



RM Wilcox

Back
at the
cabin

Prepper lifestyle and
life after an EMP

Randy Williams, retired Army amputee, decides it's time to make the move.

Randy packs up his gear after an inevitable divorce and heads to southern

PA where his granddad had an old hunting camp. With a little repair and some solid planning, Randy turns the abandoned camp into a comfortable bachelor homestead to live peacefully without the government watching his every move. What starts as a move towards a little self sufficiency, turns into more than Randy, his team of two others and their family, or the U.S. had ever expected. An EMP attack by Iran and their various allies. Read on to see if Randy and a few locals can deter scared and starving neighbors, FEMA relocation camps, and the military's attempt at restoring order after Martial law is put into effect.

CH. 1 8 MAY 19 Hurry Up

Beep Beep.....Beep Beep.....Beep.

Randy fumbled for his phone, tossing and turning, flipping blankets for just one more snooze. Finally awake enough to silence the 6:15 alarm, he's already dreading his planned workout for the day and he's not even out of bed yet but he knows the rowing machine doesn't wait for anyone. "Here we go", Randy scooted across to the end of the bed to his waiting wheelchair. Standard VA issue, nothing fancy because frills aren't needed for most things. Randy's motto for a lot things most days. Wheeling out of his make shift bedroom in the den, he reached the kitchen counter and started looking for the coffee pods he needed to function like an adult. Coffee was now about t minus 40 seconds, Randy sat back in his chair, checking his texts. His buddy Dave Remy is headed up from southern PA to help him with the move. Now a free man, freshly divorced, and ready to leave upstate NY. He still didn't blame Jennifer. Too much had changed after his last deployment and subsequent five years. Gunshot wound, nerve damage, numerous surgeries and eventual amputation of his right leg below

the knee. Add on a miscarriage, that's enough hurt for anyone to throw in the towel. With a freshly brewed cup a joe in hand, Randy grabbed his smokes and headed to the front patio. He really was thankful to his buddy Anthony, letting him stay here during the end of his divorce and the sale of their house and other shared goodies. It wasn't terribly ugly like some divorces, just easier to let the lawyers handle the "dividing of assets" as he was told it was called. It really didn't take too long. Five or six months. And Jen let him stay in the house until it had to be cleared and staged by the realtor since she moved closer to the city with a girlfriend from college. So, when the time to move arrived, Anthony came to the rescue with a den and a pull out bed that really needed a body to keep it warm for the last three or four months he was in NY. It was a lot to ask of anyone, but Anthony had the room due to his wife always on the road, being a flight attendant and all. Randy was broken out of his reverie by a vibration iPhone. "Hey fuckface, when are going to come pick my ass up"? Good ol' Dave on his way to save the damsel in distress. "Well good morning to you too sunshine" Dave replied, unperturbed by the foul language. Most Army guys can't talk without the occasional F bomb and such, Dave was no exception. "I'm guessing about 6 and change hours away, before 13:00 for is the goal". Randy looked at clock on his phone, "well its 6:30 now, so if you don't stop every hour to pee, we should be good". "Thank you very much for your

approval stumpy, I'm pulling in to the gas station now so I'll be all fueled up in ten". Randy sighed in contentment. He was just ready to rock n roll and start his new phase of his life. His plans were already spinning in his head of how to tackle his to do list. Pulling in to his grandad's old place just couldn't come quick enough. "Alright brother, I'm mostly packed up and ready anyways. Just going to get a quick workout in and shower then bag up the rest of my gear". He heard Dave chuckle on the other end "what are you always working out for man, aint much down here except some Amish and old buildings". Randy laughed right back "too true my friend, but how am I supposed to pull some country strange if I look like you". "wow, that just hurts my feelings dickhead". Randy tried to stifle his laughter, didn't want to wake up Anthony too early on his day off. "See you around 1:00 big guy, and thanks a bunch for the help". Randy really was thankful for all the help, Dave had been there for it all. Getting shot over in the sandbox, to the amputation and rehab, and finally Jen's miscarriage and following separation and divorce. Dave was good people. "No worries man, see you in a bit. Till Valhalla". Dave hung up after that, Randy smiled at their old unit motto. They both had almost made into Valhalla on several occasions. Just one more reason Randy knew Dave had his back.

Phone call finished and coffee half drunk, Randy puffed on a cig while he organized his thoughts, making mental notes about what he

still needed to pack up. Nothing big was left, mostly just daily use stuff. Rolling back into his “bedroom”, Randy pulled out his prosthetic leg from beside the bed and just stared at it for a second. What a wonder modern medicine has become, a lot of it due to Army and Marine foot troops getting shot and blown up. Docs had to develop new surgeries and therapies, otherwise D.C. would be down more than a few troops. Putting on a special sock over his stump to fight against friction and sweat irritating his skin, followed by a silicone liner for cushion. Finally, his socket and leg. Nothing super fancy but it was well fit and had several different “feet” to choose from. This morning was a P.T. morning so he used his athletic running foot. There had been a time when Randy felt sorry for himself, pissed off he got hurt and he let his body go to complete shit. The first two years after his amputation, Randy had put on about 45 lbs. above his normal fighting weight. Almost three years and almost 50 lbs. later, Randy felt like he was 25 again. Hardly a fitness model, but with regular use of a rowing machine and some weight training, Randy looked like a soldier again. Smoking didn’t help but he didn’t need to hear how bad it was. He knew, just figured he might as well do what he wanted while he could do it. So, with the leg on, Randy walked out to the garage for his hour workout. Warmed up on the treadmill, he

looked over at the rowing machine. He hated that damn thing, but his now ex-wife talked him into buying it used from a garage sale. But it worked for him, one of the few high aerobic but low impact exercises he could do with his prosthetic. He put in thirty minutes three or four times a week to this machine of pain before moving over to the dumbbells and kettle ball. After another half hour and a gallon of sweat, Randy showered and changed and made his way to the kitchen. By now Anthony was awake as well and making his own cup of coffee. “You want one too, there hulk”? Randy hadn’t ever turn down hot coffee and said as such. “So, what’s on the last-minute list for the morning” Anthony said looking over his cup mid sip. “Well I’m going to do a quick load of laundry then pack up all that’s left, then bring the rest out to the trailer”. Randy had purchased an enclosed 16ft trailer through Facebook about a year ago, when it became apparent he and Jen wouldn’t make it. He’d need a way to move all his stuff to wherever he wound up. “Need any help with your bags”? Anthony asked. Randy thought for a minute, pretty much everything was loaded up minus some clothes, his laptop bag, and go bag. “No thanks man, just some small stuff left. Listen, are you sure I can’t offer you some more money for letting me stay here, four months is a long time. I really appreciate you and Amy letting my crash here”. Randy

had given Anthony about \$1500 when he first moved in to cover extra utilities and food. It probably was just enough but had no issue paying even that much again. “No don’t worry about it bub, I appreciate the company and with Amy gone so much it really isn’t an issue, you been an excellent beer drinking partner”. We both had a chuckle at that. We certainly drank a few beers every now and then, nothing obnoxious, just an extra 30 rack or two every now and then. “Well alright, just holler if you need anything”, Anthony said as he walked to his office. He was a day trader through some hedge fund group, and judging by his house, he was damn successful. Heading back out to three car garage, Randy looked over the trailer. Everything was packed up and ready to go to start a new life somewhere else. Randy had been preparing for this move for a while now, purchasing items he would need to establish a new household in an empty house. He really made progress when he discovered a second-hand RV appliance store. Everything he’d need to turn a hunting camp into a house, at least enough for a new bachelor. From tabletop dishwashers to portable washing machines. A smaller propane fridge and a small camp oven with a three-burner top. Randy did his research and purchased used when he could but still had enough money saved up to purchase new if he needed. He also sold his Tahoe for \$27,000, a bit

of a loss for the year and condition, but he would need the extra cash to get his new place fully up and running. He still had his older sportster for running errands here in town, although that was a little more weather dependent. With it being late May however, the weather was really starting to turn into nice riding weather. He had his other truck waiting to be picked up from a repair shop, his granddads old truck. A late 70's Chevy k10 short bed truck. This was Randy's now and he had dropped it off at a local mechanic with a huge fix it list, he was hoping he would be able to pick up a working truck, it would suck to have to ride his bike in the rain. That was his first stop the next morning after Dave and he got to the camp.

Other than his bike, household goods, workout gear, and some odds and ends he was bringing with him, Randy had it loaded with his prepper gear and food. For the past three years, Randy had put aside \$200 a month and purchased freeze dried food from an online retailer. Each purchase was about a month and a half of food for one person. By Randy's math he had conservatively, at least four years of food, if not more. At first when he didn't have the enclosed trailer able to be kept in a garage, he had a storage locker that was thermostatically controlled to about 65 year-round. Perfect for storing food preps, but that had started getting really snug by the end of year two. With

everything all neatly packed, his trailer was full to the ceiling. Yes sir, Randy thought quietly, I'm ready to go.

With a few hours still left until Dave showed up, Randy had a couple last minute stops to make. The first stop was bound to be awkward at best, his wife had a check for him for his share of the house. At 9:00am on the dot, Randy pulled into the Bank of America parking lot right next to a deep blue Chevy Traverse. Jen stepped out right as Randy did, the two just looked at each other for a minute. "Damn she really is a stunner", Randy thought to himself. Standing all of five foot four inches, Jen was a looker. Track in high school landed Jen a college scholarship to the University of Pennsylvania, where she went from attractive to full on smoke show. Jen saw him staring a bit and smirked and said "you want a picture to bring with you or something"? Randy chuckled, making it look like he was debating with himself. "No darling I'm good. No matter how pretty, someone somewhere is tired of her shit". "Ah I see we're off to our normal start as usual", Jen said giving me a hard stare. I didn't say anything right away, so she started again. "look I'm just here to give you your check and go on about my day. No hard feelings, I just want a clean split and this check is the last bit". I paused at that, maybe she was exhausted, she loved arguing with me over everything and

nothing at the same time. “I suppose your right Jen, this is the last bit. Why end it on another bad note hmm”. Jen didn’t say anything, just set an envelop on my seat and turned to get into her car. She paused halfway into her car and said “I don’t hate you, you know, I don’t want you to leave thinking that. After everything we’ve been through, I couldn’t ever hate you”. Randy didn’t know what to say at first, this wasn’t playing out how he thought things would go on this little meetup. “I don’t hate you either Jen, we just are moving toward different places in life, shit happens”. When neither said anything for a few seconds, Jen nodded and stepped into her car. “Hey Jen, one last thing”. She held her door open and waited. “I know you don’t share my concerns for where everything is headed, but if anything ever does really happen, you know where ill be at right”? Another tight lipped smile and a nod and my Jen was driving off for good. Randy watched her leave until he couldn’t see the tail lights anymore before turning back. This check was his last needed item to have the full confidence to go out and settle in the camp and make it match the vision he'd always had since he got the “prepping bug” as some call it. So, with check in hand, Randy walked into the Bank lobby. After waiting in line for just a minute or two he was called up to the teller. “Morning ma’am, how are ya”. The teller, little ray of sunshine she was, just

rolled her eyes and put her hand out to take whatever Randy had. Not wanting to start arguing with another female in ten minutes, he just handed her the check he endorsed and his ID saying “ please deposit that in account number 223089 please”. “I’ll also be moving out of state today actually so until I can change banks, can you put in a note of some kind so my spending doesn’t get flagged, please”. The teller looked up to her screen then at Randy, “ I’ll have something print out for you to sign for a deposit that large, and then ill add the note, it’ll be good for three months”. Seeing Randy nod, she goes over to the printer desk and waits. Randy, like most people, is aware the government tracks all deposits and withdraws over \$10,000, as well as multiple deposits or withdraw in the same numerical ballpark. The Bank Secrecy Act, passed a few decades ago but was further beefed up with the Patriot Act. The Feds can’t keep track of their own money but you can be damn sure they can track all of yours. A minute or two and a signature later, Randy is back on his bike with his receipt in hand. With the check from the realtor, moving his savings into his checking, and his latest deposit from the VA, Randy was sitting on almost \$95,000. Not a bad sum to go start an adventure somewhere. Randy knew he had the funds, but he wanted to be smart about this whole ordeal. That money had to stretch for several years of growth at

the camp. Randy was getting impatient already, it was barely 9:30 am and he was ready to tear off running his way south. He wouldn't get very far he knew, fake leg and all that business. How to kill four hours in upstate NY?, well he would just head over to Gander Mountain for a bit, the normal place he haunts when he has time and some cash to burn. A half hour later Randy is walking around inside one of his favorite stores. Randy always was an outdoors type of guy even prior to his time in the Army. That just added an extra passion for firearms during any and all camping trips. Randy carried concealed anywhere he was able to, some places he shouldn't have been. He always figured better to be judged by twelve than carried by six. NYS policy was a shit show when it came to carrying weapons, can't here or there because you might scare someone and other nonsense. Walking up and down the aisles until he came to the ammo for handguns. Randy preferred a smaller every day carry pistol, the Ruger.380 LCP. Nice compact handgun with a decent size round, the same diameter as a 9mm but a bit shorter casing. Because it was NYS, ammo was always rare to see in stock in any kind of volume. Today was Randy's lucky day however, sitting pretty, front and center was a few tubs of Winchester .380 full metal jacket. Not a bargain by any stretch, but availability trumps deals regarding ammo. Randy walked out with

five more mags and 350 rounds for \$370. Again, not his best shopping trip but it was there and he liked to have more than a 1,000 rounds for his sidearm, this put him a bit over that. Randy glanced down at his watch, just before 11:30, he figured there was always time for a Dunkin run. God bless coffee. Randy usually had a coffee with him, often enough that he purchased a suction cup drink holder for the rear of his gas tank, a little nerdy but coffee was life. Randy decided to head on home after his java refill and started to double check everything still left. A green Army duffel with his clothes for two weeks, his laptop bag to include his phone cords, and finally his go bag. This was usually with him almost all the time. What sense was a go bag when you didn't have it with you when you needed to go. He had a rear fender mount on the sporty that held his back quite nicely. This wasn't a store bought kit, this had a decent amount of gear he had used on several occasions and he knew he could depend on it. On the bottom it had a spare change of clothes with an extra socks. Wet feet sucked. On top of that was his cooking set. A nice Esbit pocket stove setup with a two cup bowl, it also held his Spork, wash rag, and piece of leather he used for an oven mitt. He carried four large Gatorade bottles filled with instant rice, red beans, dehydrated veggies, and lastly, oatmeal. Each bottle had a desiccant

pack to keep them fresh for several months in between changing to fresh ingredients. These four bottles alone were at least five days of food. With that and maybe three or four meals worth of broken up MREs, Randy figured he was set for a while. Topping off the food section was a few bags of gas station jerky, and some other hard candies, a gallon of water in a slim plastic container and a LifeStraw. The water was the heaviest single item but was the one thing no one could do without. On top of all that was a 10x10 tarp and a used Army wet weather Gortex, finished off with Randy's near and dear woobie. Many a cold night had been averted due to his woodland camo woobie. Everything in the main compartment was placed into an older Alice pack wet weather bag. The large right side pocket held a larger pistol, a colt defender .45 compact and five extra mags. Randy's Ruger was perfect for my every day carry but he knew a larger caliber would be needed every now and then. The left pocket was for a first aid kit to include a CAT tourniquet and maps of the area he would be in. Nothing super detailed, just printed google topo maps which showed more than enough information to be useful.

