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# For The Sake OF Family

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## **For The Sake of Family**

Five year old Maggie ran up to her father and held her arms up. William, 'Wiley Coyote' Abo smiled and leaned down. He grunted just a little when he lifted her up and set her into the car seat on the K-5 Blazer rear seat. "Honey, you need to take your pack off so I can strap you in."

"I know, Daddy." The little girl leaned forward and let Wiley lift the pack off her back. "Not too far away, Daddy. That's my bug out bag," Maggie reminded her father.

Though early on, it had been difficult to get Maggie to carry the pack with her when needed, it was now a fixture and she didn't want it to be far from hand. Several practices and a couple of campouts in the back yard and then in the State park had her convinced that she needed one just like the ones her parents carried. He placed the pack next to Maggie and closed the door.

"Where is Mommy, Daddy?"

"She had one last thing to pack, Sweetheart. I'll start the truck and let it cool down a bit. It is hot, hunh?"

"Yes, Daddy. Very hot. Will it be cold at the camp?"

Wiley chuckled. "Well, not cold, but it will be much cooler. We'll be up higher in altitude where the temperature is lower."

"Okay, Daddy." Maggie settled back into the car seat and just looked around. She was inquisitive and wanted to know everything that was going on around her. Which made her a question machine sometimes, but Wiley, and her mother Yolanda, always answered the best they could.

Wiley looked over at the small house he and Yolanda had signed their very first mortgage. It was small, but Wiley was a real handyman and kept it up to code and above. They'd bought at just the right time and had a fairly low interest rate locked in and had managed a large down payment so the payments weren't too bad, and they'd have it paid off in another five years. Three if they were able to make a few more double payments.

"There's Mommy, Daddy!"

Wiley waved his acknowledgement and moved to help his wife with the tote she was carrying.

When they were putting the tote in the back of the Blazer, Maggie twisted around as much as she could to see. "Is that the yummys, Mommy?"

"These are the yummys, yes."

"Good. I like yummys."

"She likes yummys," Yolanda said to Wiley after he closed the rear lift gate and raised the rear window.

"Yeah. Sorry about that. I was just trying to get her to try them. Had no idea she would like them so much."

"Well, the first chance we get, we're going to add things other than jerky, Millennium ration bars, and Gorp to her yummy category."

Wiley chuckled again. "Yes, Dear."

A few minutes later the small family was on the way to the State park for a three day holiday.

Plans can change quickly. They did this trip. Barely out of town, the radio in the Blazer squealed and then the EAS warning tones sounded. Wiley pulled the Blazer over out of the traffic lanes and stopped.

“Daddy, what is...”

“In just a minute, Pumpkin. Let Daddy and Mommy hear this and then we’ll tell you what is happening. This is very important.”

“Oh.” It was said softly and solemnly. When Wiley or Yolanda used that term in that tone of voice, it was better for her if she did as they asked. She didn’t like not being able to use the computer and she couldn’t when she was being punished.

*“This is an alert. I repeat, this is an alert. The President of the United States has an announcement.”*

*“I won’t take much time,”* came the President’s voice over the radio. *“Our various security services have informed me that an attack using nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons is essentially underway. No attack is in progress yet, but all Americans should seek out acceptable shelter and prepare it for occupation upon an attack warning.”*

*“This is precautionary. Hopefully the knowledge that we are aware of their plans will dissuade them from proceeding. But if not, I want all Americans ready to take appropriate steps to protect themselves.”*

*“If everyone conducts themselves appropriately, there will be no need to declare Martial Law. If not, I will not hesitate to invoke it in order to maintain an ordered and peaceable response to this threat.”*

*“God bless the United States and the world.”*

Maggie was still waiting patiently for one of her parents to explain things to her. But her parents were merely staring at one another.

“Daddy?” Maggie finally asked. She was getting scared. Something about the announcement and her parents’ reaction to it caused it.

“Okay. Honey. One more minute,” Wiley said. He looked over at Yolanda. “Home, load up, and then to the BOL?”

“I think it is the only thing we can do,” Yolanda replied. “If they attack, the city could get any one of those types of attacks.”

“Okay.” Wiley turned on the seat and looked at Maggie. “Maggie. This is very important. Some bad people may try to hurt everyone in America. That was the President telling all of us to be ready in case they do try. So we are going home, load up all the prep gear, and head for the secret place only we know about. Okay?”

Maggie’s voice quivered slightly. “Okay, Daddy. You won’t let anyone hurt us, will you, Daddy?”

“No. I won’t,” Wiley said firmly. “Now, we might not be home for a long time. You think about what special things of yours you want to bring with us.”

Wiley turned back around, checked traffic and turned the Blazer around. He dropped it into four wheel drive and crossed the median, getting a half a dozen honks from other drivers.

“Can’t I take everything, Daddy?”

“No, Honey,” Yolanda said. “Only a few things. We have to get everything we will need for a long time in the back of the Blazer. There is only room for the most important things. Things like your bug-out pack.”

Maggie’s lip was quivering again, but she muttered, “Okay, Mommy.” If the bug-out pack was really important, that meant bad things.

“I can’t believe more people aren’t turning around and heading back,” Yolanda said, turning back around to face forward. Only here and there was there any sign that people had heard the announcement. With the preponderance of MP3 and similar devices, it wasn’t that surprising to Wiley.

The now recorded announcement came again. This time there was more of a reaction. Mostly the average speed of the traffic rose dramatically. Not everyone, but many, and as the process continued, even more, until almost every vehicle headed into the city was doing eighty-five or more.

Wiley held the Blazer at a steady seventy-five, staying in the right lane and let the Barney Oldfield’s pass them by in the left. They saw their first accident a mile from their exit. There seemed to be plenty of people stopping to help so Wiley drove on. Another fifteen minutes and they were home.

Wiley backed the Blazer up to the garage door and stopped, staying in the vehicle. It took only a few seconds for Yolanda to hop out and take the man-door into the garage and trigger the garage door lift.

When it was open, Wiley backed into the garage, just far enough to allow the door to close. No need to have the neighbors seeing what they were doing. Wiley killed the engine as Yolanda got Maggie out of the car seat. “You get the special things you want to take while we load up the Blazer.”

“Yes, Mommy,” Maggie replied and ran over to where Wiley was unlocking the door from the garage to the kitchen. Wiley turned back to the Blazer. Yolanda had the lift gate down and was looking at the stack of totes and cases along the outside wall of the garage.

