brian introduced himself and Hill.

“I’m Pete, the medic,” said a young man who looked only four or five years older than Brian.

Brian laid Hill down on a field blanket one of the men had spread out on the ground. She was barely conscious.

Brian explained what had happened to Hill: How they had been ambushed in the cave, and how while running through the dark Hill had fallen off a drop and hurt her leg. The medic took a cursory look,

examining the bone, and trying to determine if it was broken.

Hill, who was beginning to regain consciousness, gasped with pain as he moved her leg. Pete asked her to move it a few times, in order to determine where it hurt. After a couple of minutes, he looked up.

“Well, thank goodness, it’s not broken. The knee cap may be cracked, but I’m inclined at this point to think that it isn’t. Unfortunately, I can’t determine whether it’s cracked without the proper equipment, which I don’t have. I’ll set it, and hopefully that will be OK for now. Also, I’ll give her something for the pain.”

Brian and Hill thanked the medic profusely.

“I’m so glad it isn’t broken,” Brian said to Hill, hugging her tightly and kissing her on the forehead.

She smiled up at him, and returned the hug.

“You saved me,” she said, “thanks.”

Brian held her in his arms.

“Are you hungry?” he asked.

She said that she was. The major offered them some food, which they gratefully accepted.

As he ate, Brian looked around. There appeared to be about one hundred men from the 82nd Airborne in the group. Some wore berets, while others wore helmets. All of them were clad in forest patterned camouflage. Most of the men carried M-16s, but a few had SAWs or M-60s. One man even had a LAW. The major and the three lieutenants in the group had sidearms as well. All of the men had packs, which Brian assumed to contain MRE’s, spare ammo, and other equipment.

As they ate, Brian recounted his story to the Airborne soldiers, starting when he and Hill had fled their college campus, which seemed like so long ago. He told of how they had made their way to Hill’s house, and then to the land Brian had purchased in case of an emergency, in North Carolina. He recounted how, after Hill’s parents had gone, they formed a self-sufficient community with their neighbors, and how the UN troops had attacked them, and then ambushed them in the cave. He ended with when they had met the Airborne men.

The soldiers seemed impressed with Brian’s story, and complimented him on how he had fought off the Chinese when they had attacked the homestead.

Then the major started to tell how he and his men had come to be in the woods of Western North Carolina.

“When the president and congress authorized foreign soldiers to come on US soil and police our citizens, well, there were a lot of people in the military who disagreed with that, let me tell you. In fact, most everyone was pretty darn furious. My company was part of a regiment from the 82nd Airborne Division that had just returned to the states from Iraq when the UN forces began to arrive.”

The major took a drink of water from his canteen and then continued.

“Some guys from the Special Forces, SEALs and Delta mostly, some Rangers and Green Berets, decided that allowing foreign troops on US soil was absolutely treasonous. In my opinion, they were right. In any case, they declared that they were going to resist the UN troops and kill every last UN soldier who sets foot on US soil. So the night the first UN forces arrived, they disappeared from their base, at Fort Benning, where Delta’s based. The SEALs, and some Rangers and Green Berets had managed to get sent there on some pretext, and the entire group, about 4,000 men, disappeared into the Georgia woods that night, taking a ton of equipment with them. Javelin anti-tank missiles, Stinger SAMs, thousands of spare rifles, mountains of ammo, grenades, LAWs, Claymore mines, just about everything that was man portable. When the UN troops arrived, the UN commander sent an entire division of Russian soldiers into the Georgia woods to track them down. Not one UN soldier came back alive.”

The major paused for a moment, in admiration of the great victory achieved by the US Special Forces. Then he resumed his story.

“Well, after that, the president became worried that the US armed forces would stage a coup or something, so he ordered all stateside units to disband, leave their weapons, and return home. The president’s executive order further stated that any American units that disobeyed would be subject to court martial. Well, just about everyone in the military, including the officers, were outraged, and many units defied the presidential order to disband and remained at their bases.”

“Do you know what the president did then?” asked Bill, one of the lieutenants.

“What?”

“He ordered the UN troops to surround all the bases where units had defied the president’s order, and use force if necessary to disarm the soldiers stationed there. Can you imagine? A US president, using foreign troops to disarm the American military? Well, that’s what happened,” said Bill, his voice filled with anger.

Major McGavin picked up where Bill had left off.

“Well, since most of our military is still overseas, fighting the Iranians, who have invaded Iraq and are trying to wipe out our forces there...”

“WHAT!” Brian exclaimed. He hadn’t heard about this latest development, since he hadn’t gotten to

listen to the news since he and Hill had escaped from their homestead.