After double checking his go bag was safely attached to the rack, and all compartments tied shut with his spare pistol locked with a mini zipper lock, he tossed his duffle in the back of the trailer and

closed and locked the tailgate door. He'd put his laptop bag in with Dave and cruise down on his sporty. Randy went inside to make a couple of sandwiches to throw in his saddle bags along with some water bottles. He was still sipping on his iced coffee but wanted to have at least some other liquid other than coffee. Anthony heard him in the kitchen and came out for one last goodbye before he set off. "Well bub I guess your all packed and ready huh"? Anthony asked as he was making his own sandwich. "Yea I guess I am. Nothing in the den I don't think, maybe a stray sock or something but I'm all set". Anthony nodded and stuck his hand out, "thanks for hanging around for a bit man". Randy grabbed his hand and pulled him into a quick manly hug, complete with back smacking. "You did me a solid for sure, you can have your den back for leisurely porn watching". Anthony chuckled into his sandwich and was about to respond when the rumble of a big diesel engine pulled onto their small side street driveway. "Your chariot Cinderella" Anthony mock bowed and gestured to the door. "And he's right on fucking time" Randy grinned and headed outside. Dave hopped out of his rig smiling. "I've got to piss like a race horse, where's the head brotha"? Ever the classy man, Dave walked in, following Randy into the house. After a quick hug, and Randy asking if Dave needed some tweezers to sort things out,

Randy headed back outside with Anthony to wait. “You guys going to head right out”? Anthony asked while sipping on a tea. “Sure am bub, while I enjoyed my extended stay here, I’m ready to hit the road as soon as Dave is done shaking it”, Randy replied with a smirk. Just then, having overheard Dave said” if you shake it more than twice your playing with it, that’s the rule gentleman”. Dave gave Anthony’s hand a shake. They’d met several times, both being close friends of Randy’s. “I’m ready whenever you are Randall”, Dave using his favorite nickname of Randy’s. After another thank you and handshake with Anthony, Randy quickly grabbed his wheelchair and tossed it in the back of Dave’s truck. “That’s all she wrote fellas, lets roll”. Dave hopped into and fired up his big diesel, having hooked up the trailer as Randy and Anthony said their goodbyes and Randy check his .380 was secure in a shoulder holster he used for riding, swung his leg over the Harley and fired her up. With an eager attitude, Randy rode out of the driveway and headed for the highway.

After an uneventful seven hour trip down the various highways, and two gas pit stops later, Randy and Dave finally made it to Buck Valley, PA. Another 15 minutes and they were pulling off the main road onto the barely visible 200ft driveway towards the camp. Coming to halt and turning the bike off, Randy just sat back and admired his granddads handy work. That hardworking man had purchased a run down cabin on 10 acres from a work buddy further upstate with the sole idea of using it to get away from things and maybe do a little hunting in the peace and quiet surrounded by nature. He spent the next two decades on and off during each hunting trip to do a little fix up here and there. Randy's gramps had purposely left the cabin in a spartan and austere way. It had a wood stove, a metal sink basin, and two bedrooms with a small bathroom off to the side. That was it, plain and simple, just like the man. Randy turned when he heard Dave creeping up. "So what do you think now we're here". Randy looked back at the simple four hundred and change square foot building and smiled, "it'll be perfect after some work, I have been here a couple times and did a some repairs myself and hired out a few bigger ones to others". A new metal roof on top of new plywood was the first thing he had done when he came out here right after his mom died. That was hired out to a local do it all kind of crew who knew

Randy's grandpa and gave him a good deal. They had asked what else he planned on for the immediate repairs and boy did Randy have a list. After he tore out the old lath and plaster interior himself, he had the crew work on running some wires and outlets throughout the place. Now the cabin was ready, at least enough to live in until Randy did more work to it. After the new install of wiring, and final hook up to the pole at the road, all that was left was a septic system and running water. Randy had a third party come out and drill the well out. Sixty eight feet deep with fresh clean water. The septic was a pain to plan out from so far away with all the codes guys who had to be involved, but Randy was determined and patient, not like there was much of a choice. Randy wanted simple but that didn't mean he wouldn't need a good porcelain throne. "Just wait Dave my man, this place will be a dream retreat when I'm done with her". Dave looked at the simple but rugged cabin and agreed with Randy's words. Both of them, along with another buddy and his family who moved on the backside of the property, all shared the same view of the certain shit storms this country was headed for. They didn't know what to plan for exactly, but everyone knew the US had pissed off enough people for the threat list to be a mile long. "Hey Dave, you mind giving Chris a call and let him know we're here, I'm going to unload some things ill

need in the next day or so from the trailer”. Dave nodded in affirmation while heading to the truck to get his phone. Randy went to the back of the trailer and removed the lock and lowered the door to all his worldly possessions. His list of stuff to bring in tonight was pretty small, His go back for sure, a fresh sheet and pillow for the bed, and a personal hygiene kit with a towel. Randy grabbed some snack food from a tote kept right at the opening of the trailer for just this purpose. The rest will be unloaded with the guys help by tomorrow evening anyways. Dave walked up just then “Chris is on his way over, said he’s bringing some stuff for the camp”. Randy knew that at least some of the goodies were going to be liquor of some kind, Chris didn’t drink a lot but when he did it was certainly top shelf. It was getting towards 7:30 by the time Chris showed up. Stepping out of his jacked up Dodge, Chris Temery walked up with his shit eating grin he always had. Even in the bad times in Afghanistan, sitting in the mud, he would always be quick with a joke to lighten the mood. “Well evening boys, how we doing”. With a chuckle, hand shakes were passed around, “Damn, you didn’t get any better looking did you bub”? Randy stepped back looking at his old battle buddy. He looked the same as he did six years ago, hadn’t changed a bit. “I might not be the best looking man in this great commonwealth, but I’m certainly

the best looking gun slinger here, and that's a promise". The group shared a laugh, Randy had missed this, laughing with the boys he shared a foxhole with. "So Dave said you had some presents for, what did ya bring me Mr. Santa". Randy knew it would be good, Chris always took care of his team. As the former squad leader, he always took that role seriously. "Hmm I suppose I did, you two ladies just stand fast right here". Randy and Dave shared a look and shrugged, they'd fined out a minute anyways. Chris came back with a wheeled Yeti cooler and blue box under his arm. "Figured you needed some food up here before we hit an actual store, so I threw together some sandwich essentials and chips, some fruit and other items for breakfast, and couple of sodas, a gallon of milk, and a jug of orange juice". Randy was getting a bit peckish himself anyways so a quick dinner would do just fine. "Thank you man, I don't know about Dave, but I haven't eating a meal since breakfast, gas station jerky doesn't count, so what's that box your hiding behind your back". Chris with his trade mark sly shit eating grin looked surprised, "Oh this box right here, well this is your actual house warming gift, enjoy brother and welcome to the neighborhood". Randy took the box and was surprised himself, Johnny Walker Blue Label. This whiskey was at least a buck fifty. "Damn Chris, you don't play around do you"? Chris laughed

“not with whiskey sergeant, nothing about that is joking matter”.

Randy led the guys up the steps and stopped at the door checking his pockets for his keys. “Here you can just take back the spare you gave me, we can make another if need be” Chris had said while holding his hand out. Randy was thankful, his key was buried in small metal box in his go bag, and he just wanted to eat. Walking in and turning on the lights, he noticed there was a few more pieces of furniture in here than the last time he stayed for a weekend. Randy turned with a questioning glance at Chris. “Welcome to the neighborhood Sergeant, I figured you need someplace beside the bed to park your ass”. Chris said as he had his arms wide, gesturing to the living room. A small four chair dining table, a small two cushion couch, and an old but well cared for comfy looking stuffed chair. Randy was actually touched, “Thanks Chris, this’ll help out a lot, and give us some place to eat dinner other than the floor”. There weren’t many lights in the whole cabin, Randy didn’t really like bright lights anyway, gave him headaches. So each room that needed a light did have one, but only a 15 watt bulb. After sitting down at the table, the guys opened the Yeti and began making a sandwich each with some chips, each taking an ice cold can of coke. The remainder of the night was just spent swapping stories and general bullshit, but what a night it was. Chris

ended up staying till ten or so and then head back to his house, his property and Randy's actually shared the property, he had purchased a six acres from Randy from he assumed the property. So, after his own closing, Chris had rented a skid steer to doze a long clear path from cabin to cabin, almost a quarter mile long from door to door. This was all by design, Randy knew you couldn't build a community around self sufficiency with just one person by themselves. He wanted to have his friends close by as he built up his new life. Dave didn't live far away at all, maybe five or six miles. Close enough that were an emergency to happen, he would be on site to lend a hand. Dave helped Randy do a quick police call and helped bring in the gear Randy had put to the side by the trailer and locked it back up. After Dave unhooked the trailer, he bid goodnight and headed to his house just down the road a bit, saying he'd be back in the morning for breakfast. Randy sat in his new but old chair as he popped of his leg, it had been a long day and he was pretty sore, more than ready for a hot shower and then bed. After hopping in his wheelchair, Randy wheeled outside to the porch, listening to the springtime bugs was a favorite of his grandpas for as long as he could remember. He never understood why Jen didn't like coming out here for a long weekend or so. She just wasn't a city girl at all, and always complained about the

lack of comforts. Whatever, it was Randy's dream to finally be out here making it his own. There was so much to do to get this place ready for regular living, luckily it was late spring time and not really cold this far downstate, the lack of insulation wasn't an issue right now. With his cig finished and stubbed it out in an old coffee container full of sand, another gift from Chris, Randy headed inside to grab some clothes and shower quick before head. The bathroom wasn't anything special, a toilet and a five by three walk in shower that was tiled in plain grey tiles. It wasn't anything to write home about and Randy was glad to see the propane water heater supplied piping hot water. The model he chose was as basic as possible and couldn't even be adjusted at the unit itself. Simple is easy to maintain, repair, or replace, Randy's goal for the entire cabin. After changing and throwing his dirty clothes in the hamper Dave brought in, Randy unzipped the mattress from it's storage bag and put on a fresh sheet and a new pillow. By now he was warm and cozy from the shower and tired from the long day, quickly setting an alarm for 6:00am before he forgot, Randy finally shut his eyes for the day. Waking up with a start, it took Randy a second to recognize the exposed overhead beams he was staring at, a grin forming on his face when he realized, dream living day +1. Quickly getting dressed and handle some urgent

bathroom business, Randy started a pot of coffee. He left his leg off for now as it took his leg time to “wake up” as he called it. Turning his wheelchair towards the counter where he had his camp stove and a twenty pounder waiting to be hooked up. Making sure everything was ready, he grabbed his coffee mug and wheeled outside for the best part of the day, peace and quiet. As only child and now divorced man, Randy didn’t have a lot of people he needed to keep in contact with, two of his six closest friends were only five minutes away. So he mainly used his iPad mini for checking up on news and chatting on various forums. A year ago, Randy had made accounts with several survivalists and homesteading forums where he could read stories and post his own questions to be answered by individuals already living that lifestyle. There was almost too much information, but the forum style websites had each category broken down, so it was easy to navigate and find answers he wanted. Power, water, security, livestock, Randy had scoured these for a long time before finally making his own plans with others experience as a base. Lately the news was always bad. After the bad orange man didn’t win the reelection, everyday it seemed the headlines read some story or other how the US was letting foreign nations opinions affect how the US was ran and what our country should do with our money. Why should

America care what china thought of US policy, even our friends across the ocean, Randy was pretty sure a war was fought so the US didn't have to give a damn what Britain thought. Randy had to be careful what he read though, tread to far down the rabbit whole and you leave any credible news reporting and start getting into conspiracy theory broadcasted from someone's basement. Randy looked up when he heard the loud diesel that could only be Dave's, pulling up into the small gravel yard in front of the cabin. Dave jumped out chipper as a squirrel, carrying his own large coffee thermos and said, "couldn't remember if you brought your pot in from the trailer or not, and I didn't want to guess wrong". Dave liked coffee almost as much as Randy did. "Better safe than sorry bub, but I bought a cheap Mr. Coffee the other day so I'm good though". Dave nodded as he walked up the five steps to the porch and plopped down on an old Adirondack chair that had been made by Randy's granddad. "So what's on the agenda for today, trailer and some general unpacking"? Dave asked after another sip from his thermos. Randy nodded his head and turned to Dave and said " That's about it, although after breakfast id like to head over to Harrys place and pick up my truck, where still getting spring rains so I want to be able to put the bike in the old shed if need be". Dave's reply was cut short by an