“Baby, you’d better get inside and move things forward at first. I’ll get the totes.”

Yolanda nodded and climbed up into the back of the Blazer. She moved the camping gear already there toward the lift gate and to one side. Wiley had the first tote ready for her. Each one was numbered and he was going by the numbers. When they could place the totes without Yolanda in the Blazer she hopped out and ran into the house while Wiley finished up. He placed the camping gear over the top of the totes to at least try and hide what was really there.

That done, Wiley went inside to help Yolanda with the last few items they would take. He added the holster for his grandfather's old World War era Colt .45 semi-auto pistol to his belt while in the bedroom. He loaded the pistol and then placed it in the holster. Two leather double magazine pouches went on the left side of the belt, all covered by the hem of the light jacket he put on for that reason.

Yolanda had the tote with the family's most loved keepsakes. It would go on the floorboard behind Wiley. Wiley came into the kitchen with another tote of items kept in the master bedroom. It went on the seat beside Maggie's car seat.

The lift gate was raised and the rear glass run up. Despite the two fuel cans and spare tire on a swing away rear bumper mount, with Yolanda's help, Wiley got a trailer hitch platform connected. Wiley ran out the back door of the garage to the small yard shed and carried two five-gallons fuel cans to put on the platform. Yolanda got another, and Wiley the last one and one container of water. The containers were secured, and then a fitted cover was put over them and secured.

Next Yolanda stood on the running boards of the Blazer and locked down the right hand side Thule cargo container to the roof rack when Wiley lowered it with the rope and pulley system attached to the roof. They ran around to the other side and lowered and fastened a second one down.

Finally, a large Coleman cooler was loaded down with items from the freezer and refrigerator, and all the ice in the freezer placed on top of it.

Yolanda helped him carry the cooler out to the Blazer and place it on the floorboard behind the passenger seat. Both looked at the empty car seat and said, “Maggie!”

They found Maggie dragging Wiley’s old duffle bag down the hall from her bedroom. It appeared to be full and heavy. Maggie was grunting and groaning mightily to keep it sliding on the carpet.

“Sweetheart? What do you have in there?”

“Important stuff. You said important stuff.” Wiley decided if he didn’t look inside he wouldn’t have to take anything out. Maggie’s lower lip was quivering and he just couldn’t do that to her. Yolanda, when they’d packed the totes had everything Maggie would need, but apparently the cuddly toy or two that Wiley thought she would grab as ‘important’ wasn’t all she wanted with her.

So Wiley grabbed the handles of the duffle and picked it up. It wasn’t all that heavy, but definitely heavy for a five-year old to be handling. “Let’s go.”

Yolanda took Maggie’s hand they hurried back to the garage. Wiley was able to stuff the duffle down between the tote on the rear seat and Maggie’s car seat, though it was a struggle.

When Maggie was secured in the car seat, Wiley told Yolanda, “I’ll lock down the house. You get the Blazer started and ready. Can’t get the front platform on with the door down, so we’ll need to work fast when I get back.”

Yolanda nodded and went around to the driver’s side of the vehicle. Wiley didn’t take long turning off the electricity, gas, and water, and even the special shutoff valve in the sewer line. Things would either be okay when they returned, or they wouldn’t.



When he got back in the garage he locked the rear door and the kitchen door, and then opened the overhead door. As soon as she'd pulled out of the garage Yolanda was out of the Blazer ready to help Wiley place a platform similar to the rear one in the front hitch tube below the front spare tire mount. More totes went on the platform and were secured.

It had only taken three or four minutes to accomplish, but that was enough time for the neighbors to notice and come over to investigate. They were still several yards away, but a half dozen were approaching.

"Go! Keep going. Slow, but don't stop for anything." Wiley said quickly to Yolanda. She hopped back into the Blazer, put it in gear and pulled out. Wiley was already lowering the overhead door.

With it down and latched, Wiley worked the man-door latch and closed it behind him. He heard the latch catch and ran to the Blazer. It was almost to the end of the driveway and several of the people approaching were yelling at Yolanda to stop.

But she saw Wiley gaining on her and just kept going. Slow enough for Wiley to get to the passenger door, but fast enough to make getting in front of the Blazer a dangerous endeavor.

"Stop, man, or I'll shoot!" screamed one of the neighbors Wiley didn't know. He had a bolt action rifle in his hands. Wiley didn't hesitate. He pulled the .45 and yelled, "Back off!" He wasn't sure the man would, but between the Blazer headed for him, the .45, which Wiley was now pointing directly at him, the man gave way.

Wiley ran the rest of the way to the Blazer and scrambled to get the passenger door open. He slid into the seat with the .45 still in his right hand. There was a great deal of yelling going on, much of it words that Maggie had never heard before. But no shots.

Holstering the .45 Wiley buckled the seat belt and sighed. "I was afraid of that."

“I’m glad we discussed and practiced that move,” Yolanda said. Her voice was shaky.

“Yeah. Same here.” He turned and looked at Maggie.

“You okay, Sweetheart?”

Maggie looking scared, said, “Yes, Daddy. Why were those people mad at us?”

“It is because they saw that we had things they might want for this emergency. They would have taken them from us if they could.”

“That’s not right! People aren’t supposed take other people’s things!”

“You are quite right,” Wiley replied. “But some people don’t believe the same way we do.”

“Was that a gun in your hand, Daddy?”

Wiley bit his lip and looked over at Yolanda. She shot him a glance and a very small shrug of her shoulders.

“Yes, Maggie it was. I know you are curious, but when we get where we’re going, I’ll show it to you and you can learn all about it. How does that sound?”

Maggie wanted to see it now, but whenever either of her parents had said they would explain or show her something she was curious about, they always did. She’d just have to wait. She yawned and in a couple more minutes was fast asleep in the car seat.

Keeping the radio low, they listened to ‘expert’ after ‘expert’ on world affairs chime in with an ‘expert’ opinion on the situation. The majority

were saying that the attack would never happen. It was just ‘too unthinkable’ to be carried out.

“Wishful thinking, if you ask me,” Wiley quietly told his wife.

“Perhaps. But I sure hope they are right.”

“Oh, yes. Definitely. But I hope we have the time to get to Uncle Fred’s before any decisions are cast in concrete.”

“Yeah. I can agree with that,” Yolanda said. She kept the speed down, her eyes on the move constantly. Traffic was getting crazy. Two hours into the trip, Yolanda slowed when traffic ahead of them began slowing.