“That’s right. While the president was welcoming UN troops into our country to oppress Americans, the Iranians invaded Iraq. Now, Iran doesn’t have a particularly strong army, but our forces in Iraq are very lightly equipped, since their main task was fighting insurgents. Our troops there had few tanks, and no MLRS or heavy artillery. Iran wiped out our air bases in Turkey and Qatar with ballistic missile and cruise missile strikes, before we could stop them. Then, they invaded Iraq with tanks, APCs, artillery, air support, 500,000 regular troops, and 300,000 reserves. Our 130,000 troops there won’t last long against those odds,” said the major grimly.

Bill spoke up. “And while that was going on, North Korea invaded South Korea. China declared themselves to be “neutral” in that conflict, but if they were to declare war on us, they already have their invasion force stationed here under the guise of peacekeepers. We flew in our troops from Germany, about 20,000, with armor and Patriot missile batteries, to fight the North Koreans, but that won’t be enough. Right now, the US Navy, which is still under American control, has taken up a defensive posture around Guam, where our Marines from Japan were relocated to, after the war in Korea broke out.”

“So, as you can see, there were not that many Army and Marine units on US soil to begin with, since most are stationed overseas. Therefore, it was relatively easy for the UN troops to surround all our military bases. Some, such as Camp Pendleton, out in CA, resisted, and were wiped out, completely razed. The entire garrison was killed by the UN forces,” another soldier added.

“Well, when we got word that a UN land force of 50,000 with 200 tanks and 500 APC was on its way to Fort Bragg, augmented by a Chinese seaborne force of a further 10,000 soldiers, we decided that we would be more effective resisting them through asymmetrical warfare than staying and trying to defend the base. So we broke up into company sized groups, such as this one here, took what equipment we could, and blew up or burned what we couldn’t take. We then burned the fort to the ground so the Chicom’s can’t get anything. But unfortunately, I hear that they have taken a number of other bases intact, and have stationed large garrisons there,” continued Major McGavin.

“We tried to keep in radio contact with the other groups. Unfortunately, the UN forces caught up with a number of the groups, and wiped them out. None of our men from the 82nd surrendered. They all died fighting for this country, God bless them. Well, for about a week now, we have not had any contact with even one of the other companies. We don’t think they were all caught, at least we hope not, but we think some may have moved out of range,” said Bill.

“So what are your plans?” asked Brian. “Were you heading anywhere in particular when you came upon us?”

“Not really,” said McGavin. “Aside from fight the invaders down to the last man, we haven’t decided exactly what to do or where to go yet.”

“Well, if you’re willing to take me, I’m with you,” said Brian. He really hoped they would accept him into their unit and was worried they would decline.

“Well, son, you’ve proven that you can fight, and that you know how to shoot, from what you’ve told us, and what we observed,” replied the major.

“Normally we wouldn’t accept a civilian, especially a civilian with an injured wife to care for, into our unit, but I do suppose these are desperate circumstances. We need every fighting man we can get, and we certainly aren’t about to just leave you here in the middle of the woods with the Chinese all over the place, and your wife injured. So yes, you can join us. How does this sound? We have some spare camouflage, and boots, and M-16s. You can enlist in this company as a private.”

“Thank you, sir, that sounds great! I’m honored!” replied Brian.

“Well, it’s done then. Welcome to our company.”

The men shook Brian’s hand and slapped him on the back.

“My wife is injured, but she knows how to shoot pretty well, and I taught her some basic military tactics like overwatch, bounding overwatch, and how to gauge windage when sniping a target. So when she gets better, she can fight too. Even for now, she can function as a sniper.”

“Well that’s great son...I mean private. I’m glad to hear that.”

Brian didn’t know if he was allowed to talk casually with higher ranking officers like the major now that he was a private, but all the other men, of all ranks, seemed to be chatting, so he felt as if he fit in.

“So, getting back to what we were discussing earlier, what should we do now?” asked one of the lieutenants.

“Well, one idea I was thinking about is heading south and trying to link up with the Special Forces fighting the UN troops down in Georgia. Or, we can stay around here for a while, attacking the UN troops, or alternatively, we could head north, to Virginia, or west, into Tennessee.”

“What are our chances of getting all the way down to GA on foot, without being noticed?” asked Bill.

“Well, obviously we would avoid the roads, where there are checkpoints, and stick to the woods and rougher terrain, but truthfully, I don’t know. And even if we did get down there, I don’t know how we’d find the special forces and link up with them.”

“Well, I really don’t see the point in staying around here,” said a sergeant. “I mean, yeah, there are UN troops here, and we could fight them, but we could be a lot more useful somewhere else, attacking more important objectives than some outlying troops stationed up in the mountains.”