ATV pulling up on the side of the cabin, Chris didn't forget Randy was making pancakes for breakfast. "Morning ladies, brought us some bacon to go with the flapjacks". Randy figured he'd be able to eat a slice or two of bacon, especially if it was home made. Chris always kept a couple of hogs around just for that, clearing out brush areas and making bacon. Randy said, "Well I suppose I could do with some bacon, from one of your hogs?" Chris nodded "sure is, had a sow that just would not take to the boar and I needed to make her useful somehow, so here she is". That was Chris's job, he had a decent size hog farm and sold the feeder piglets but also was the local butcher, he was so busy during deer season he didn't get a chance to get out much himself. "Does that happen often, or do you just have enough sows to make do", asked Randy. Chris laughed "I have about 35 five sows right now and 10 boars. There's plenty for the fellas to be bred to, but this female didn't take to any of them, sometimes it just happens, so I processes those and end up putting up about 300 pounds of pork each year". Randy was kind of shocked, 300 pounds was a lot for a family of three, not to mention all the other meat he took as payment for his butcher service. "Well alright then, house about we head inside and ill fire up the cooktop" Randy said. After cooking up some of the best flapjacks ever, Randy got dressed while the guys started unloading the

trailer. Him and the guys just brought everything inside and put it in the cabin living room, Randy would put it away over the next couple of days as he needed space. All of the preps went up into the loft over both bedrooms, Randy figured he could use half the loft for storage and use the remaining space and spare bedroom to house four more people if he ever had to. After everything was unloaded, Dave moved the trailer next to the shed, so it was out of the way but still accessible. After all that Chris went back home for some morning chores and Randy and Dave jumped into Dave's truck to go get Randy's truck from Harry's, which was only about a 15 minute drive. Pulling into the old auto repair shop, Randy was greeted by a couple old Cadillac's, a few el Caminos, even an old model T variant. Some folks just loved keeping old relics in fighting shape. The shop owner saw us pull in and came over to greet us, "morning Randy, come to pick up the ol' girl huh"? Randy waived and said in response "I sure did sir, how'd we make out, am I going to be able to drive that thing home today?". Harry nodded in excitement and ushered us into the old shop. "That truck is a solid piece, we did all we could, we certainly used all the money you had left with us, but we also got to a large bulk of the repairs. Anything left is cosmetic or extra, nothing to stop it from passing inspection, which we already did. She's ready to

be put to work, shouldn't have any issue with her now". Randy shook Harry's hand and he handed me an old key on a rusty keyring. "Thank you very much sir, the truck looks good as new, I'm sure ill be back for some repairs here or there but I'm glad I can drive it home today". With that, Harry walked back inside with the other mechanics and Randy and Dave went to go fire the old Chevy up. Randy asked to have the truck sanded all down and dents pulled out when they could and filled with bondo putty when they couldn't. For cosmetics as well as toughness, Randy had the whole truck spray painted a single coat of Line-X, the same stuff used for truck bed liners. That coat will last longer than the truck will, the stuff just wont scratch and wear away. Dave whistled, "well she looks a lot better than the last time I saw her, we barely managed to get it here last time". Randy nodded, it sure was hassle of a trip. After agreeing to meet up for dinner, the guys went on their own way for the time being. Dave had to get back to his house and do his work for the day, he had a bunch of odd welding jobs, Randy went and sat in the cab of his new truck, they even steam cleaned all the fabric of the bench seat. Randy saw the stack of papers for all the repairs done to the truck, from fuel pump and alternator to a new battery and starter, there were a few things left but not enough to worry about today. Most importantly, this truck was an electronics

free ride, all mechanical. Randy didn't think an EMP was first on the threat list but if you had a plan to live with no power after an EMP, you could pretty much survive and live through anything. Randy turned the key and the engine roared to life, with a single straight pipe and high flow exhaust, the old K10 sounded like a beast. As Randy sat inside the cab, he just sat thinking, what's next on the list? Randy figured before too long he would need a/c of some kind so he might as well talk to some HVAC guys. He already knew what he wanted for the property, a small but efficient mini split system with four wall units. One for the enclosed crawl space below the cabin, one for each bedroom, and the last unit in the main cabin area. The best part of this system is that it can cool and heat, so Randy could use it for nighttime when the fire might die in the winter, being able to keep the house at 60 or so until he could relight a fire in the morning. Also, the lack of ductwork would cut down some of the cost, after a quick google and a few phone calls later, Randy had an appointment for a tech to come by the house later on the next, the gentleman also gave him to name and number of another guy who did spray foam insulation, the two of them usually paired up for most new builds and remodels. The insulation tech luckily had a cancelation that day and had a spot available in two hours, with that making his decision, Randy made the

quick trip home. Heading into the house, Randy figured he may as well do some unpacking before he had some company. Eyeing the long two foot wide low shelf that made up Randy's "kitchen", he pulled up the camper size fridge, portable dishwasher, and the clothes washer, and put them on the shelf with the dishwasher and clothes washer on either side of the sink so they could drain into it and save on special plumbing. With the kitchen set up, Randy moved onto loading the fridge up with everything left over from Chris's visit. He'd make the 38 mile run to Walmart in a day or so but he had enough to last till then. Next was to secure his weapons and ammunition, he felt bad he hadn't done that yet. Randy wasn't one for such a security violation but had been very busy the past day and a half. They weren't just left about the main cabin though, each rifle had its own soft case, they would fit nicely in the closet. The main bedroom was only a 10x10 but It had a two foot deep closet with a metal pole that spanned side to side for hanging up his clothes. Randy wouldn't fill up the closet even back in the city, much less way out here where his goal was to live simply. After the all Randy had were a couple pictures and Knick knack stuff. His favorite wall hanging though was a huge four by five foot American flag made out of red, white and blue shotgun shells. This went on the wall right in the

living room area above his new couch. After all this moving around, Randy had to take his leg off for a while, he loved being active but his leg was a serious limitation. That was why Randy wanted to live at his “bug out” location. If something ever happened and transportation was shutdown, there was no way his leg would let him make any kind of trek on foot. Certainly not without the ability to take off and soak his leg after a long day, Randy wouldn’t make it day carrying everything he’d have to add to an already 30 pound go back. Living on site here was the best of every situation. That was why he put money into fixing up an old truck, an EMP wouldn’t affect it at all, or so all the internet forums suggested, Randy needed to have reliable transportation after any event. Randy also made sure to buy a spare circuit board for each of his appliances that needed them, they were being kept in a homemade faraday box. Randy had purchased a used tough box used on job sites, lining the inside and top with aluminum foil and then covering that in two layers of thick cardboard. He put each board itself in extra-large plastic faraday bags, hoping that with the triple redundancy of the actual metal tough box, aluminum lining and the individual bags, his electrical stuff would be safe and sound. Randy also planned on putting a HAM radio and some small handheld radios inside when ever he got around to purchasing them.

After a good rest, Randy figured the insulation tech could show up any time now so he popped his leg back on and walked around so his stump could settle in and be more comfortable. As if on cue there was a knock on the door, Randy opened the door and greeted the tech. “Afternoon sir, thanks for coming by so quick”. The tech smiled and introduced himself as John as asked to come inside and get a look at what he would be doing. “So your thinking of spray foam eh, it’s gonna cost a bit more than normal batt insulation but the quality is second to none, no gaps for cool or hot air, and it’ll fill in any nooks and crannies you don’t even see”. What tech didn’t over praise their own goods, but Randy had done his research and John was right on the money for quality as well as cost. “Yes sir, I’ve looked around plenty but I know the route I’m taking, I’ve done all the prep work as far as removing drywall and all that, even the rafters over head are bare and ready to go. I’d like five inches of foam for all walls and seven inches for the roof”. The tech was surprised at first saying “most folks just want the bare minimum for code R values and that’s it”. Randy knew it was a little more insulation than required and even more than most people who went the extra step would have put it, Randy figured while he had the spare cash he might as well go premium while he could. “Yea I figured after it’s all put in, I should be able to heat this

place with a candle, but that's the goal. Warm in the winter and nice and cool so in a month or two, I'm not dying in here". As the tech started to take some measurements of wall lengths and rafter width, Randy decided to head outside for a smoke and think about what to do next. He really needed to write out a list so he went back inside quick and grabbed a notepad from a tote in the loft and got to writing. After the insulation and HVAC work was all done, he'd be all set for summer and could move onto some outdoor items on his list. He had food for a few years in dried goods but that would get old fast, Randy really wanted to get a chicken coop up and have fresh eggs every day. He loved eggs and they could always be used for bartering if shit ever went south, but that brought up a dilemma. If shit ever hit the ever present fan, Randy had to be worried about neighbors and even the government. Randy had read tons of books where the individual was all prepped to weather a storm, only to have the government come in and take surplus goods for redistribution for "the good of the many". Fuck the many, people could plan ahead just like Randy was and the government had no right to take from the people. So, how to hide or limit the visibility of his soon to be small farm. A garden couldn't be hidden at all from the air but he would certainly put it behind the cabin, but Randy new he would put one in. The chickens would help

on that end, but how to hide chickens from people up to no good. Randy finally came to the conclusion he needed a small pole barn, nothing crazy, just a simple metal sided building, maybe 600 or so square feet. Spending that much on a building for just chickens was crazy though, Randy decided to keep it a bigger building but he could also use it for multiple purposes. Randy could certainly use it for chickens but also other farm gear he needed to store when he bought it, maybe even section off a bit of it to form a bunk house if he ever needed to house more than four people. As he was pondering his future build projects, John came outside and let him know he had the measurements he needed. Randy braced himself “Alright, so what’s a warm house gonna cost me, my other leg”? John laughed “No, nothing so expensive, since your going with my unofficial partner for the HVAC portion I knocked off a grand for you, I’m a vet myself so how about an even \$6,000”. My face must have had an annoyed expression or maybe even a pissed off one so he held up his hands to stall any reply yet “ Hold on first, I guarantee you that any guy who comes in to do even roll insulation is going to charge you at least \$3,500. I’ll even throw in the crawlspace ceiling to sweeten the deal”. That appeased me quite a bit and I said so, we shook hands and John said his partner would be by the day after next to eyeball the HVAC

portion, and give his own estimate, but would probably start the day after. I could deal with that and was looking forward to my first big item being checked off the list. So much to and more than enough time to do it, certainly sounded like a first world problem to Randy.

CH 3 6 MAY 20

Randy woke up like he had most days since he got to the cabin, right at 6:00am. Today was a special day, not only was he headed over to Chris's to help him watch over a sow due to give birth any minute now, but it also marked the one year anniversary of his move to the cabin. The "cabin" had now become the homestead, not only in name but in function. Last summer Randy had really got to work on the property, and with Dave and Chris around to help when he needed them, the work and time flew by. Randy still had his morning coffee on the porch, but now he had added barn chores. He had chickens to water and feed, and bunnies that seemed to always need hay and water. He also needed to monitor his fodder grow racks, just sprouted alfalfa and clover seeds, but the rabbits and especially the chickens loved the fresh greens. Randy had decided to not let the chicks free range, not only due to possible predators, but to keep them out of view. Because they weren't let outside, Randy had to bring the inside

to them in the form of fresh greens. He had put up a 24x48 pole barn before the snowy season came and worked on it all through the winter to get it ready for his 20 chickens and 10 rabbits. He purchased the chicks and bunnies early April and when the chickens started to lay eggs, he would get a rooster or two to try and get a few eggs to hatch. Randy had the area already built up to let the hatched chicks grow to replace others as they hit the two year mark, but also to raise a bunch up as broilers. fresh chicken meat and eggs, along side the bunnies, Randy would be in meat on his own before two long. Chris said he'd obviously give him a feeder pig to eat all his scrap food and add some pork to his diet when it matured. Randy added a sub panel box in his crawlspace and dedicated it to his barn. He needed lights in there for the chickens to adjust to days to, he didn't keep it on long, most of the year he'd keep it at 16 hours, but the winter months he would adjust the timer down to eight hours to let the chickens recoup from all the egg laying they would start doing soon. After the chores were all completed, Randy headed to the front portion of the barn where he had made a small gym. He was still using the rowing machine and free weights but had added a pullup bar, these three systems seemed to work very well and had continued to improve himself. Randy never wanted to be a big muscle head, just wanted to be in shape and strong

enough to handle anything he needed to do. Workout done, it was time to head inside and make some breakfast. Because Randy was working out so regular, he thought it would be a waste to eat like garbage and just hinder himself. He wouldn't eat like a Mr. Olympia, but he made sure to eat properly enough. Today's breakfast was going to be steelcut oatmeal, which was higher in protein than regular oatmeal, and some diced up fruit inside and a glass of chocolate milk. After a quick shower, Randy hopped on his four-wheeler and sped down the trail to Chris's place, which he reached in about three minutes. Knocking on the barn door, Randy went inside and saw Chris and his wife Ashley talking and looking over one of the pig pens. "How are we looking today, is it almost show time", Randy asked as he was walking up to them both. "Morning friend, I think you got here just in time, mama is looking ready to go", Chris said in response and his wife gave Randy a hug as well saying "There's coffee in the thermos if you'd like some, not much to do right now but wait". So Randy waited with a cup a joe in hand and sat on a hay bale. He was curious though and asked "So when do you guys have to get involved, you guys don't need to help deliver do you"? Chris and his wife smirked and Ashley said "No we only have to handle each baby for a few minutes to do a couple things to help out" "Because we keep

the pigs in a barn, they don't get to burrow in the dirt so we give an iron shot to help with anemia, we also clip the milk teeth to help out the mama sow not get injured as the piglets feed on her. We also help and make sure each piglet finds a teat, sometimes they cant get to one right away and the first bit of milk from mama is the most important, piglets can die if they are the runts and don't find a teat fast enough". Randy sat back on his hay bale and absorbed his lesson, he tried to learn something new as often as he could when it came to homestead living. The more he knew, the better off he'd be in the event anything happened and was forced to rely on himself. As he was zoned out, he hear a high pitch squeal, mamas first piglet was being gently handled by Chris. In short order all seven piglets had been doctored up by Chris and Ashley, they had asked if Randy wanted to try. Randy declined using the clippers on the milk teeth but he did give a couple of shots to the piglets. After the trio had made sure all the piglets were being fed, they turned on one last heat lamp and left the barn. Making their way back up to the house, they sat in a small, but comfortable kitchen and relaxed for a few minutes. Chris broke the silence "So what's on the agenda for today Randy, anything fun". Randy thought about todays to do list for a minute, "I'm going to head into town and put in my order for the new propane tank and see how soon they can

deliver it". Chris nodded "You going to go with the 1,000 gallon tank right, more than you'll use in a year for sure, but that's why your out here right? To be more prepared than the average joe". Rand agreed, he was already ready more prepared than 90% of most people, but her could certainly do more. "Yea I'm going as big as possible, "That's for the best, pay for it now and in the long run you'll make out", Chris added. Randy had sold his smaller fridge and oven and went back online to another RV store and purchased a full size propane fridge and a bigger oven, also propane. No, Randy wasn't worried about running out anytime soon, he was hoping was making the right choices for all this, there wasn't exactly a rule book he was following. "Well then it sounds like your making good headway, am I still coming over with my tractor to till up your garden plot"? Randy had Chris bring over a few hogs and pen them up in a 30x60 grassy spot that would make a good garden on the south west side of his property. He had purchased a used chainsaw and had been clearing the area for a while now. Clearing the ground for the garden and clearing the tree foliage to make sure his south roof got plenty of sun. You can't have solar panels with a blocked roof. "If you have the spare time id really appreciate it, I've been dumping and spreading the chicken and rabbit manure there weekly since I got them, should turn that spot into a

decent garden next spring time if we do this monthly until then”.