“Alternate route A?” Yolanda asked.

They were on a slight rise and Wiley used a pair of binoculars from the glove box and studied the situation up the road. “Yep. Alternate route A. There is a turnaround just up ahead.”

Yolanda had to engage four wheel drive and take the median around three cars to get to the turn around. They were headed back the way from which they had come and Wiley chuckled.

“What?” Yolanda asked.

“The sign back there. ‘Authorized Vehicles Only’. I always wanted to get a decal maker to make me a windshield decal that said ‘Authorized Vehicle’. Don’t think it matters much at the moment.”

“No. Guess not.” They hadn’t been far past the turn off to get to the alternate route when the traffic backed up, so it was only a few minutes before Yolanda got off the interstate and on a state road.

Fortunately, because they were going on the camping trip, Wiley had taken the Blazer in the previous week-end for a service, and then filled

the fuel tank just the night before. So they should not have any trouble with the Blazer, or need the extra fuel in the cans before they got to the bug-out location.

Wiley thanked the stars when the traffic around them suddenly slowed and came to a stop. He'd had a non-electronic diesel engine and non-electronic transmission installed in the Blazer the year before when the old 305 engine had given up the ghost after 150,000 miles. So, even though they couldn't see anything, Wiley was sure a HEMP device, (High-altitude Electro Magnetic Pulse weapon) had been set off up in near space.

Things started to get dicey then. With theirs the only vehicle running it seemed, large numbers of people wanted a ride. And some were insistent, including a few with guns in evidence.

"Whatever you do, don't stop," Wiley told his wife. "If you have to, run down anyone that tries to stop us from in front." Wiley pulled the .45 again and kept it ready. This time he had to use it.

There was one man, with a double barrel shotgun aimed at the Blazer. Wiley put a bullet between the man's feet. The guy flinched, but didn't move. Wiley gritted his teeth, said a quick prayer, and put the next bullet into the man's chest.

The shotgun went off, but it was already pointing almost to the ground when the man fell, dead before he hit the pavement.

"Gun it!" Wiley said. He held the pistol ready, but that was the only shots he had to take. At the speed they were going, no one tried to stop them by standing in the road. Wiley heard Maggie crying and turned around to see to her.

"Baby, are you all right?"

"My ears hurt, Daddy! A gun is loud!"

“Yes. They are. I have things to protect your ears when I show you the gun. You won’t hurt your ears if you wear the hearing protectors. Promise.”

Maggie sniffled a few more seconds, but was still sleepy and soon asleep again.

Yolanda almost missed their turn off, but Wiley saw it and pointed before she went past. She turned onto the gravel road that quickly turned into a dirt road with a gate across it. Heavy woods on each side of the road made going around the gate with anything except a motorcycle difficult, if not impossible.

Wiley hopped out of the Blazer and ran to the gate. A short prayer asking for the lock to still work after all these years, and Wiley thumbed the wheels of the combination lock. He had to tug hard to move the shackle. But it moved enough and Wiley opened the gate.

He waited for Yolanda to drive through and then closed and locked the gate. “Better let me drive,” Wiley told Yolanda when he walked up to the driver’s side door.

Yolanda climbed down out of the Blazer and hurried around to the passenger seat. Maggie was stirring again. “Mommy, I have to go potty.”

Wiley answered. “It isn’t much further, Honey. Can you wait just a little bit?”

“Okay, Daddy. But not too long.”

“Very good,” Wiley said. He started the Blazer again and they were off, deeper into the heavy forest.

Wiley was good as his word. Fifteen minutes later, with the dirt road now a mere set of very old tracks, he stopped the Blazer and turned off

the key. "I'll get the chemical toilet out," he said and hurried around to the back of the Blazer. It was a bit cumbersome getting the chemical toilet out through the back glass opening. They couldn't open the lift gate until the hitch platform was unloaded so the side swing tire and can mount could be moved.

They took turns after Wiley set the toilet up. Maggie was an old hand at using the chemical toilet and firmly told Yolanda she could go by herself. So Yolanda stood with her back turned while Wiley went exploring. He found the cave entrance just where he thought it would be and went back to the Blazer to use the chemical toilet.

Yolanda and Maggie had the cooler open, and Yolanda was preparing sandwiches while Maggie watched and sipped on a bottle of cold water.

"Are we going camping here?" Maggie asked.

"In a way," Wiley replied, squatting down so he could talk eye to eye with his little girl. "Remember I told you some bad people are trying to hurt everyone in America?"

"Yes, Daddy. I remember." Maggie looked a bit concerned.

"Well, there is a place up the hill just a little ways, that will be safe from them. We'll be camping out, but inside a cave."

"What is a cave, Daddy?"

"It is a big hole in the ground that nature has created by years and years of water running through it."

Maggie looked a little skeptical. "If it has water in the hole, how will we camp in it?"

"Gotcha there," Yolanda said with a chuckle.

“Uh. Yeah. Well, it isn’t a hole in the ground downward, it is a hole going into the earth sideways. And there is only just a little bit of water in it now. That water is what keeps things nice and green around here.”

“I don’t get it, Daddy.”

Wiley sighed. “How about I show it to you after we have lunch?”

“Okay, Daddy. Caves sound like fun.”

Yolanda quickly spoke up. “They can be, Honey, but they can also be dangerous for people that don’t know what they are doing.”

“Does Daddy know what he is doing?”

“Yes, Daddy knows what he is doing. And so do I. And you will, too, after we show you around and show you what is dangerous and what isn’t.”

“Okay, Mommy. Can I have a samich now?”

“Sandwich. Here you go. You’re favorite. Peanut butter and jelly.”

“Yum!” Maggie exclaimed and took the sandwich. She carefully peeled back a bit of the paper napkin it was wrapped in. Prior experience had taught mother and daughter that eating PB&J sandwiches was a cleaner process if a napkin was used to catch drips.

Maggie sat down on the cooler and began to eat as Yolanda handed Wiley a sandwich and took one for herself. “What is the plan?” she asked Wiley.

“Yes, Daddy. What is the plan? Plans are good. I like making plans.” Maggie looked up at Wiley expectantly.

“Well,” Wiley said, taking a seat on one of the totes from the front hitch carrier that Yolanda had moved for that purpose. “We are going to move the things in the Blazer up to the cave. And then I’m going to hide the Blazer so no one will find it. We’ll set up a camp inside the cave, and then just keep camping out until it is safe to go home again. How’s that for a plan?”