“Permission to speak, sir!” said Brian.

“Granted,” replied the major, looking at Brian as if he was overdoing things a bit.

“Well, every asymmetrical force needs an area where they can fall back to, a sort of base of operations, I guess. Even during the War of Independence, the Patriots used the countryside as their safe area, and attacked British troops, then melted back into the countryside.”

“So, you mean that if we drove the UN troops out of these mountains, we could use them as a staging point for larger operations into more populated areas.”

“Exactly. If we move into more urban, or even suburban areas, it will be easier for them to catch us, since we can’t melt into the woods. Also, they have more troops in urban areas. Plus, here, we are guaranteed the strong support of the local population, most of whom would join us.”

“Those are good points,” said Bill.

“OK then, I think for the time being, at least, we will stay in the TN/NC border region, and try to retake it from the UN forces,” said McGavin. “Once we do that, we can expand the offensive, and, hopefully with a lot more men, can try to retake more territory from the Chinese.”

“Also, we could send small units into the more urban areas, to take out high value targets of opportunity, and then retreat back here,” said Bill.

“OK, that’s a good idea, too. Alright then, tomorrow, we will be engaging the UN forces in battle. In the meanwhile, get some rest. We move out before dawn. Lieutenant, please post sentries.”

Brian was assigned sentry duty from 3 A.M. to 3:30 A.M. Since there were so many men, the shifts were not that long, and not every soldier had to pull sentry duty that night.

“Private Lowe, come with me, I’ll get you camo, a weapon, ammo, and some other equipment,” said the major to Brian.

The major handed Brian an M-16, a bayonet, and ten loaded magazines. He also handed Brian a spare pack.

“In here, you’ll find camo, extra ammo, night vision, MREs, a canteen, a blanket, a knife, a hat, knife, and boots. Also, here’s the same equipment for your wife,” said the major.

Brian thanked the major, and then walked over to Hill. She was lying on the blanket the soldiers had put down for her, asleep, near the middle of the camp.

Brian changed into his camo, loaded his M-16, and put the beret the major had given him on his head. He felt a surge of pride, being part of a US army unit, and he also felt honored to share in the comradeship of the unit. He felt relieved, for the first time in days. He was glad to be among such good friends.

Brian lay down on the blanket next to Hill and fell asleep. He was awakened later by one of the sentries when it was his turn for sentry duty. His shift passed uneventfully, and he returned to sleep.

Chapter 23

Brian awoke a few hours later. Excited for the new day, his first in the 82nd, he didn't feel like sleeping anymore. But knowing that he needed to be fully rested for the day ahead, he lay back down and closed his eyes.

About an hour later, order was given to break camp, erase all traces of their presence, and move out.

It was still dark.

Be sure to break camp before dawn, for the French and Indians attack at dawn, thought Brian. Robert Rogers' Ranger Handbook. Rogers commanded the original colonial rangers, during the Six Years War, known as the French and Indian War in North America. That was before the War of Independence.

Brian wondered if they would be fighting any French or Indians today. He knew there were Indian troops in the area, having fought them before, but he didn't know if there were any French.

As he packed up his equipment and prepared to move out, Brian prayed for success in battle that day, but more than anything he prayed that the Lord would keep Hill safe. He prayed that if it was God's will, he and his new brothers in arms would defeat the enemy.

"The LORD *is* my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD *is* the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

When the wicked, *even* mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell.

Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this *will I be* confident."

Amen.

Hill was just waking up.

“How did you sleep?” he asked.

“Well. I think the painkiller he gave me helped,” she replied.

“How’s your knee? Does it still hurt?”

“Well, it still hurts, but I think it’s much better. I think Pete was right, it isn’t broken, I just hit it hard on the rocks. I feel I can walk without any trouble.”

“That’s great, honey!”

Brian told Hill that the major had accepted her as a member of the company and she was ecstatic.

“I’ll make those commies pay for what they’ve done!” Hill declared, in a grave tone.

A minute later, the company left camp and moved westward through the forest towards an interstate highway that the UN convoys often used. The major deployed his forces along the sides of the highway, at a bend, in the classic L shaped ambush formation. Claymores were set in the road, and det cord was strung along the sides. Brian was stationed near his wife, as well as Lt. Bill, whom he had fast become friends with since the previous day. The company waited for a convoy to come along. About two hours later, a tank appeared around the bend, followed by an APC, and then a long line of trucks.

“Wait until they’re all in the kill zone!” whispered the Lt. to his men.

Brian said a quick prayer and whispered, “Whatever happens, I love you so much,” to Hill.

“Make ready!” whispered the Lieutenant.

Brian clicked the safety off his M-16 and shouldered his weapon.