Chris agreed, “We wont have to till it every month I don’t think, ill get it turned over once today so we can get all the large rocks out and then well do the same in the fall. We do that and I think you’ll be in really good shape to plant when you need to, seven or so months of dumping manure there should give you plenty of fertilizer to rot down over the winter”. Randy thought that was a good plan, seeing as Chris knew a lot more about the homestead life. Him and his wife had chosen to live this way since Chris left the service almost seven years ago. “Alright well when you get back give me a call and ill head over with the tractor and we’ll get to work. Randy nodded and waved goodbye, driving the wheeler back to his place. Checking his .380, making sure it was secure and hidden, Randy hopped into his truck and drove into the little town. Pulling into the parking lot of Grady propane, Randy saw that it was indeed small operation, but was assured they could fill his order. Walking in the front door, Randy was greeted by the receptionist with a friendly smile. “Morning sir, what can I do for ya”. “Morning miss, I was told I could place and order for a new tank and a fill up of what I have right now”. The looked a bit confused at first, “You want more propane than you have right out, have you been running empty on your current tanks”? Randy decided

on how best to respond without sounding like a doomsday nut by going vague a first. “No I haven’t run empty but id just like to have a bigger backup for emergencies, that’s all”. The receptionist seemed appeased if still confused, started looking at her computer seeing what she could pull up. “Ok sir, what size would you like to order, we have several right here on site and we can call our other location and get one moved over”. Randy figured it’d be easier to just say what he wanted and pay than to have to hem and haw over details, “I’d like a 1,000 gallon tank to be delivered and filled, along with my three other 120 gallon tanks, none of the tanks are empty, but two are pretty low. Can I do pay on delivery for the three smaller ones”? The receptionist, Nancy, said Randy could pay on site for the three smaller tanks, but needed to pay for the large tank and fuel in store so she could put an order that size through the system. Randy had no problem with that and handed Nancy his card, a minute and \$3,900 later, Randy was headed out the door with a delivery date of within two weeks, but they would be by the property in a day or two to top off the smaller tanks. Randy headed home, satisfied another big item on his list could be crossed off. As it was only 9:40am, Randy figured he’d stop at the diner in town first for a cup of coffee. Mama Sue’s café was the only diner in town but had surprisingly good food. Him and the guys had

went there a few times when no one felt like cooking. Sue still worked at the diner every now and then but she mostly visited with the patrons while she took their orders, she was friendly to everyone who entered. Randy sat down at a small table and waited for Sue to stop by for his order, today however a new waitress came over instead. A very pretty redhead, about the same age as Randy came over and introduced herself, “Hi I’m Amber, would you like some coffee to start”. Randy was a bit speechless at first but recovered “yes please, and a pastry if you don’t mind. I just stopped by quick to say hi to mama Sue. Is she here today”? Ambers smile drooped a little, “No grandma hasn’t been feeling well the past few weeks and hasn’t been in a couple of days. Randy didn’t miss the grandma bit and now could actually see some resemblance now that he tried. “Well, I’m sorry to hear that amber, will you tell her I said hi when you see her next, I’m Randy by the way” and put out his hand in greeting. Amber perked back up at that and, while shaking his hand, said she absolutely would, especially for someone so handsome. Randy didn’t get embarrassed easily but was a bit unused to the female attention, it had been a bit a dry spell recently. With a smile and a twirl of her ponytail, amber hurried off to grab his coffee and pastry from the display case. It was delicious as always and Randy was glad he

stopped by, especially after he paid and was in his truck, he noticed a number phone number on the back of the receipt. Randy chuckled, guess he still had some charm left after all. Making it back to his place in short order, Randy figured he'd give Chris a call and have him bring the tractor over and knock out the garden patch while the sky was still clear, looked a bit like rain was on the way. Amy answered the phone and said she would send Chris on his way shortly, with having a few minutes to spare Randy figured he would pop his leg out for a few and give it a rest. He hadn't had any issues with it lately but didn't want to try and push it as the nearest VA was in Martinsburg down in West Virginia. It wasn't terribly far but the one way drive was almost 50 minutes, and the VA was anything but quick, that would eat up most of his day. So he took breaks throughout the day and it seemed to help, although Randy was sure his continued weight loss was a big help. Randy was just above dozing when he heard Chris's big Ol' Massy Ferguson coming down the trail. It was a only 60 or so horse power but with the huge agriculture tires, there was no way it was getting stuck. Steeping off the rig, Chris greeted with a friendly wave. "Morning again Randy, get all your business don't in town"? Randy told him he ordered the tank and all that, he was almost about to tell him about meeting Amber but didn't want to

sound weird about it. “Well, where do you think the best place is to start back here”? Chris said there wasn’t much to it, and just asked Randy to walk behind and pick up the bigger rocks as they came up. So for the next hour and a half, Chris and Randy went up and down in rows tilling in the manure and removing the big rocks inhibit root growth. Randy went inside the cabin and brought out some beers to take a break after all the work was done. “Thanks man, that would have taken weeks with a walk behind tiller”. Chris nodded and replied “ No worries man, I don’t ever get enough work at my place to really bust this beast out”. Chris carried on saying, “Hey have you been watching the news at all, the UN put out a big report saying their inspectors were killed while in Iran doing an inspection of nuclear material. After all this time before, Hassan Rouhani wouldn’t let them in, then he goes and has them killed. I wonder what he was trying to keep covered up”. Randy had seen a story on one of the news websites he follows regularly. “ Who knows man, that robe wearing dude was never right in the head, I hope nothing comes from it”. Randy hoped nothing big came of it, he was trying to live a peaceful life, not struggling to live in a nuclear waste land. Waving off to Chris as he pulled out, Randy was anxious for some reason. Hearing about Iran in the news was never good. He had a decent start on the

homestead, but a few things wasn't much better than nothing. Randy decided to head back towards town an bit before turning off for a few miles, there was a bulk goods store he visited monthly as least. They only took cash but didn't ask questions the last time Randy made a bigger purchase than normal. I tried to purchase 50 cans each of fruit, vegetables, and canned meat, 100 pounds of rice, and 75 pounds of beans monthly. With his freeze dried food never needing to be touched along with keeping an over filled pantry off the kitchen, these extra food stuffs just went into the loft with the extra gear and other stuff. Randy wasn't just prepping food for himself, he knew he'd need others on the homestead to really have a fighting chance of living through anything bad. So, Randy decided to prep for about 30 people living on the property, including the preps of Chris and Dave. He wanted this food already purchased and stored, not to mention Chris's hog farm and the garden spot they just worked up. Randy pulled into the cash n carry right around 1:00pm and grabbed one of their flat bottom push carts and did a slow walk around the aisle figuring where to start. Four cases of water started the shopping just they were on an end cap and right up front, Randy moved on to the canned fruit with five cases of canned green beans. Walking two aisles over brought him to the fruit, he tried to alternate between oranges, pears, and

peaches, just so he had a little variety if he needed to live off his stored food for a while. Last bit on his list today was rice, oatmeal, and pancake mix he could use for biscuits and pancakes. Randy tried to keep his monthly trips for his prep food below \$300, he still needed to purchase his regular day to day food. Randy added a last minute case of muffin mixes to his cart and headed to the checkout line, Randy pulled out one of each item to make the checkouts easier. The cashier was still surprised at the bulk “We have a storm coming or something I didn’t hear about”. Randy chuckled and went with his go to response, “No I try and buy bulk every month and donate it to local food pantries, you know, my good deed for the month”. The clerk laughed and thanked him for being thoughtful, and finished ringing Randy up. Randy pushed his full cart over to his truck bed and headed home minus \$325 total. Randy figured he had two or three months of food per purchase all towards his goal of having another three years of food. Pulling into his driveway he just sat in his truck for a minute to collect his thoughts. His day today remained simple, wake up and get a workout, farm chores and then breakfast. Maybe it was time to add something else to his routine, glancing at the receipt in the cup holder, Randy decided to give her a text. *So I’m in my truck bringing in some groceries, and I find this receipt with a pretty girls number on*

it. I wonder who put it there?. Text sent, Randy started bringing up all the new groceries into the loft, before he took his leg off, he thought he should check on the animal barn before. Stepping into the barn, he was greeted by familiar squaks and clucks. Randy smiled, for being so loud, barns sounds were oddly soothing to him. No eggs yet, he figured he still had two or so months until they were of age, but he still made sure they always had plenty of food and water. He mixed scratch grain and chick feed so they had decent protein in their diets but cut out a bit of the cost. Heading over to the rabbits he pulled the first four out of the cages and put them into individual runs to give them some more exercise. He would give them an hour or so out and then change them out with the others. He also only feed the fodder when they were in the runs, just seemed easier that way. So while the first batch was in the runs, Randy went through the barn and shoveled out the chickens and the rabbits and put the manure in a 12 square foot yard cart until he could bring it around to the garden in a pit lined and covered in sheet metal for future use. Cleaning and watering chores done, he was swapping the rabbits out in the runs when his phone vibrated. *Hey I hope that wasn't too forward, I couldn't think of a way to ask for your number with such a quick greeting so I figured I'd give you mine, hope that's ok. Get ahold of me if you'd like to get*

together sometime. Randy smirked, he would certainly like to meet up with Amber, he was a guy after all and she was a stunner. Heading inside, Randy grabbed an apple with a small cup of prepackaged peanut butter, one of his favorite snacks. Mess cleaned up and moving onto the couch, Randy decided to check out other news platforms for news on Iran. Killing some UN inspectors had to create some noise from other countries, most countries, including the U.S would be monitoring any threats from that part of the country. With Iran being allies with Syria, and such close neighbors, anything Iran did would probably be supported by them. Randy new a threat of direct attack was a possibility, too many countries hated the U.S and would love to see her knocked down a peg. The bad orange man didn't care what he said and angered a lot of people, and the current puppet was so weak, we were now being viewed as a target. The message boards were on fire with predictions of what was going on and who was going to do what next. This was the exact reason why Randy and so many others prepped, to be able to live on their own without the need to trust their safety and other concerns to others. Randy took a deep breath to calm his thoughts, he would stick to the plan and work on his homestead to the best of his ability while he could. Increasing functionality without expanding overall footprint, flying under the radar and being the grey

man was what prepping was all about. Randy must have dozed off for a bit when he woke up to his phone ringing, Dave was calling and invited him over to watch the game and have a few beers and being an American male he couldn't refuse, Randy needed a night to just relax and enjoy a couple of brews. Randy didn't have a particular team he rooted for but rather just enjoyed the atmosphere, beer and too many wings made anything fun to watch. A week later, Randy was just about to have dinner on his front porch when his phone went off, putting down his food and checking, he was surprised to see it was Amber calling. He hadn't gotten around to setting up a date with her even though he had planned on it. Answer politely, "So I was just thinking of calling a pretty redhead, and then here you are calling me, you're not psychic are you". Amber chuckled on the other end "No I was waiting for a certain gentleman to call me and ask me on a date". Randy kind of felt bad about not calling her first, time just always got away from him and he told her so "That's ok" Amber replied, "I was actually calling about dinner, I don't feel like cooking tonight and was wondering if you wanted to grab a bite out somewhere". Randy liked women who were direct, and weren't always dainty little flowers who were too shy to say what they want. Looking down at his plate of grilled chicken and a salad he said "Sure I'd love too, where did you

have in mind". Randy imagined her smiling into the phone when she said "I'll text you the address, and ill see you in.....a half hour?".

"Sounds good and ill see you then", Randy replied and hung up the phone, mumbling to himself "Guess I'd better put on a clean shirt".

The dinner turned out to be a hole in the wall burger joint, but randy had to admit the food was excellent. Typical first date conversation, where you went to school, where you work and what you do for fun.

Randy had surprised her with his prosthetic, she hadn't seen it at Mama Sue's and he didn't walk funny. "Sorry to spring that on you so fast, but its kind of a part of my whole situation, I hope it doesn't freak you out". Randy had was briefly telling her about the divorce and obviously the leg came up, Randy was worried at first that would be a deal breaker when she didn't respond for a few seconds. Amber broke the silence when she eased his worries "No its not a deal breaker Randy, I'm just sorry you had to go through all that. And all that is why you moved out here when you had the chance, that about right". Randy nodded and said "Yea that's about it, new place and a new quiet start". The two ate in silence for a minute or two before Randy asked "So how long until your done with nursing school, you said you'd been in it for a while". Amber finished her bite and said "Just about five months, I'm just finishing up my internships at

UPMC Bedford, they've already offered me the job once I get my license" Randy thought that was pretty good news, he'd hate for this date to go well only to have to end whatever they had then when she had to leave the area for work, Everette was only a half hour or so away from the cabin and only 15 or so from her place. Randy didn't want to get ahead of himself so he just smiled and said she must be getting excited, being so close to the finish line. Dinner ended on a good note and Randy even got a kiss on the cheek as he walked her to her car and said goodnight, "Goodnight Randy I had a good time, hopefully I won't have to wait so long for your next phone call", Randy assured her it wouldn't be long and headed back to his own truck, sitting in the cab he thought to himself out loud "It won't be long at all.

The weeks flew by and before Randy knew it, summer was in full bloom that only hot and humid August could bring. Along with his daily chores and projects with the guys, Randy and Amber had certainly kept regular dates and Randy thought he could officially consider them an actual couple. Randy still hadn't let her in on all of the preps he was stored away, she'd been over plenty and when one day she asked about the loft, Randy just said it was for extra storage. The loft was actually more of a mini second floor, as Randy had walled

up the entire front of the loft facing over the main cabin just for this very reason, Randy had left a four foot walk way across the entire front. He didn't want to keep secrets from someone he was starting to care for but until she needed to know, she wouldn't. In regards to the cabin being built up, Randy had enclosed the entire back porch which was mostly unused. He left the doorway and down the steps clear, but he had started stocking up his firewood on either side of the door, leaving him essentially a 6x20 hallway to store wood. He actually ran a little short last winter and needed to have some delivered. The biggest improvement was the purchase and delivery of solar panels and batteries from an online vendor. Everything solar was stored in a new faraday cage under the house to keep all electrical components safe, and until he needed to install them, the panels and other gear would stay there hidden from the world. The only thing Randy did with some extra batteries he ordered was connect them all to a battery maintainer kept in the crawl space. In the event of Randy needing to install his solar array, he would have around two days of battery backup he could wire up to an inverter to power the whole house. Plenty of time to install and wire up his solar panels and electronics needed.

The news kept on getting worse and worse, Iran was getting increasingly hostile towards everyone, but mostly the U.S. We kept trying to get our own guys into Iran to see exactly what the situation was. Rouhani said if any U.S forces even tried to enter his country, it would be war. This didn't sit well with the powers that be but for the moment, we didn't risk an all out war to prove what we already suspected. Iran had nuclear missiles on standby, or at least the materials to make them operational. The country was a real threat to the safety of Americans, and Randy knew no matter how much he'd done, there was always more he could do, more food, more ammo, and more people to rely on.

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Randy rolled over in his bed in the middle of the night and bumped into something warm, smiling and remembering what that lump was, Randy reached over and put his arm around Amber and tried to get another hour or two of sleep. Randy and Amber had dated for a little over a year before Randy made a gamble and asked Amber to move into the cabin permanently. Amber had already been staying for days at a time and only went home to grab fresh clothes from her house, she said she'd love to move only if he was absolutely positive. She didn't want to intrude on his personal space and make him regret it.