“That is a good plan, Daddy. I like it. I like camping.”

“We all three do, Maggie,” Yolanda said. “This is just a special form of camping, to protect us from the things the bad people might use to hurt us.”

Maggie made a fierce face and said, “I don’t like bad people. They are bad. Bad is not good.”

“You are right about that,” Wiley said. He picked up a second sandwich and began to eat it after a long draught of water from one of the water bottles. They finished up their lunch in short order, and then began the process of unloading the Blazer.

Of course, the first thing out of the Blazer was Maggie’s duffle bag and pack. “Honey, is there something in there you can play with while we work?” Yolanda asked.

“Yes, Mommy. But I want to work, too.”

“Not this time, Sweetheart,” Wiley told Maggie. “You will be helping up in the cave. We want you to save your energy for then. Okay?”

“Okay Daddy. I’ll color, instead.”

“You brought something to draw with?” Yolanda asked, a bit surprised.

“Yes, Mommy. See?” Maggie pulled one of her coloring books and a box of crayons out of the duffle.



Wiley noted that it was the smaller box of crayons and not the big one she usually used. “That’s good, Maggie. That was a good thing to bring.”

“Thank you, Daddy. You said important things, so I brung only the important things.

“That’s brought, not brung,” Yolanda corrected Maggie.

“Oh. Brought.”

Wiley took up the first load. It was quite a chore even with the hand trucks that he unfolded and used to carry three of the totes at a time up to the cave. He used a slightly different path each time so he wouldn’t beat down the vegetation, leaving a visible track straight to the cave entrance.

Yolanda stayed busy keeping an eye on Maggie, and pulling out the totes for Wiley. It took a couple of long hours of hard work to get the totes, fuel and water cans, and contents of the roof top carriers up to the cave.

Even as careful as he was, there was a bit of visible trail. But Wiley looked up at the sky and decided it would probably rain. That would go a long ways to eliminating the trace of trail. When Wiley and Yolanda were sure everything was moved, Wiley had Yolanda and Maggie get back into the Blazer.

He took them back down the trail a little ways, until he saw the point he wanted to leave it. “Wow!” Maggie exclaimed when Wiley passed between two trees. There was barely two inches between the trees on each side and the sides of the Blazer. “That was close, Daddy!”

“Yep. But we made it, hunh?”

“Yes.” Wide eyed, Maggie watched as Wiley maneuvered the Blazer through places it didn’t look like it would go. But he made it to the slight depression in the ground he was looking for and pulled down into it.

“Okay,” he said. “End of the line. Everyone out.”

Maggie was ready for Yolanda to pick her up out of the car seat when Yolanda got out and leaned the front passenger seat forward. “Okay. Maggie, why don’t you sit over here on this rock and watch Daddy and I make the Blazer disappear.”

Maggie laughed. “You can’t make it disappear! Only magicians can do that!”

“Well, for today, I guess we are magicians,” Wiley told her. It took some grunts and groans and a lot of hard work to get the camouflage netting over the Blazer. Two layers. With the tan color scheme of the Blazer, it blended in with the netting to almost make it invisible.”

“See, Maggie? What do you think?” Wiley asked when they were finished.

“I can still see it,” Maggie said, disappointed.

“Well, you just come over with us and look again.”

Maggie hurried to do so. When she was standing hand in hand with Wiley and Yolanda she turned around and gasped. “It’s gone!”

“Oh, it is still there,” Wiley said with a chuckle. “It just blends in so well that it is hard to see.” Wiley squatted down and dropped Maggie’s hand to point. “See? Right there is the Blazer.”

“I see it! I see it!” she said excitedly. Then looked disappointed. “I thought it would really disappear.”

“Almost the same as,” Yolanda said. “You don’t think anyone that doesn’t know it was there will find it, do you?”

Maggie had to look carefully again to pick out the camo net and Blazer. “It is hard to see. Almost like magic.” That was good enough for her. “What is the plan now, Daddy?”

“We go back to the cave and settle in.” With her hands in her parent’s, Maggie trudged through the forest, looking around constantly so as not to miss anything.

Suddenly Wiley stopped them. “Do you see the cave, Maggie? It is right over ... there.” He pointed to the cascade of vines trailing down the steep slope of the hill in front of them.”

“No, Daddy,” Maggie finally said, after a thorough look in that direction.

“It’s like the Blazer. Come on and I’ll show you.”

They walked forward and then Wiley stopped them again, right at the face of the hill. “Here we are.” He swung some of the vines to one side, exposing the small opening of the cave.

Maggie hesitated. “Are there bears and mountain lions in there?”

“No. I made sure of that before. Nothing dangerous as long as you stay in the areas I’ll show you.” Wiley pulled the flashlight he was carrying from the belt pouch on his hip and turned it on.

With the absolute trust of a five year old in her father, Maggie stepped forward fearlessly. A few ‘oohs’ and ‘ahs’ later, and Maggie was at home in the cave. She had her special place picked out. It hadn’t occurred to Wiley, but the thick pad of sand off to one side of the tiny, wrist sized, stream made for a great sandbox to play in for a five year

old. It was near the rear of the second chamber of the cave. The one they would set up camp in.

Just as it appeared from a small hole in the third chamber of the cave, a few feet past the area of sand, the stream disappeared into the rock through a series of smooth edged cracks in the rock of the floor. From the stories that his Uncle Fred had told him about the cave when he was young, the tiny stream was year round, but sometimes down to nothing more than a large thumb size flow, and up to fist sized in the rainy season. No matter how hard or long it rained, that was all the water that moved through this section of cave.

Though Uncle Fred had explored deep into the cave, Wiley wisely limited their exploration to only the first four chambers that had been carved out of the stone millennia ago when the water ran full bore. Uncle Fred had decided that an earthquake in the area had changed the course of the stream. Whatever the reasons and causes, the cave was perfect for hiding out for a while.

Maggie had strict orders not to go further than the second chamber without one of them with her. She walked over to the small section of cave just tall enough for Wiley to walk through, bent over slightly. She looked into the darkness and suddenly said, "Okay, Mommy. Okay, Daddy. I won't go in there without you." With that, she turned back to the sand box and went over to play.

Another surprise to her parents were the dozen small toy cars, trucks, and people from one of her play sets Maggie had gotten for Christmas the year before that she pulled from the duffle bag sitting beside the sand box.

"Quite the planner, is our girl," Wiley said.

"Quite," Yolanda agreed.