So after a weekend of moving her stuff she wanted to keep into the cabin, Randy had given her a key the same day she turned in her old key to her landlord. She moved in last year on Randy's birthday, which was a special present in itself. Good thing she was comfortable living on farm, after three years on living on the property, Randy had quite the setup going. He had added more chickens and a few rabbits, selling extra meat and eggs to his neighbors. Not a huge money making venture but it covered most of his monthly prep purchases so for the past year or so Randy was putting that money back into savings. Amber was a little shocked to say the least when a few months after she moved in Randy had pulled her to the side and really explained what he was doing here. She had noticed some extra food here and there but not much more than a forward thinking person would put up before winter. When Randy brought her into the loft, she was pretty quiet for a while, Randy was worried she'd think he was some kind of nutcase and pack her stuff back up and beg for her apartment back. She thought hard for a minute and realized Randy was not a rash individual, so she waited for his explanation. Randy explained how him and a few others, Dave and Chris included, were part of a large group of people who believed America was due for an upset and wanted to be able to live comfortably and on their own. Too

many horror stories of FEMA camps in foreign countries and here in the states during national disasters were available if a person did a little searching on their own. Amber didn't scare off at that so she asked if he had any other surprises she should know about. Randy smirked and gave her a detailed tour of the loft and the locked door that was his armory. Amber actually seemed to enjoy this part of the tour as she looked among the guns, seeing a few she was familiar with. There wasn't hundreds of rifles and pistols, only about six or so of each, but there was easily 10 or 15 thousand rounds combined. Not enough to fight a war but easily capable of defending the cabin. Amber seemed satisfied and was actually thankful for Randy's foresight. After coming down from the loft, Randy brought her out the front part of the pole barn and showed her his bunks he had built and the locked faraday cages with all his spare electrical parts for all the appliances as well as a bit more freeze dried food and some fuel stored on the other end of the barn. Thinking the tour was all finished, Amber was heading back inside when Randy asked if she wanted to see the crawl space where the good stuff was. Seeing the glee on Randy's face, Amber was a bit nervous but agreed anyway. Following Randy around the other side and waited while Randy unlocked the door, ducking down she followed him inside. Waiting there were two

tool shop chairs on wheels and Randy gave her the one with the comfy cushion seat. The ceiling was only four and half feet at the highest corner and went down to just below four at the lowest, plenty of room on the low rolling chairs though. Randy wheeled over to the first of the batteries, explain how if they ever lost power they would have two or three days once he connected this small bank to the inverter that was placed in a steel trash can lined with cardboard, seeing the question in Amber's eyes, Randy explained about EMPs and what they would do to electronics. All this metal insulated the circuit boards from any pulse that might result and keep them safe. While Amber was certainly impressed, two or three days wasn't going to really change anything in the grand scheme of things. Shaking his head, Randy rolled down to an enclosed box lined with sheet metal. Opening the door to show her the six other batteries, spare inverter and charge controller, and the 4kw worth of solar panels. "Your right, a few days won't do much of anything, except give me and the guys a chance to mount these bad boys onto the roof and connect all the wiring, then there will be unlimited power, more available than we draw from the grid currently, I already have the mounting brackets in place on the south side of the roof ready to go" Randy said with a cocky grin. Amber looked at the enclosed area that took up a quarter

of the crawl space, “Ok maybe you are a tin foil hat kind of guy, but I’m glad you’ve put this much thought into ensuring you and those you care about will have a safe haven to live at”. Randy could except and that and gave her a kiss, “Thanks for not bailing on me right away and let me explain”. Amber gave him a quick hug and said “I wouldn’t bail on you for having extra than you need, but do you really think you will ever need any of this stuff”. Randy thought for a second before he responded, “I hope I don’t ever need to come down here other than a bad snow storm, but you know I follow a lot of news sites and not any of them really share good news. Iran and its allies has launched more attacks on Israel, and of course the U.S stands in to help our ally. The terrorist run country has said any further aid to it’s enemies, and they will consider that an act of war, Iran already has active nuclear missiles. A military defector risked his life for video footage before barely making it to the U.S, being hunted by Iran with a vengeance. This video was all the proof we need to confirm absolutely that there are active missiles that could be fired at us any time”. That seemed to shock Amber a bit, “Surely we have radars and all that stuff to detect a launch right”? Randy nodded, “We do for sure, but what about smaller nukes getting smuggled in through some of their allies. We trade with multiple countries daily. Wouldn’t it be

easy to put something in a buried container on some cargo ship that custom misses, or get some planted agent to pass it on through?”

Randy didn't want to scare Amber by throwing this at her all at once, but he wanted her to realize how precarious this situation could be, this is why he prepped and he wanted her on board. Seeing how serious Randy was, Amber decided then and there that she was going to help and support Randy, even if nothing dangerous ever happened. “Well alright then, do you need me to do anything to help”. Randy was relieved to hear Ambers response, “Not at all, I've got it handled on my end, I just didn't want to keep something so important to me hidden away from you, your even more important to me and now I feel relieved” Amber gave him another quick kiss as they left the crawl space, “So are the other guys a crazy as you” she asked while laughing. Randy nodded quickly while smiling saying “Dave is about the same as me regarding food stores, but he has way more weapons than I do, he could supply a weapon to anyone we meet who wanted to join up and help” Amber was puzzled at first “Join up? What do you mean, are you guys starting a militia or something”? Ambers laugh sounded a little nervous now and Randy placed his hands on her shoulders to calm her down a bit “No we are not, however, we feel that having enough on hand to support and equip others will only help

us if the time comes. If shit went down tomorrow, we would need numbers on our side to defend and protect this place from others. Hungry and scared people will do crazy things to get what they need to survive, neighbors turning on neighbors wouldn't surprise me at all. That's why I have my animals and my long term preps hidden away, even you didn't know at first until I just showed you, that's how it needs to stay unless we want everyone at our doorstep demanding food and water". Seeing Amber accepting his answer, Randy led her back outside and into the house.

After a great night sleep and waking up to a beautiful women in his bed, Randy snuck out the bedroom door and started to make Ambers favorite breakfast, Pancakes with blueberries. As if awoken by the smell, Amber came out to the main cabin and sleepily gave Randy a hug and sat down to a full plate. After a sip of coffee Amber said "So what's on your agenda today, I don't have to leave for work until noon, maybe we could pick up after breakfast and head back into the bedroom"? As tempting as that was, Randy had a pretty full day ahead of him and with a smirk told her so. "I have to go out for a prep run in a bit and the guys and I are still working on putting up another bunkhouse out back, trying to get up our available beds between Chris and I up to about twenty". Amber nodded, she fully understood now

what was trying to be done on with Randy's property. Randy paused for a second, trying to word his next question. "I've been thinking a lot about what you bring to the team here, besides my happiness that is", Randy added with a wink. Seeing Amber not replying yet Randy continued, "I was wondering what kind of medical supplies you could try and squirrel away every now and then". Amber didn't think that would be too hard but she also didn't want to get into trouble for something that may never happen Randy laughed. "I don't want you to try and sneak off with an xray machine, just maybe some suture kits, some one time use injectable antibiotics, and wound care items. Things that are certainly stocked up on in bulk, and wouldn't be missed if you take a few items each every now and then". Happy his list wasn't excessive, Amber nodded and agreed. After all, plenty of nurses have a bag or two full of supplies at home just in case. Happy he now had access to some decent medical supplies, Randy rolled over to her and gave her a quick kiss and went their bedroom to get changed for the day. 10 minutes later, Randy stepped out, and with another kiss goodbye to Amber, headed for his old Chevy. Connecting his phone to a Bluetooth speaker, Randy launched one of his political podcasts for the drive into town. *Another firefight involving U.S troops and Iranian backed Iraqi soldiers yesterday is continuing to*

eat away at U.S patience with the hostile country. Not eager to start a nuclear war with the trigger happy nation, there are continuous calls from the Republican controlled Senate, demanding action are only leading to tensions here stateside in the higher political circles. My source is saying that war is on the horizon. He doesn't believe the U.S with strike first, but rather respond in such a violent way, any allies of the foreign nation would have no choice but to try and defend Iran. This would be the worst possible outcome that could very easily light the fuse for WWIII.

Randy turned off the podcast for some quiet as he finished up his drive Every time he turned the news on there was more and more proof that he had made the right choice in choosing his current lifestyle. Pulling into the only pharmacy in town, Randy wrote out a quick list he could refresh his mind on why he was here. Feminine hygiene products and just general shower needs were not normally on his prep list, but since Amber had come into his life, he had to make sure she had everything a woman would need. A lot of books he read had always glazed over this point in the prepping checklist. While hardly as glamorous as guns and ammo, it was equally important for any women on his team be healthy. Randy also started stocking up on condoms, apart from other uses they had, there was no way bringing a baby an unsafe world was the responsible

thing to do. Safely checked out and back in his truck with his man card intact, Randy headed over to an auto store. He had gotten an email from them saying his engine rebuild kits, his extra 30 gallon gas tank, and his new run flat tires were in and ready to be picked up. These tires were real beasts, though not too big for his truck. Fit for his 20 inch rims, these tires were loaded with Kevlar reinforced side walls and in the treads. Able to take plenty of abuse, Randy asked if they could be mounted now by and chance and luckily, they guys had a spare half hour and agreed. The engine rebuild kits were pretty pricey due to the trucks old age, but they would come in handy even in peace time much less a shit hit the fan scenario. With an extra gas tank, Randy would be able to travel almost 1,200 miles. He just couldn't shake the feeling he was running out of time, so he didn't feel guilty about these pricey expenditures. His last stop for the morning was back at his local cash n carry. Randy had plenty of food stocked up now, almost three or four years by his math. And that was considering the extra people who would be joining his camp. The past few months were focused on comfort items rather than pure necessity. He wanted to focus on items his crew would need, but also items that could be bartered. Between Randy and the guys, there wasn't much that wasn't accounted for, but he figured that extra wouldn't hurt

anyone. So Randy began focusing on items like coffee, bulk tobacco, liquor, and cheap bar soaps. His Crawl space was almost completely full, minus necessary room for maneuvering, the same for the front of his barn. So much so that Randy was looking at a few different prefab sheds to store extra supplies and putting it towards the back of his property. Another hour or so later Randy was pulling back into his parking spot just as Amber was getting into her car. "You made it just in time babe, I got called a bit early today" Randy walked around to her door and gave her a kiss through her window "Me too, you're working a lot lately, everything ok down there". Amber heaved a sigh, "Yea nothing crazy, one girl transferred out and another is on maternity leave for the last month of her pregnancy and won't be back for two more after the baby is delivered". Randy nodded, not a lot could be done it seemed. "Alright then, be safe driving and give me a call if you can steal away for a minute every now and then" Amber blew him a kiss and backed out down the driveway. Randy was finishing unloading the car when Dave came tearing into the driveway and jumped out of his truck, "Are you hearing this shit going on right now!!". Randy hadn't seen Dave this flustered since the sandbox. "No but what's got your panties in such a twist, outta beer at the piggly". Dave wasn't amused, "No dispshit, Iran just declared war on the U.S.,

apparently another engagement in Iraq was the final straw”. Randy was socked silly, who would openly declare war on the greatest military in the world? “Have you heard from any of our guys still in, any activation or what”? Dave shook his head quickly, “Nothing so quick yet, Ft Drum and Bragg have been alerted, Donny and Bash are still in and shot out a quick message to our phone tree before they were put on lockdown, I’m headed over to Chris’s real quick, we need to sit down and see what we can find out”. Randy agreed, “Go do that and ill turn on the radio and tv and see what info has been put out”. Chris and Dave returned about 10 minutes later and came in and sat by Randy at the kitchen table. Chris looked impatient and immediately asked “Well, what’s the word so far” Randy closed his laptop saying “Iran attacked our troops still in Baghdad for “interfering” Rouhani broadcasted a message saying the U.S had gone too far and were declaring war on our country” Dave was pissed “Who gave him the balls for that move, he cant be alone then, you think Iraq or Syria are involved? I don’t see any other way they would ever have the courage to do something like this”. Randy sat and thought for a minute. “I think it would be safe to assume he has some backup in place, the president is supposed to go live in ten minutes and address all this, the tv is already on and I’m just waiting on that,

it'll at least be some info". The guys sat quiet and waited, and eight minutes later the normal news broadcast was interrupted by the Emergency Alert System. A minute later a live video of President Brandall at his podium popped up *My fellow Americans, I stand at this podium today to announce a grave truth, Iran and its allies have declared war on our great country. For the safety of us all, I have recalled all U.S forces from foreign soil apart from our troops in Iraq. Our military intelligence and missile defense forces are at full alert and are ready to respond to any threat immediately. All air travel has been grounded, and international travel has been blocked for the time being. I ask you all to remain calm and follow any orders from your local government in all regards to your safety. If they are issuing orders, it's because their higher direct chain of command has ordered them to do so. Again, please stay calm and look to your radio and news stations, as they will pass on emergency announcements from myself and from the White House's press secretary. There will be press another press release this evening, and continuing on after that every day at noon and 6:00pm. Please remain calm and secure in the knowledge we are doing all that can be done to ensure the safety of our great nation.* After the video report, the guys sat in stunned silence just trying to absorb the facts they just heard. Chris was the

first to break the tension “Well, what’s our first step. We don’t know much of who else is involved but we should probably start our plan. Ill obviously stay at my place because I’m so close, but I think we should go help Dave should load up both his trailers and bring them here. Any objections fellas”? Randy was on board but still a bit tentative, “Do you think we need to start that just yet, what if it isn’t as serious as made out to be”. Dave spoke up and added, “Chris isn’t saying I move over here yet, just get my essential gear over here just so we can stage it if we need to lock down”. Chris nodded and agreed, “That’s right, I would like to get the big stuffed moved and ready to go”. Randy didn’t really have an objection, just in disbelief this was really happening. “Alright, I might as well hook up my trailer too, although my truck can’t haul what yours can”. Plans set and agreed upon, the boys got to work. All three trucks pulled up to Dave’s driveway 20 minutes later with Chris in the lead. His trailer was going to be food and anything personal of Dave’s he wanted to bring over. Dave was a very neat and tidy individual so his food stocks were already set aside in bins, easily moved and loaded into Chris’s trailer. As Dave was a single guy, he didn’t need to bring to much over in the way of personal items. Just a futon couch that had a really comfy mattress and a pre packed travel closet of clothes and a large bin of