With Maggie occupied, one of the wind up lanterns near her for light, Yolanda and Wiley began to set up a comfortable camp, first putting up a privacy enclosure right next to the entrance to the third chamber of the cave. The chemical toilet went into it, with a crank flashlight in addition to the other items.

The tent went up next by the light of another wind up lamp. There wasn't enough soil or sand in the cave, except in the one spot, to use stakes on the tent. But it was free standing and with a couple of things put inside was stable enough to use without it sliding all around. There was just enough sand under the ground cloth to act as a slight cushion from the rock it covered.

As camp was set up, the empty totes went into the third chamber to leave more room in the living area. They did leave several as seats in a couple of places. Suddenly Wiley looked over at the entry to the second chamber from the first. It was totally dark.

"I guess the sun has gone down," Wiley said, nodding toward the opening.

"Wow. You're right," Yolanda said.

"I want to check outside for any nearby lights," Wiley said.

"I'll get Maggie," Yolanda said. "I want her to see what it is like out there in the dark."

Maggie followed along eagerly. But she stayed close to her mother as they joined Wiley at the entrance to the cave. Wiley was holding a strand of vines aside. The moon wasn't up yet, and the sky looked hazy, preventing the few stars visible from casting much light on the ground.

"It's a total black out," Wiley said softly. "That had to be a HEMP."

"Maybe that'll be the end of it," Yolanda said hopefully.

But Maggie was suddenly pointing and saying, “Look Daddy! Mommy! A great big campfire!”

Both adults hurriedly looked back outside. Both knew that wasn’t a big campfire, but the light from a mushroom cloud rising from behind the horizon.

“That’s not a campfire, Maggie,” Wiley said, taking one of her hands in his. “That is the bad guys using bad weapons to attack America.” There was a catch in his voice.

“Ow, Mommy! You’re hurting my hand!”

Yolanda hadn’t realized she was gripping Maggie’s other hand so tightly.

“Sorry, Sweetheart. Is that better?” Yolanda asked when she loosened her grip considerably.

“Yes, Mommy. Just right.” Despite the slight pain she’d felt, she didn’t want either of her parents to let go right now.

“I’m going to set out the remote survey meter probe at the opening and set the CD V-717 meter just inside this chamber.”

Yolanda nodded. “Maggie and I will fix some supper. That sound okay, Maggie?”

“Okay, Mommy. I’ve played enough. Time to get to work.”

“That’s the attitude,” Wiley told his daughter. “I’ll be right back.”

Maggie helped as much as Yolanda let her, since they were using the camping stove to cook the meal. Wiley looked over when he came back

in, but opened one of the totes left out for seats and took something out of it. “Going to see what the Alert Radio has, if anything.”

Yolanda nodded. She’d barely gone back to working at the fold up table when Wiley was back. “Nothing,” he mouthed to Yolanda when Maggie wasn’t looking. It was not happy statement.

Wiley was even more unhappy a few hours later, after Maggie had gone to sleep and Yolanda was getting ready for bed. He’d been checking the CD V-717 radiation survey meter every fifteen minutes. There was no radiation the first several times and Wiley was about to let out a sigh of relief.

But between the last time he checked and this time, the fallout started and rose to 15R per hour. He continued to watch it, prompting Yolanda to come over to see what was wrong.

When Wiley quietly told her the fallout was coming down, she shuddered. “Hold me?”

Wiley stood up and did just that. “There is a good bend in the cave between the first chamber and this one. And if need be we can stay in the third chamber. It jukes off at an angle, too.”

“How much are we getting in here?” Yolanda asked, looking over at Maggie’s small tent, the door of it just inches away from the door of the larger tent.

“Let me get the other meter and check. It only just started, so I expect very little.”

Yolanda stood with her arms crossed in the cool temperature of the cave despite the sweats she was wearing.

“Not registering,” Wiley said when he came back, held the meter at waist level, and turned it on. “I’ll see where the point is that the radiation stops.”

“Oh, Wiley! Be careful!”

“Absolutely.” He inched forward. There was no movement of the needle on the lowest scale until he made it around the outcropping of hard rock that had caused the river flow to cut a turn in the path of the tunnel.

Wiley stopped and waited a few seconds. The level was stable. He hurried back to Yolanda and looked at that meter. It had barely moved.

“Looks like it has started to rain. Yolanda, why don’t you get some sleep. I’m going to give it a couple hours and try to catch the peak reading. An hour after that and I’ll take an initial reading to plug into Tired Old Man’s spread sheet and see what our shelter stay is likely to be.”

“Okay. I guess. But don’t be up long. You need your rest.”

“Yeah. Okay. Two hours, tops.”

They shared a kiss and then Yolanda went back to the tent and Wiley sat down to keep an eye on the V-717. He set the V-715 down beside it and turned it off. No need to waste battery power.

He caught himself dozing a couple of times. The third time he looked at his watch. The two hours was almost up. He turned on the flashlight and shined it on the meters. He was surprised to see the V-717 reading 67R and the V-715 when he turned it back on, still zero. The cave was an effective shelter. He’d had a moment or two of doubt, but this confirmed it.



The previous reading on the V-717 had been just shy of 70R. He set his watch alarm for one hour and leaned back against the rock wall of the cave to catch a nap.

Wiley jumped when his watch alarm sounded, seemingly extra loud in the cave. Since it had taken well over an hour for the fallout to arrive, he decided that they had not received any of the very fast decay isotopes that ran the meter readings way up at first. That was the reason for the wait of an hour after peak for those isotopes to stabilize and get an accurate reading that would follow the 7/10 radiation decay rule from that point on.

So the 7R reading he was getting on the V-717 tracked perfectly with the calculation. He'd plug the numbers in the Excel spreadsheet he had obtained on the internet the next morning. For the moment, everything was copacetic and Wiley went to bed, snuggling up to Yolanda to whisper, "Already down to 7R. 42 hours from now it should be down to 0.7R per hour."

"How long will we have to stay?" Yolanda whispered back.

Wiley chuckled softly. "My mind doesn't work as fast or accurately as TOM's Excel spreadsheet. I'll put the numbers in tomorrow after I check the meters. Good night."

"Good night, my love."

Maggie's wide awake question the next morning had Yolanda and Wiley up and about at just before five AM. "Mommy. I need to go potty. Will you go with me?"

A groggy Yolanda said she would and untangled herself from the sleeping bag. When the two returned, Wiley was over at the meters. He looked pleased when he came back to the tents.

“Good readings?” Yolanda asked, prompting Maggie to ask, “Can I read, too? I like to read.”

“This is grown up reading, Maggie. We’ll read a story after breakfast, though. How’s that?”

“Okay, I guess,” she replied with little enthusiasm.

“You two might as well get some more sleep,” Wiley told them. “I’m going to get the computer out and do some calculations.”

Maggie brightened, but the stern look on Wiley’s face had her crawling back into her tent and the sleeping bag.

“Give me an hour or so and wake me. I’ll start breakfast then.”

Wiley nodded. “Will do.”

He didn’t spend much time on the computer. He had two charged batteries, and a solar panel set up to recharge them and the other rechargeable batteries he used. But he couldn’t deploy the solar panel until the radiation had fallen enough for him to go out for more than just a few seconds at a time.

He made sure Yolanda was asleep when he got out the binoculars, clipped a dosimeter to his shirt pocket, and picked up the Victoreen-715 meter. He walked quickly to the front of the cave, did a good scan of the area through the hanging vines. Satisfied there was nothing moving now, he took a reading on the V-715. Under 2R per hour. About 36 more hours and it should be down to 0.7R And about twelve to fourteen days, down below 0.10R per hour, a level low enough to get out and about full time for him and Yolanda, though he was determined to keep Maggie in the cave as much as possible.

Rather than wake Yolanda, Wiley set about making breakfast for the family shortly after six. The coffee and hot chocolate were smelling

good and brought both Maggie and Yolanda out of their sleeping bags and the tents.

The two went over to the toilet enclosure and then to the hand washing station consisting of a self-contained water container, basin, and drain. The basin drained into a 6-gallon pail that Wiley would empty regularly.

Both were dressed and waiting for their coffee and hot chocolate to cool enough to drink and for Wiley to take the first pancakes off the griddle. Yolanda helped Maggie get set at the fold up table and handed her a fork and a napkin. One would get about as much use as the other, and call for a good cleanup afterwards.

“How are the pancakes?” Wiley asked a few minutes later when he sat down to his own short stack.

“Yummy!” from Maggie.

And “Great,” from Yolanda satisfied Wiley he’d done okay. He wasn’t the world’s best cook.

After breakfast and the cleanup that followed, Wiley took Yolanda aside and told her his thoughts on how long their stay would need to be. Not wanting to use the computer much yet, Wiley set about checking everything over while Yolanda played with Maggie. Or, more accurately, tutored her in geography using one of her learning books taken from the duffle.

The lesson over, Maggie went to play in her sand box and Yolanda went to help Wiley. “Can you believe her? She brought school books with her in her important bag.”

“Really? She is a remarkable little girl.”

“Yes, she is. And I intend to see that she weathers this... war... without too many scars.”

“Me and thee both.” Wiley’s words were heart felt.

As soon as the radiation rate outside was under 1.0R per hour, Wiley, always wearing a dosimeter to track his exposure, and Tyvek coveralls, rubber boots, rubber gloves, and a respirator to protect against any fallout dust that might still be clinging to plants, began to venture outside. The rain that first night had washed much of it away, but more had fallen after the rain.

He checked on the Blazer first, not getting close to it, but close enough to see that it was still there. The next trip he took one of the buckets of waste from the chemical toilet and a shovel. Wiley buried the waste and headed back to the cave, using an alternate route.

Maggie wanted to go each time Wiley went out, but Yolanda and Wiley were stern with her. They tried to explain what the problem was, but she either didn’t understand, or chose to not understand.

Wiley had taken the .45 each time he went out, but after seeing some activity in the distance from the cave mouth Wiley brought the heavy 2-gun Hardigg i3300 hard case with soft 2-gun insert bag out from the third chamber of the cave. He placed it on the fold up table and went back to the third chamber to fetch two MTM ammunition cans and an Otis Tactical Cleaning Kit.

Maggie noticed the activity and hurried over to see what her father was doing. Yolanda saw as well and quietly asked, “Do we really have to?”

“I think so,” he said hurriedly, before Maggie could get into hearing range. “Saw something. Way off, but they could be headed this direction.”

“Daddy! Daddy! What’cha doing?”

“Do you remember what I promised in the Blazer when we were coming here?”

Maggie snuggled between Yolanda’s knees where she was sitting on a tote, watching Wiley as well.

“About showing you the gun?”

“You going to show me now?”

“I sure am. Pay close attention, and when you are older, I will show you how to shoot it. Now I just want to make sure you aren’t afraid of it, and respect it enough to leave it alone if you were to find one at a friend’s house sometime.”

“Okay, Daddy. I promise.”

Wiley drew the .45 from the waist holster and began the process of clearing it and then breaking it down while explaining safety aspects of having a gun. Maggie watched, entranced, as Wiley named the parts and cleaned the gun, and then put it back together, asking Maggie what each part was. Yolanda had to coach her a little, but she remembered many of the things.

He ran the magazine home and put the old Colt 1911A1 back in the holster. “Now, that was for things close to you that are dangerous,” Wiley then said, unlatching the Hardigg case. He took the 2-gun soft case out and then slid the Springfield Armory M1A out of the soft case.

Maggie’s eyes got huge. “That’s a big gun, Daddy!”

“It is a rifle,” Wiley told her. An M1A rifle. It shoots much further than the pistol and can stop bad people from farther away than the pistol. But you must always know what you are shooting at before you pull the trigger. These guns can kill people. You don’t want to kill anyone unless they are really, really bad.”

“No, Daddy.”

Wiley went through the same procedure of breaking down the weapon, cleaning it, and putting it back together. He reached down and opened an ammo can and pulled out a 20-round magazine for the M1A and inserted it. “It’s ready to go. You want to see another one?” Wiley asked.

Maggie nodded eagerly. Wiley leaned the M1A against the table where it wouldn’t fall, and took out the Remington 11-87 semi-auto shotgun in the other side of the soft case. Maggie’s jaw dropped open. “That’s even bigger than the M1A! It has a really big hole in the barrel!”

“Yes, it does. This is a shotgun. It is used mostly for hunting flying birds and small game, as well as for protection from bad people.” Again Wiley went through the process of educating Maggie and getting the guns ready for possible use.

“Now, when you are older we’ll get you smaller guns for you to shoot while we shoot the bigger ones. When we do that, we’ll have hearing protection and eye protection to use, like these.”

Wiley pulled out a set of earplugs and shooting glasses to show Maggie. “You know how loud the Colt was when I shot it before and it hurt your ears?”