hygiene items. After Chris's trailer was loaded, he went back to Randy's cabin to unhook the trailer and drove back to Dave's. Next, Dave backed up his own trailer to his garage, this was the goodies trailer. This was the gun truck, filled with most of Dave's collection as well as ammo. This took a bit as Dave really did have a lot of weapons, from rifles, pistols, and then shotguns and hunting rifles, Dave had a bit of everything. Dave's trailer was also going to be used to transport some of Dave's important welding equipment as well as the most important item, Dave's supply of half inch plate. Can't armor up the cabin without plates able to take a round or two. This finished off Dave's own trailer, and after he brought it over to Randy's to drop off, he came back to his place to plan the next move. Randy had wrote most of the plan for this type of situation so the guys let him explain the next step. "We need to hit the stores for some building supplies. Between the three of us we probably have close to six or seven years of food for about 20 or so people. No reason to draw attention by going to clean out stores now, others will do that for us. No, we need to hit farm and hunting stores for some security items and animal feed. The more feed we have now the less we have to count on what we can plant. We also need barbed wire, some fence posts, and one of our most important purchases, we need a load of Tannerite". Randy

liked reading and watching videos of ways to defend his property for times like these, and since normal folk couldn't buy explosives for perimeter security, he would buy the next best thing. The Tannerite came in two parts, and once mixed together and shot with a center fire rifle, there would be a pretty decent explosion. Not the fire starting kind, but more of an air explosion, with a big enough jug filled with the Tannerite, it would be a very good deterrent for others to leave his property alone. Randy also wanted to run barbed wire around his living area to include his barn and garden areas with four strand of wire. If the situation called for it, Randy could electrify the top two wires as a massive deterrent with car batteries and keeping them fresh and swapped out. Randy informed the guys that although he doubted they would be limiting purchases already, it would be better if they entered the store as three individuals rather than one party, and once everyone agreed where to start, they loaded up in Randy's truck and headed to the nearest sporting good store, as they felt guns and associated gear would be the first thing besides food that would be bought in a panic. Crossing over into Maryland and driving for another 15 minutes, brought them to Henderson's. A decent store for the location and didn't look to be packed yet. The guys each grabbed a cart and went in separately after a minute or two of the others. Chris

was to grab any food goods and snack food he could fit into the cart, Dave was on a batteries run and fuel for their lanterns, and Randy would look around for the Tannerite. The Tannerite actually had its own endcap in the sport rifle section since it was normally used to identify a hit at the longer yardages of competition shooting. A small mountain of 20 pound cases filled up a good chunk of an aisle, Randy filled up his cart and bottom carrier with about 240 pounds, more than enough to fill up several of the smaller metal coffee cans he had kept for this purpose. Randy didn't want to store this stuff on site just because there was a definite decrease in performance once it was mixed and stored for a period of time, so there wasn't really a point. He'd only put out the cans if some of the locals or other groups wouldn't leave him well enough alone. He was more worried about groups who would be forced to leave their homes and seek safety elsewhere. His cabin would not be their elsewhere. After all, D.C was only about a two hour car ride, he knew he would eventually have visitors that's he needed to be ready for. After a quick 20 minutes. The guys were checked out individually and loading their items into Randy's trailer. Randy had been trying to get ahold of Amber for an hour by now, asking her to steal a minute away as soon as she could. After Randy and the guys made it back to his cabin and all three

trailers were put out back neatly and locked, they headed inside to try and find out some more news. When they finally turned on the tv, they couldn't believe their eyes were working correctly, this was impossible. A dirty bomb had gone off in front of the Capital dome. Different reports were pouring in of the wounded and dead.

CH 5

This was insane, and the guys just stared at each other in shock and dismay. Was this an isolated incident, or could this be the start of war. If that was the case, then this attack must have been planned long in advance, maybe even years of planning. A news station was replaying a video clip, apparently from the group responsible. An offshoot from Hezbollah, claiming they had called upon sleeper cell agents. The speaker on the video continued saying that while the glorious Iran was preparing for its own attack, their sleepers in the states would continue to strike fear into the hearts of the infidels, and with Allah with them, strike a wound so deep we would never recover. The video ended with the speaker saying this was just the beginning of the loss of life in the U.S. The news caster was unable to speak for a few seconds and as soon as she regained her composure she froze once again. "I'm sorry everyone but this is just too hard to

believe, I'm hearing right now there has been another attack on downtown NYC, we're trying to confirm this story and reach our field reporter right now, please stay tuned for immediate updates as they come in" Randy turned to look at the guys who seemed just as scared as he was, "Is this really happening, how could these attacks possible take place". The others didn't have anything to add simply because they were still in disbelief this could be real. "I'm going to get Amber now, she needs to be home where its safer, Chris why don't you go grab your wife and come back here, Dave I need you to keep an eye on this news and let me know what else is going on". They both just nodded slightly as Randy was already headed to his truck. This was completely unbelievable, Randy didn't want to speed but he needed to get Amber home right away. He doubted this area was under any kind of attack but he was nervous about what the government might order to be done in the short term. He couldn't have the government order all medical personnel to report to the hospitals in case of an attack in their area, she needed to be home right now. As Randy was driving, he turned on the radio listening to reports as they came in. He wasn't half way to Amber when another report came in of several attacks in southern Texas, in Val Verde county, which was one of the biggest oil deposits in the state. A half hour later, Randy was pulling into UPMC

Bedford and whipping into a parking spot. Walking quickly into the front desk he pulled up short when his phone started vibrating, praying it was Amber he quickly answered as Amber started to speak quickly “Hey have you seen the news, I’m getting a little scared now”. Randy sighed in relief, he wasn’t going to have to explain this from the beginning, “I’m downstairs actually coming to pick you up, we need to leave now” Amber paused for a second, “What do you mean leave, I haven’t been on my shift for an hour, I cant exactly leave the people already here on their own”. Randy tried to hold in his frustration already building, “Babe there have been three terrorist attacks in the last 40 minutes, we need to lay low until this gets figured out, not be separated when who knows what could happen. Please, figure something out and lets go” Amber sighed as Randy heard someone talking to her in the background, “Ill do the best I can, I can try and leave in an hour when the next nurse comes on duty”. Randy had to take what he could get he supposed, “Ok, I’m in the long term parking, level two aisle four. Get there as soon as you can”. She agreed and hung up. What a shit show this day was turning out to be. Heading back to his truck, randy turned on the radio hoping for some kind of update. It wasn’t more than ten minutes when another emergency alert ran across the radio waves. It was another news

network reporting yet another attack, this time at the biggest and most busy hospital in California, Cedars-Sinai. *According to our news sources on the ground along with video footage of the aftermath, we can confirm this was another terrorist attack. Some video has been recovered by the authorities and they have released a video showing two white cargo vans pulling up to a loading dock in the rear west side of the building. After appearing to ask some questions to a worker, the two vehicles simultaneously exploded. After the explosion, the video ended abruptly and this is all we have at the moment.* Randy turned off the radio, getting more and more pissed as he listened. He needed to get Amber out here asap. He picked up his phone and tried calling her again but there wasn't any answer, maybe better luck with a text. *Hey babe, listen there was another attack. We really need to go now, I know you have a lot going on, but this is serious. Please message me back when you get a sec.* Randy was trying to see around the parking lot, seeing if anyone appeared anxious or anything, he couldn't have been the only one listening to the news right now. No message yet, Randy figured he'd give Dave a call and make sure he heard about the latest attack. After a couple of rings Dave answered and said "Tell me you heard about California, we need to close up shop as soon as you and Amber get back." Randy had the same idea

“I’m just waiting on Amber, says she can try and get out in an hour, about 45 minutes left right now. I’ll head back as soon as I can. Is there anything else we need last minute while I’m out.” Randy just wanted to get back but figured him and Amber could do a quick stop if need be. “There is always more we need, but we need a list and a plan, we’ll figure it out when you guys get back”. Dave said and then hung up. About an hour and a half later he got a text from Amber, *Hey I’m just grabbing some stuff out of my locker and then pull my car around to you. Give me ten more minutes.* Ten minutes won’t make or break their plan so Randy huffed out a breath in relief. Right around 20 minutes later Amber pulled into the spot next to him, Typical women sense of time Randy thought to himself, Randy hopped out and gave her a tight squeeze and kiss. “Man am I glad to see you, the worlds falling down around our ears babe, we need to head home and lock the door, ya know, just stay home until this clears up a bit.” Amber nodded softly, “I just cant believe this is real, what’s going to happen to us.” Randy gave her another quick squeeze, “We’ll handle one thing at a time, is there anything you need from any store before we get to the cabin, I’d prefer not to stop but I am definitely not going back out in a week when people are really freaking out.” Amber thought for a minute and couldn’t think of more than just few

things. “Unfortunately I do, I need a quick stop at a drug store, I need some lady stuff.” Randy forgot to tell her he’d added her to his people to prep for, “No babe you don’t, I’ve stored up plenty of....womanly supplies, just for you.” Seeing Randy a little embarrassed she thanked him “Are you sure, ill need more than a box or two.” She never understood why men got so embarrassed out something literally every women went through. Randy assured her right away, “I’ve probably got about 20 or 30 large boxes of goodies put away for you and some other stuff that was just in the same aisle. I figure I’ve stored enough for at least four or five years, plus the little bit you have in the bathroom.” Amber was touched, she hadn’t been apart of the team for too long but as soon as it looked like she would be around for some time, Randy immediately addressed any shortages in his supplies for another member. “Thanks a lot, my big strong man went down the girly aisle just for me.” Randy smirked but acted indignant “Yea women and don’t think it’s happening again.” With a chuckle Randy pulled out and made sure Amber was in line, then started the convoy home. Finally pulling onto his long driveway eased some of Randy’s worry, they all just needed to find out some news, then the group could start finalizing some plans. Just as the couple was walking up the stairs, Dave bust out the door, “About time you two showed up,

California is already rioting and they don't even care it was a terror attack, they just want blood. NYC isn't much better, only Washington is somewhat calm, but that's just because they immediately brought in the troops. Randy expected that much already, no way those places could be calm after this, they riot and protest a police officer doing his job. "How's Texas doing, they have any boots on the ground yet?" Randy asked. Dave nodded, "All the governors have declared a state of emergency and called up their National Guard, Texas is still calm but that's just Texas, they'll handle themselves." Good ol' Texas, they be fine as long as the U.S can get a handle on this. Randy was curious "I doubt any country would actually try and get their troops on U.S soil but what's their endgame. Once the situation is stabilized, there's no way we won't give the order to mobilize our forces and retaliate. Even if they hate us, everyone fears the U.S military." Dave nor Chris had an answer, so Amber put out her opinion. "Maybe they are just trying to get our attention, keep us focused elsewhere, we haven't heard anything new from Iran directly yet. Maybe they are waiting for the right time." Randy thought that made the most sense, at least with the little intel they had access too. But for what, get us all mad and afraid and then do what, attack with their own military? That would be stupid, Iran's military was still behind ours no matter be it size,

tech, or quality of fighters. Randy had met some serious trigger pullers while he was still in. No, there had to be another angle everyone was missing, some behind the scenes plot that hadn't come out yet. Dave broke the group of their dark reverie, "Listen, its only a few hours until the President gives his next fire side chat, the governors have already did their bit and called up their Guard. There is no way Washington isn't going to put out its own guidelines or downright order Martial Law until the country is proven secure. We need a plan for before that and certainly after." Randy had to agree, with Washington attacked directly, the President would have no choice but to show a strong confident front, its how he'd go about implementing that show that caused Randy to worry. Constant patrols and checkpoints, probably even a curfew, would be the beginnings of any government scramble to maintain order. After a minute thought, Randy added, "Well what do you think is step one for us, I'm all ears." Chris stood up at that point and cleared his throat "While you were collecting Amber, Dave and I went through my food stock and my trailer of Dave's food goods, and came up with a rough figure. We both keep our food preps in rubber maid totes and five-gallon buckets, so its pretty easy to get a tally. From what I've seen and what Dave has said, you and him have similar amounts of food. With all that, we

have come up with a magic number of our timeline for food. Randy rolled his eyes and made “hurry up” motion as Chris paused for dramatics. Chris chuckled and continued, with all that added together, collectively, we have about nine years of food for a group of 15 people.” Seeing Ambers shocked face, he smirked and continued, “We put away that much food for a reason, we need numbers to rely on. Maybe and hopefully not soon, but one day were gonna need a lot of bodies to defend this place and support each other.” Randy agreed, he figured they would need close around 20 to 30 people to really make it through a shtf event. That would make their stockpile of goods dwindle to just over two years. Not that impressive when he thought it about that. Chris saw people thinking quietly and added, “My main point of bringing our food stores up is because we don’t have enough. We’ve all talked many nights about needing more guys here and with the numbers we’re going to need, we are short by far.” Amber was apparently not alarmed enough and said so , “Is that not enough, we could quadruple the number of people here and still have several years of food, is that not enough.” The guys all shared a look and Dave decided to handle this one. “No its not at all, what happens if this is long term and we need food and other items to trade and barter. We need more dry goods for a start, maybe double Randy’s

chicken flock, expand the garden area for sure. But the most immediate action is for us all to go drive through the different towns nearby and buy up what we can without causing a panic and standing out.” The guys nodded and agreed and Amber or Chris’s wife Ashley didn’t have any reason to object. Randy said to grab a bite for lunch and then load up into the trucks and head to town. About 20 minutes later, they loaded into their trucks and headed into town for their first stop. They should have done this earlier, as the local grocery store was a mad house. People weren’t violent or anything but the line was a solid 10 people each checkout lane. They each grabbed a cart and started gathering what they could find. Randy went right to the canned goods area and loaded up several whole trays of different vegetables, tuna fish, and canned chicken. Spam evened out empty space in the bottom of his cart. Amber was grabbing boxes of oatmeal and potato flakes, while John had brought over about six packs of ramen, it was really high in sodium but it was warm and tasted damn good. Last stop for this store was some multivitamins and as much toilet paper as they had room for. No one wanted to resort to leaves or washing and reusing cloth to make do, no sir. Each team member had a cart and tried to stand in different lanes if possible, just trying to not stand out as much as possible. Standing in line took almost 45 minutes and by

the time everyone was to their vehicles, it was well over an hour. They tried to pack their trucks neatly knowing this wasn't their last stop for the day. The group gathered by their trucks for the next planning step, Randy had a good plan worked out long ago. He looked at the guys and said "Chris and Dave, you guys need to go to a lumber yard and get more materials for the bunk house, don't worry about custom shit, just get what's in stock and bring it back to the cabin. I think Ashley should come with Amber and I and continue getting more food at the next store we get to. Two birds with one stone and all that". Not seeing an issue, the guys and ladies split up and went their separate ways. The next store on the list was a bigger grocery store, Weis. Grabbing three carts, Amber, Ashley, and Randy went on their own, getting more or less the same as before. Lots of rice and beans, Stove Top meal kits, and drink mixes made up the bulk of Randy's cart. This time he grabbed an super size pack of extra strength paper plates and several boxes of assorted plastic utensils. Randy had asked Amber to go to the meat section and stock up on ham steaks and bacon, and other smaller cuts of meat. Ashley's main buy was to be breakfast items. Cereal, oatmeal, frozen sausage crumbles, shelf stable milk, canned fruit and chocolate milk powder. With full carts, the group waited in line to check out, and the same as

the last store, the line was packed and took almost an hour to get back to their vehicle. Before they drove to their next grocery store, Randy stopped at a smoke shop. Amber disliked his smoking but wouldn't tell him to stop, Randy knew he should quite for obvious reasons, but he didn't think an emergency situation was going to be beneficial to kicking his habit. So, walking into the store that was basically empty, Randy purchased all the menthol bagged tobacco and pre rolled papers with filter the store had on the shelves. He also purchased several bags of regular flavor tobacco, figuring it would be good to have on hand for trade. Loaded back in the truck, Randy figured there was enough time to hit one last store and still being able to make it home for the presidents briefing. The last store for the day was a simple cash n carry, probably full of bulk food items but only took cash. This trip Randy told the ladies to get whatever they felt would be wanted at the cabins. With all the basics covered, Randy wanted to add variety when he still had options. The only item he asked them all to grab was 10 pounds of flour, salt, and sugar. Everything else was up to their fancy. Randy stocked up on large canisters of coffee and several cake and brownie mixes, hardly important in the grand scheme of things but Randy would be unbearable without his coffee. The sweets were just good to have. Ending his trip with a few cases of