Maggie nodded.

“Well, with these, the sound won’t hurt you. You always want to wear protection when you go shooting, unless it is bad guys and you don’t have time.”

“Okay, Daddy. Can I go play now?”

“Of course you can, Sweetie. Just remember, no touching if Mommy or I aren’t there to help you.”

“No touching. I know, Daddy.”

Wiley smiled and breathed in relief. “That went well.”

“You did a good job. All the basics. I just hope we don’t have to use them. I can wait for a long time before we need to get Maggie her own guns and gear.”

There was very little to do for Yolanda and Wiley those long days waiting for the radiation level to fall. Maggie seemed happy with her duffle bag of important items, bringing out something new almost every day to play or learn with.

With the radiation low enough to not get too heavy a dose, Wiley went to checking the area with the binoculars every couple of hours. Five days before they were scheduled to leave and see what had happened at Uncle Fred’s, Wiley heard gunfire. He didn’t spot it, at the time, but an hour later he saw a curl of smoke just before a heavy rain started.

That night he quietly talked to Yolanda. “I have to go see what is going on, Yolanda. I don’t want to have to do battle up here in the cave. I have to take it to them, if that is what they are.

“Now, while I’m gone, I want the two of you to hole up in the fourth chamber. The entrance is small, and you can stop anyone from coming in. At least until I get back.”

“What if you don’t come back, Wiley?” It was a hard question, but both knew it had to be answered.

“Then you take Maggie, get to the Blazer and head for Uncle Fred’s as fast as you can get there. If anyone made it through this, it is him and his family.”

Yolanda went into Wiley's arms. They fell asleep, though Wiley didn't sleep long. He eased out of the sleeping bag and then the tent, and took up the binoculars again. This time he pinpointed a camp fire in the distance, despite the now light rain. "That fire must be huge," he muttered. He took note of landmarks so he could find the place again later.

The rain was still light when the three got up the next morning. Wiley was distracted and barely touched his breakfast. Then he announced he was going on a scouting run. As usual, Maggie wanted to go.

"Not this time, Maggie. This time I have a special task for you."

"What is it, Daddy?"

"I want you and Mommy to explore the fourth chamber a little bit and wait there for me to get back."

"I can't go in there. You said so."

"I know. But things have changed. You've grown up a little bit since then. I think you're old enough to handle it with your mother's help."

"Yes, Daddy! I'm a big girl now!"

"Well, maybe not really big, but bigger than you were." He kissed Maggie's forehead and then Yolanda's lips. Near the entry of the second chamber, Wiley had laid out the FMCO vest and MOLLE belt he used with the M1A. It carried eight 20-round magazines, plus the one in the gun. There were two canteens of water, a survival kit, first-aid kit, and tools & hardware kit, along with a butt pouch with poncho and liner, some jerky, gorp, and several Millennium ration bars. He put on the vest, picked up the rifle, and went through the opening into the first chamber.

Quietly Yolanda said, "I guess it is time for us to check out the fourth cave chamber. What do you say?"



“Okay, Mommy. Can I have a flashlight, too?”

“Sure you can. We’ll both take two. And your bug-out bag. That’s what we’re doing. A mini bug out from the second chamber to the fourth chamber.”

“Okay, Mommy.” Maggie ran to get her bug out pack and then joined Yolanda at one of the totes. Yolanda took out several items and put them in her pack. Then she took out the 11-87, and an FMCO vest set up to carry the same things that Wiley’s did, but with 48 loops for shotgun shells rather than the 8 magazines he had.

“Can you shoot, Mommy?” Maggie was amazed.

Yolanda had to chuckle at the astonishment on Maggie’s face. “Yes, my child, Mommy can shoot. And shoot very well. I just hope there is nothing to shoot at for a long time.” Yolanda put on the vest and then slung the shotgun over her right shoulder.

Maggie had one of the windup flashlights in her left hand, so Yolanda took Maggie’s right into her left, and carried her flashlight in her right hand. Off they went, through the third chamber and into the fourth.

Yolanda had to twist and wiggle a bit to get through the opening, which Maggie found hysterically funny for some reason. But they were finally in the chamber. It was much larger than the first three, and the light beams from their flashlights faded away into nothing.

“Daddy said there wasn’t anything dangerous in here, but let’s look around and see for ourselves. What do you say?”

“Okay, Mommy.” There was a tiny quiver in Maggie’s voice, but she bravely followed her mother deeper into the chamber, holding tightly to her hand. It wasn’t too long before they found a wall of the chamber and

began to walk along it. Pretty soon they came to the entrance again and stopped.

“Nothing dangerous,” Yolanda said. She sat down on the sand. That was one of the things different about this chamber. The floor wasn’t as even as the others, but was covered with a thick layer of sand.

Yolanda leaned back against the wall, the hydration bladder in the pack attached to the vest padding her, and Maggie squeezed between her mother’s knees and leaned back against her. “Let’s turn the light off and wind them up ready to use again. What do you say?”

“Okay, Mommy. You won’t run away in the dark, will you?”

“No, Sweetie. I would never do that.”

“Okay.” Maggie switched her light off and then Yolanda did the same. There was the sound of cranking and whir of the generators in the flashlights charging the capacitors. Suddenly, almost at the same instant, both Maggie’s and Yolanda’s eyes adjusted to the full darkness. And saw the glow on two walls of the cave.

“Wow! The walls have little bitty flashlights!”

That launched Yolanda into a lesson on how some plants, animals, and minerals could produce light all by themselves. Yolanda was glad to have something to do, and Maggie was soon lulled to sleep by her mother’s voice.

Yolanda swept a few loose strands of hair from Maggie’s cheek in the weak natural light. “I guess we’ll have to take up this lesson later,” Yolanda said and gave Maggie a kiss on the top of her head.

Yolanda jerked awake. She didn’t know how long she and Maggie had slept, but it must have been a considerable amount. She desperately wanted to know what was happening. She’d wanted Wiley to take one of

the MURS radios with him, but he said they wouldn't work with her in the cave, so he hadn't taken one. So Yolanda continued to wait, wide-eyed awake now in the pale light.

Wiley had moved quickly to the spot he had picked out to wait and see if those at the campfire came toward the hill with the cave. His heart dropped when he heard noises in the distance of several people moving toward him in through the damp forest.