Gatorade drinks and he very nearly emptied the jerky display, everyone loved teriyaki jerky. The girls got similar items but a few he didn't bother with, Amber got several boxes of biscuit mix and mac n cheese. Ashley stocked her cart almost full with pasta and different sauces along with chips and cookies. Finished loading up the fully stocked trailer, Randy figured they had purchased another three years of food at least and he had a bad feeling they could still use more. Finally pulling into his driveway he was happy to see the guys just finishing unloading their trailer full of lumber. They waved to the group and came over to check in. Chris spoke up first, "I think we damn near took every 2x4 the store had, along with nails and a spare hand saw or two. We finished up the trip with about 40 sheets of plywood, we certainly have enough to finish the bunk house, probably enough to build at least one more as well". That was good news to Randy, with two bunk houses and Chris's spare beds, they could easily put up another 18 people at least. They didn't have the beds filled yet but knew it would be hard to find people who had the extra skills they would need long term. "Sounds good man, we have enough food in the trailer for an army, let's get anything needing the fridge inside or out to the barn, everything else can wait until tomorrow for sure". Randy said as he thanked the guys. They had put

in a busy day and he was starving but most of all wanted information. The ladies whipped up an easy dinner of baked chicken and stir-fry veggies while the guys finished bringing in any food needing refrigeration and by 5:30pm they were all sitting down to a warm meal. Since the ladies cooked, the guys picked up and finished just before 6:00. They were all sitting and nervously waiting for the presidential address. What would he say, would the government have an immediate plan for a response or they were just as clueless as everyone else. Finally, the normal news was interrupted by President Brandall, he looked tired and not as put together as normal. Randy couldn't hold it against the man, even if he didn't vote for him, his responsibility right now was enormous. Not many Presidents have ever dealt with an attack on U.S soil, hardly a play book for them to go from. *Good evening my fellow Americans. This day is one that could never have been predicted. We have a long history of adversity with Iran, from the late 70's with hostages, 2011 with sailors being captured, and recent tensions with fighting Iranian backed Iraqi forces. Never would I have thought this day would be possible. Like a sneak thief in the night, we were brutally attacked with malice and prejudice. We will not take this on the chin without an equally brutal response. I am meeting with the military's generals and my own*

cabinet to form a battle plan. And please, make no mistake, with congress's approval, The U.S is now at war. To facilitate this effort and to maintain security, certain rules will be implemented. The first, as much as it pains me, will be to initiate a curfew effective immediately. Starting tonight at 9:00pm, all citizens without authorization from their employers will be required to remain in their homes until 5:00am. Although an unfavorable situation, this will allow the authorities to better monitor any movements of the enemy. Any and all vehicles and citizens that are found to be outside during curfew will be stopped and questioned. If proper reasons are presented, individuals will be released to go about their business. If caught outside without reason, you will be detained. These are simple instructions and I hope they are followed. As of this moment, this is the only use of the emergency presidential powers I am enacting at this moment. Please continue to listen to the new information conferences at 9:00am and again at 6:00pm. There is a new hotline for citizens to call and report suspicious behavior and personnel. Please be aware of your environment and we will triumph through this. Goodnight. Randy was actually thinking the president would be taking more drastic measures, not out of necessity, just Democrats don't normally let an opportunity to expand their reach pass them by.

A curfew, while an annoyance to be sure, wasn't anything unrealistic, and if there were still foreign assets on U.S soil this could help flush them out. Amber was the first to speak up, "Looks like they aren't trying to cause a panic yet, does this mean I should head back into work? I don't want to be unsafe but I certainly need this job". She shot Randy a grin, "plus the fact is I was just getting into a good rhythm of sneaking out supplies for the cabin". Randy smiled back and laughed while saying "We'll just go day by day, I certainly won't put you in harms way. However, if there is an attack anywhere in this state will you agree to stop working". Amber agreed by nodding slightly which appeased Randy. Randy stood up "Let's call it a day and start fresh tomorrow, we'll continue to sort out and store supplies until there is an attack in PA. Until then let's just take each day slowly and we'll be alright". The rest of the crew agreed and headed back to their trucks to head home. Seeing Dave head out Randy spoke up "Hey bub, you wanna just crash here tonight, I wouldn't mind us still being close by". Dave just shrugged and looked at Amber, "What do you say boss, can I spend the night, Randy and I promise to go to bed at a reasonable time". Amber was laughing but gave Dave "permission", Dave ran out to get a bag yelling "Yay a slumber party". Randy chuckled and gave Amber a quick hug and a kiss. "Are

you going into work tomorrow”? Amber figured she might as well “Until it’s not safe I should work when I can, we just spent a bunch of money today and I really like being a nurse”. Randy nodded and went to the bedroom to take off his leg, it was a long day and he pushed it a bit today. A nice hot shower and a loose compression wrap should set him straight. Wheeling out to the front deck, Randy brought out some coffee for him and Dave. “So, what do you think man, I just feel like we’re missing something, these small attacks aren’t going to destroy the nation or anything. Unless they strike hard and fast and really create some chaos, all there doing is putting themselves on the chopping block”. Dave agreed “I think this is just something to keep us distracted, from what though I’m not too sure. I doubt this will be the end of the attacks, and who knows how long they’ve been working on moving people into the proper places to launch these attacks, these kinds of things take some time. We need to finish the bunk house and work on a list of who we could invite to join us”. Randy agreed, while they had the freedom to do so, they needed to finish a few key tasks at the cabin. Randy and Dave discussed some plans for tomorrow and the next week or two, finally settling on a plan, they guys called it a night. Dave showered first while Randy finished picking up the living area, one thing about small houses is

they are quick to clean up and easier to maintain. Randy showered after and hopped into bed and snuggled up to Amber while she read her kindle. “You should probably download any books you might want to read in the next week or so. I know this mess is just beginning and I know how much you love to read, just to play it safe”. Amber turned off her kindle and rolled over to face Randy, “You really think this is going to get worse, more attacks and all that”. Randy nodded sadly, “They didn’t do any long-lasting damage, just scared some people, you don’t plan for these kinds of attacks without an endgame. We’ll have plenty more to worry about soon, I guarantee it”. Amber just stared off for a bit and Randy continued “But I promise I’ll do everything in my power to protect you and our place here”. Amber knew he meant it and that comforted her. “I know you will, I just never thought a group would ever attack the U.S, at least not here on our turf”. Randy agreed, having first hand knowledge of the military’s strength. The next few days and weeks were going to set the motion for what him and his crew would do next. Not seeing any use in worrying when there was still too much unknown, Randy gave Amber a goodnight kiss and put his arm around her, her shampoo scent always relaxed him and he fell right asleep. Randy woke up right before his alarm was set to go off, not because he was so well rested,

more like Dave was in the living room yelling for them both to get out here and see what was on the news. “Check this shit out, the same terrorist group released another video early this morning and now it’s on every news outlet there is”. Randy walked groggily over to the kitchen table where Dave’s laptop was set up and showing a paused screen. “This is the same video, I just pulled it up here so I can pause it and whatever if I need to, this is nuts, those are nuclear weapons Randy!! Amber and Randy sat right down as Dave hit the play button. *You Americans are arrogant, your also weak. Look at the fear we have spread so quickly. We are not afraid, Allah will guide us. With his strength, we will bring America to its knees and cover this country in flames. What will rise will be a true nation of peace, a nation of Allah. No more will the infidels kill our brothers in lands not their own. That ends soon. Cower in fear in these last moments.* The video ended with chants of Allahu Akbar from what sounded like several men. As the video panned away, Randy could see huge missiles in the background, it looked like 10 or 12. The terrorists appeared to be in a huge missile silo, most of the rockets were on big storage racks but there were three in the background that were vertical with crews working around the base. “They have rockets that appear ready to go, my god those could carry nuclear payloads. They’d have to or there

wouldn't be a point in even showing this video, they are showing us they aren't backing down", Randy spat out, now understanding why Dave was so anxious. Randy turned to Amber, "I think it's safe to say you shouldn't go into work now, do you need to make some calls or anything"? Amber nodded her head dumbly, "Just the section chief, I'll give her a call now and send the head nurse on duty a text. Amber went into the bedroom and shut the door to make her calls. Dave turned to Randy at a loss, "what the fuck do we do against a nuke, food and all that wouldn't matter". Randy tried to calm his friend down, "I don't think there trying to launch a nuke, I think there launching in space and detonate before our missile defense system would take it out. I'm hardly an expert but I think an ICBM directly launched at the U.S has a good chance of being intercepted. I'm concerned about all those other missiles we saw. I'm confident we could intercept one, maybe even two or three, but more than ten, no way". Dave wasn't as assured, "Whatever they're planning, they aren't going to wait for very long. I think we need to continue with our current planning and just hunker down, figuring who we could add to camp as we see a job vacancy that we can't do or don't want to do pop up". Randy didn't have an objection to that at all and said as much. He asked Dave, "How much cash do you have left over from

what I gave you”? Randy had given each other guys \$2500 bucks before they went on their shopping spree, he had a little more saved up but every little bit counted. Dave thought for a minute, I still have a little over \$1500, Chris and I used your credit card for all the lumber instead of cash”. Randy figured about the same, with his idea of their limited time left before whatever big attack was coming, Randy wanted to go out and talk to some of the locals he was eyeballing to add to the roster. He asked Dave to man the news and to call Chris and make sure he was up to speed. After that check in, he needed Dave to work on the bunk house, he knew they would need it soon. Dave agreed and Randy headed back into the bedroom as Amber was hanging up, “Have any problems from the bosses”? Amber shook her head no, “They don’t believe it’ll get worse but they understand people are already scared as it is. The chief said he would give me a few days to ride this out but after that they’ll need all hands available”. Randy didn’t say that he doubted there were days left. “Well that’s good, at least they didn’t give you a hard time about, I doubt you’re the only person doing that”. Randy told her he was planning on heading out for a bit to do a little recon, and of course Amber offered to ride with him, but Randy declined. “Would you actually mind doing the morning chore run in the barn and then help

Dave with the bunk house? Dave could use help until I get back or Chris shows up in a bit”. Amber agreed and gave Randy a quick kiss and started to get dressed. Randy went out and fired up his truck and drove into town, his first stop, Harry’s garage. Being the same guy who did the restoration of Randy’s truck, he knew Harry did great work. Not much could be harder on vehicles like a shtf scenario, and while him and the guys could do most maintenance of their own vehicles, no one could outperform Harry. Although he was a little on the older side, Harry had two sons in their mid 30’s who took up the family trade, it was a bonus that one of the sons was a prior service Marine. Pulling up to Harry’s, Randy went right into the side office where Eric was normally in charge. Seeing Randy enter the office, Eric stood up in greeting, “Well look who it is, what did you break this time Randy, we just installed the winch a few months ago”. Randy reached out to shake hands, “Don’t be so dramatic Marine, us Army folk don’t break everything we touch, unlike others who won’t be named”. The Army and Marines always had healthy rivalry but it was mostly in good fun, both services loved their country and protected it equally. Eric chuckled as he sat back down, “So what can Harry’s do for ya, dad’s not in the shop today but Tim and I can do anything the old man can do and more”. Randy sat down and finally

turned serious, “I’m sure you’ve been watching the news, and you know there is more going on than is reported. We’ve been friends for a while now right”? Seeing Eric nod tentatively, Randy continued. “I am adding to my crew because I don’t not believe this is anywhere near over, nor as bad as it will be getting. I need people who can contribute their skillsets to the group, as well as defend it when we are threatened”. Eric saw where this was headed and answered, “And you would like my family to join up with your crew to do what exactly”? Randy thought for a moment before answering, “When the time comes, and it will be clear as day, I want you guys to head over to the cabin. We have food water and supplies, all we need are more troops to make sure it stays with us when the time comes”. Eric tried to absorb what Randy was saying, “Do you think it’ll really come to all that, you know how strong our military is, not many forces could fight that, maybe china because they just have the numbers we don’t, that’s it”. Randy could certainly see his point of view, this was crazy to imagine. “I do think it will come to that and more, that’s why we’re having this conversation now and not under duress in the middle of an attack. I want all the details to be clear for all parties involved. If shit starts flying, everyone is to regroup at the cabin”. Eric nodded and put his hand out to agree, “I’ll let the old man and my brother know and

we'll talk more about it at home tonight. I'm on board and I'm sure Tim will be too, but my dad will need some convincing. It'll take some serious shit to make him leave his home for anything. How many others are you trying to get to join your little band"? Randy smiled, knowing with Eric on board, their father would eventually come around. "We're currently finishing up the first bunk house and we have enough lumber and roofing to build at least one more. I'd like 20 or so people to join my camp, with the people already there, it'll bring us close to 30 troops on the ground. Should be enough to hold off pretty much anything other than a real platoon of soldiers". Eric was certainly surprised at the amount of people he was planning for, seeing Randy head out to his truck, Eric had a lot to think about.

Over the next two and a half weeks, there were two more attacks. One in early evening in Florida at a big commercial marina. A suicide bomber wearing a vest set it off at a café that served mostly fisherman. The other attack was at a church in Boston, a lone shooter walked right in and lit the place up. The news said between the two attacks, there was almost 100 dead and almost that many wounded.

The national guard was activated in every state it seemed, to assist local authorities locking down the highway systems. Checkpoints at every possible state entrance, all interstate travel had been banned unless you were a big rig driver or you could prove you worked across a state line. Randy and the others were tense and more than a little afraid. So far, there had been no attacks or reports of enemy agents captured inside PA. That gave the others a bit of breathing room, although the entire nation was nervously awaiting the next news report.

Randy had made it to several homes and businesses of people he wanted to invite. For most he kept details brief and only explained there was safety in numbers if any situation arose. Not everyone was like Eric and his family, who knew about being prepared even if they didn't know how serious this could get. Only one person said he thought Randy was crazy and wanted no part of whatever vigilante group he was trying to start. Randy was a bit disappointed as this was one of only two possible

electricians available to the group. Oh well Randy thought, he had increased his possible shtf team to 11 people, if he included his prior group already. If figured more would trickle in on their own if the situation ever arose, although that wouldn't be on his terms so that was a future security risk.

Amber had all but quit her nursing job, only working a little less than part time. Mostly just to fill in shifts that were low on nursing staff. She wanted to help when she could and it was still a steady stream of medical supplies they would rely on if it came too it. With the constant news stories, she knew it wasn't looking good for the long run. Driving home from the hospital, she tried giving Randy a call, maybe she'd pick something up quick for diner on the way home. Her and randy hadn't really had any quiet time in the past few weeks, it seemed like every day there was a new disaster happening and the crew and to adjust their plans around it. No answer from Randy, Amber knew he was doing even more work while he had the time, storing and sorting new supplies and gear and it was brought it, Amber was so zoned out thinking about all the work to be done, she almost didn't realize her car had lost power and was just coasting. With out power steering, she almost plowed right into the back of a truck in front of her, she barely had enough time to swerve past the truck as she locked up the brakes, still going about 20 mph when she smashed into a car stopped in mid turn.

Randy was just about done for the day, he had been organizing all the supplies they had all acquired, as well as putting away another batch of solar panels and inverter stuff. He wanted to have a lot of spare parts and even extra panels. They wouldn't last forever, although the warranties were for around 10 or 12 years. Finished up in the crawlspace, Randy headed up to the cabin and saw it was time for lunch, he started pulling out stuff for a sandwich and some fruit. Randy figured he use the burger sauce that Amber had made the other day for burgers. Opening back up the fridge, Randy saw the light didn't come on with the open door. Randy thought to himself this was one thing he just did not need right now, a busted ice box. Checking the back and seeing it was still plugged in, Randy knew nothing else was on the breaker so he headed back into the crawl space to see if it tripped. Grabbing the auto rolling chair, Randy leaned over to turn on the light to see, nothing turned on. Looking for the spare bulbs he kept nearby, Randy froze. There weren't any lights glowing on the battery maintainer keeping his two large batteries topped off. Turning around to look at the south wall, there wasn't a light blinking on wall mounted flashlight kept there for an emergency. Randy's heart beat seemed to stop for a couple of beats, He quickly rolled out from the crawl space and raced around to the side steps entering the kitchen, seeing his cell on the kitchen table he picked it up and tried to unlock it, it wouldn't turn on and looking around the kitchen, he noticed the

clock was out on the stove. Damn this didn't look good. Running out to the barn, Randy tried to gym lights, nothing came on out there either. Randy could only think of one thing that made sense. Those fuckers went and pushed the red button and launched a nuke at the U.S. Randy went back outside and hopped into his old truck and fired it up, and to his dismay, she turned over without a problem at all. Now he was pretty sure he knew what was going on, The U.S had just been hit with an EMP.

Amber unbuckled her seatbelt and rubbed her sore shoulder as she stepped out of the car. "What the hell lady, you know where the brake pedal is on that thing", Amber looked across the hood of her dinged-up car to a guy who didn't look too pleased with her. "Sir I'm really sorry are you ok, my car lost power and I could barely control it". Amber thought her last sentence sounded a bit off, but right now things were still a bit fuzzy. "Yea well you hit me and now my car won't start. I hope you have insurance cause I'm not paying for this" Amber looked back at the angry driver and was going over what she was hearing. Her car died while driving and this guy's car died while turning and she ran into the rear-end. Looking passed the driver into the intersection, her blood ran cold for a second. There were about 15 cars in and around the intersection, all of them sitting and not running, she couldn't hear a single engine at all. She reached into her car for her cell phone to call Randy, it wouldn't turn on but she could see the

charger plugged in still so she knew it wasn't a battery issue. Amber went slack and sat back in her car for a second, Randy was right, the shit was definitely hitting the fan.

Randy drove down the trail towards Chris's house and before two minutes passed, he was knocking on and walking in through their back door. "Chris where you at man, we got us a problem". Ashley came down the hallway "Hey Randy what's up, Chris is out front working on his truck, a pile of junk is what it is". Ashley finished with a laugh. Randy tried to keep a calm bearing, he didn't want to alarm her if he was wrong. "Sorry for barging in like this Ash, could you turn on the news, my tv stopped working, I was hoping for some updates". Ashley said of course and walked into the living room with Randy on her heels. Picking up the remote and pushing a button or two, nothing came on. Randy said it wasn't a problem and went out to talk with Chris. When he got to the door Ashley called out to him, "Hey I just tried checking on my phone, it's not working either". Seeing Randy didn't look surprised or shocked she was getting worried. "What's going on Randy, what happened". Randy didn't want to lie so he just looked at her for a second while saying, "Why don't you come outside while I talk to Chris, this is looking like a doozy of a day". Turning around, Randy headed out the front door to talk with Chris, who he found under his truck on a Snap-On creeper. "Hey dude, this shitty Ford giving you a hard

time”. It was a running joke of most garages, Chevy shit on Ford, while Ford busted Dodges balls. Still under the truck Chris shouted back, “Ol girl works just fine asshole, just gotta treat her right, not that you’d know anything about that huh”. Ashley apparently wasn’t in the mood for jokes, “Chris get out from under there, I think something bad just happened”. Chris zipped right out and was up on his feet just as quick, not much would get Chris all riled up, except hearing Ashley upset that is. “Alright I’m here, what’s going on”? Ashley looked to Randy and so did Chris so he figured it was time to spill it. “Alright here it is, I lost power at the house and the barn”, Chris was still looking at Randy a little confused so Randy continued, “And my phone isn’t working, and after getting here and talking with Ashley, her phone won’t turn on either”. Chris seemed to take just another second to try and process what Randy was saying before he just about tore his door off the hinges trying to get his phone. With the phone in hand, Chris tried the power button and holding the home button down too, with no luck he tossed it back through his truck window and looked at Randy. After a heavy breath, Chris looked back to Randy “Does this mean what I think it means? How fucked are we” Randy had to chuckle “Brotha, no one living on this property is fucked, every one else in this damn country is another matter.

Amber tried to get her thoughts in order about what she should do next, the guy she rear ended had stopped shouting and had his hood up trying to figure out what was going on, so at least she had some quiet to think in. She was about half way home when her vehicle lost power, that still put her around 18 miles from the cabin. She knew Randy would be on his way once he realized what was really going on, so she would just start walking on the main route home and hoped she would be able to flag him down. Decision made, Amber headed to her trunk to get her bag and changed out of her scrubs and crocs into a long sleeve tee and some yoga pants and put on her pair of lightweight hiking boots. She moved around some gear in her pack and added two large water bottles, pulling out a her small pistol and sliding into a slim waist holster that sat inside her pants. She didn't want to cause any panic but figured Randy would kill her if he found her unarmed in this mess. With her shirt over the holster, and combined with the small pack, her .380 wasn't very noticeable. And with one last look at her vehicle, she slipped away without the other gentleman even noticing, and started hoofing it towards home.

It didn't take long to bring Chris up to speed on what Randy was fairly certain had happened. Randy asked him to keep an eye out for Dave, who was sure to show up soon, and said he was headed out to go get Amber. Randy knew her car would be toast, but she really liked her

matchbox car and wouldn't trade her Focus for anything. Randy Went back into the crawlspace real quick to hook up the inverter the power up the cabin until him and the boys could get the solar panels out and mounted. He was a little nervous as he finished hooking up the batteries to the inverter and powering it up for the first time. He knew he took every precaution to protect his equipment from this kind of attack but you never really knew till you needed it. When he saw the voltage read out from the battery side, he sighed in relief. Within ten minutes he had the system up and running and wanted to test a light or two. Rolling over to the light switch for the crawl space, he paused for a second before he flipped it on, the 15w bulb turned right on without missing a beat. Closing the door he checked the fridge was up and running again, and with that done he went and grabbed his go back from under the counter in its cubby. Quickly putting on his small duty belt and 1911, he shoulder the bag and got into his truck and quickly went to retrieve Amber. They had a plan in place for any loss of communication, they had picked out a main route from the cabin to the front entrance of the hospital that they would both follow which would allow Randy and Amber to meet up along any point of the route if need be. Glancing at his watch he figured she would be at least half way home. Amber was really good at sending even a quick text if something came up, and having not received

anything prior, Randy hoped all was still ok and just went a bit faster towards the first main road of the route.

Amber wasn't too worried yet, people wouldn't really freak out until tomorrow or the day after when they realized this was not a quick power loss, then there would be complete chaos. With that in mind, Amber tried to keep a good pace on her walk home, she was really hoping Randy would pull up anytime and whisk her away back home. No one tried to stop her along the way, only a few people called out to her as she passed and asked if she knew anything, she answered briefly but never stopped walking. No point in risking anything, but she didn't want to be rude and unintentionally create an issue. She had been walking for about a half hour when she came upon a good size accident. No one looked hurt just really pissed off. A family of three was standing on the side of the road being yelled by two other males. It looked like the family was driving through an intersection and didn't see the stop sign buried in some ivy and when they lost control they had t boned another truck that was coming across the four way stop. Their breaks had failed, and although they weren't going more than 35 mph, there was a lot of damage to both vehicles. The other two drivers looked to be friends or maybe brothers were yelling and screaming at the gentleman with the family, "I don't care what happened, you're paying for this damage. I use this truck to get to work every day" The family man had his

wife and kid stand behind him as he was talking. “Look I already told you the car died, and it looks like yours did too, that’s why you were in the intersection. The phones aren’t working to call the cops to get a report for insurance and I don’t carry any kind of cash on me. What is there really left to do” The bull of a man didn’t like his tone and got in his face, “Your gonna walk your happy ass back into town and go to an atm and withdraw everything you can, right now”. Amber was afraid this was going to get violent and just tried to stand back out of the way when she heard it, she could tell Randy’s truck exhaust sounds apart from any other vehicle.

Randy had swerved around at least 12 car wrecks, two of them forced him to go off road a bit and it looked like he was coming up on another one. He had been keeping an eye out for Amber with his windows down, and his radio was already off because it was fried. He slowed down and as five people all turned their heads at his vehicle as he rounded the corner, he’d been waved down a few times along the way but he didn’t stop, his only goal was to get Amber. He yelled out the window “I’m coming around the left side so back up so you’re out of the way”. And he started driving forward and around when he noticed a OD green t shirt running up the opposite side of the road, and he’d notice that bright red hair anywhere. Finished pulling around the accident, pulled another 10 yards passed the accident and did a quick three-point turn so he was facing the accident and

stopped and got out of his truck. He had barely turned around when Amber crashed into him, she wasn't crying but he could tell she was pretty shaken up and just squeezed her and rubbed her back. Pulling away a bit so he could see her face, Randy said "Come toss your bag in and let's get out of here, this is just the beginning". Amber nodded and went around the back of the truck and got in. "The family up there is in trouble, they don't look like there from around here and as soon as you leave there's going to be a fight with the two other men". Randy looked towards the wreck and shook his head, "It's not my problem darling, we have more than enough to do on our own". Amber gave him a hard stare and said "I know we can't go out to try to help everyone, but right now there is no danger other than a scared family being bullied by some asshole locals, we can help with that". Randy held eye contact for a minute for huffing loudly and walking towards the family of three. "Afternoon folks, any one hurt here or just the vehicles". The two country boys went to start yelling and Randy held up his hand while looking at the family. The father looked at Randy ignoring the other two so he better get his story out quick while he could. "We were just driving trying to get back on the highway without cell service for gps. We just got turned around and were heading towards last town and then the car lost power and I couldn't stop. Those two had the same issue in the intersection and I ran right into them. They want me to pay for the damage

in cash right now or they aren't letting us leave". Randy nodded, he got most of that info from Amber but he wanted to be sure. "Where you gonna head to from here? long walk to anywhere really". The gentleman shook his head. "We live about three hours away up north a bit. We drove down here for a funeral, one of my dad's old war buddies passed away and we were down here for a bit helping his wife Charlotte get everything organized". Randy figured that was good a reason as any to be out in the middle of nowhere, "You guys going to your dad's place, is he nearby"? The gentleman shook his head, "He lives in an assisted living home near my brother in Dallas". Randy thought for a min and looked back towards Amber. "How about you grab your belongings and head to with me, I'll feed you and give you a place to sleep for tonight and then we can go from there in the morning, sound ok"? The husband looked to his wife and seeing her nod he agreed, "Sure I really appreciate that, I'm Sam by the way, and this is my wife Judy and our son Nick" Randy nodded and turned towards his truck, "wait a minute asshole, what about my truck" The two boneheads yelled at his back, Randy paused and said over his shoulder, "I suggest you push it out of the way and not block the road in case there is EMS vehicles out". Hillbilly bob grabbed Randy's arm and spun him around back facing him, he was greeted by a cold steel barrel not even two inches from his face. "I wouldn't play the tough guy here, get your gear and start walking

home”. The frightened man didn’t even see Randy draw his pistol, and just held his hands up and backed away mumbling under his breath. Seeing his back down, Randy holstered his pistol and walked towards his truck where Sam and his family were just looking on in shock. “Don’t worry I wouldn’t have shot him, lets head back and we’ll talk more at home. You all will need to ride in the truck bed but it’s not a far drive. Seeing them start climbing in, Randy got into the cab and saw the look Amber was giving him, “I really wasn’t planning on shooting him, just trying to scare him”. Amber huffed and looked out the window, “Thank you again for coming out to look for me, it wasn’t a long walk but people are already getting scared, mostly because there is no communication”. Randy knew it wouldn’t take long for scared people to turn into violent people, “No worries babe, we had a plan in place for something like this, I’m sorry we had to execute it but at least it was there, I’m glad your safe”. It was a quick 25 minute drive back to the cabin, and Randy didn’t see any new car wrecks, and two of them had been cleaned up a bit and pushed off the road a ways. Finally pulling down his driveway, he saw Dave’s truck and felt a lot of stress leave his body. Randy had plenty of plans and fallback ideas but almost all of them required Chris and Dave, now that the team was here, they could plan on what to do next.