Backtracking to the point he had spotted earlier, Wiley crawled down under the trunk of a huge old growth fallen tree. He dug a bit with his sheath knife to make a clear firing port for the M1A. He set out two of the magazines from the vest and just waited to see who or what would be coming down the trail. It wasn't long before he found out.

A young man, boy really, thought Wiley, was in the lead. But he was on a leash, like a dog, a choke chain around his neck with a leather leash attached. The loop handle of the leash was in the hands of a huge bear of a man. His hair was unkempt, and Wiley thought he could smell the filth on the man from where he was.

Wiley kept watching until two more men showed up, right behind the big man and the boy on the leash. Wiley winced and nearly pulled the trigger of the M1A with the big man in the sights when he yanked viciously on the leash, causing the boy to gag and gasp and fall backward.

The big man kicked the boy. "How far are we? You said we'd be there today."

Wiley caught a glimpse of the boy's eyes before he looked at the man holding him prisoner. He was sure he saw the boy wink at him, but couldn't be sure. The boy moved around a bit, adjusting the choke collar so it didn't cut so much of his already bloody neck. Wiley realized the

boy was getting out of the line of fire between the three men and the tree Wiley was under.

“Let him go and I won’t kill you!” yelled Wiley, unable to just drop the three without warning. The boy had his hands on the chain around his neck and yanked on it as he fell to the forest floor.

The big man had the leash looped around his wrist and was caught off balance by the yell and the boy’s actions. The boy was on the man like a dog on a raccoon. Wiley had to change aim from the two on the ground to one of the other men.

Both had unslung rifles and one was even firing the semi-auto into the forest, forty-five degrees away from where Wiley was. The second man was crouching down, yelling at the second man to hold his fire.

Wiley squeezed the trigger of the M1A and the man still firing went down. Wiley didn’t even have to shoot the third man. The second one, when Wiley shot him, still had the trigger down and stitched a line of bullet holes across his companions back.

Hurrying over to the other two, Wiley swung the butt of the M1A against the side of the big man’s head, knocking him off the boy he was now choking with his bare hands. The boy kicked the weight off him and took off the choke chain and threw it to the ground.

“Thanks, Mister. You wouldn’t be William Abo, AKA Wiley Coyote, would you?”

“How in the world do you know my name?”

“We’re kin. I’m your Uncle Fred’s grandson, Tommy. These guys managed to get the drop on us, but most of the family got into the shelter and locked it down. The standing orders were to stay in the shelter if something was to happen and not open it for anyone without the pass code. We never put in the escape tunnel we intended so they aren’t able

to get out and help. Anyway, they are safe for the moment. Can stay in that shelter of months if they need to.

“They were working on Paw something awful. They didn’t know about the shelter and Paw didn’t give it away. But he finally said that there was a cave on the property the ones not here might go to. They were going to kill Paw if I didn’t take them to it. I said I would take them. I been holding back some... Thanks...”

The boy took the proffered canteen and took several long drinks before handing it back and continuing.

“Grandpaw had mentioned that you might have hightailed it to the cave when the nukes started flying. I guess you did.”

“Yes. My wife, Yolanda, and our five year old, Maggie.”

The big man was stirring and Wiley asked Tommy, “What do we do with this guy?”

“I’ll show you, considering what he done to the women of my family.” The boy dropped to one knee as the man, fully aware now, tried to get away. But the knee dropped on the man’s chest, pinning him into place. Tommy reached down and pulled the huge knife on the man’s belt.

Wiley had to turn away when Tommy ran the razor sharp edge across the big man’s throat before he could say anything or even scream. Tommy dodged the blood, wiped the knife on the man’s shirt and stood up.

“Besides. He kicked the dog and took my knife.” Tommy was checking the other two. “Good job. Both dead as doornails.” He began stripping items from the bodies, even going through the pockets of their filthy clothes.

Wiley heard a clank and saw the flash of shiny gold. “Pop turned over the money to them too. But please don’t judge. They were hurting him

bad and began to threaten to do the same to Maw. He had to do something.”

“I understand. How many are left at the farm?”

“Just three more. You gonna help me get them?”

“Yes. I think I must. It is the right thing to do.”

“Your family okay?”

“Yes. For the moment. If I’m gone too long, Yolanda will get Maggie to the Blazer and head for the farm.”

We’d better boogie then. Wouldn’t want her to drive right into an ambush.”

Wiley blanched. “Definitely not.” He hurriedly retrieved the two magazines for the M1A and replaced them in the vest. Wiley was amazed at how fast the boy could move in the forest, having been mistreated the way he had, and loaded down with everything from the three dead men.

“A straight shot and it is two hours. Been leading the yahoos around in circles most of the time, trying to find a chance to get away and kill ‘em.”

From then on both fell silent, needing to conserve all the oxygen for the slow run to get to the farm before the light began to fade. That was when Yolanda would head for the farm with Maggie.

They made it in less than two hours, but the sun was on the horizon. Yolanda might already be on her way, thinking him dead, Wiley thought.

“I know where they are, or have been, keeping watch from. If you can take one of them, I’ll take out one, and the family should do the rest when they hear shooting.”

“You sure about this?”

“Oh, yeah. You don’t mess with family and get away with it.” Tommy checked the AR-15 and put in a full magazine and then did the same with the AK-47 clone. He dropped everything else beside a tree stump just inside the edge of the forest.

“I’m going around back. You see that guy there, in the shadows? Smoking a stinking cigar?”

Wiley had to concentrate, but finally made out the man. “Got him.”

“When you hear me fire, you take him out. If he starts moving to make rounds, drop him and me and the family will take it from there.”

Wiley took up position, with the M1A held firmly against his shoulder, the sights barely visible in the faint yellow light coming from the windows of the house. Just as the man threw down the stub of the cigar, and started to take a step off the porch, Wiley heard Tommy open fire with the AR-15. It had apparently been converted to select fire, for Tommy dumped the whole magazine in one long burst.

But Wiley didn’t really notice, as he was already taking up tension on the M1A trigger. When Tommy shot, Wiley squeezed the trigger. The man stumbled and almost fell, but he was lifting some kind of long arm so Wiley put two more rounds in him. The guy went down with a thud.

Suddenly the sound of more full auto shooting came, this time from the AK-47. A little fearful of getting shot by mistake, Wiley stayed where he was. Suddenly outside lights blazed and the headlights of a vehicle illuminated the front lawn of Uncle Fred’s large old house.

As soon as he could tell it was the Blazer, Wiley stepped out and waved his left arm. Yolanda angled over that way and stopped beside him.

“You’re okay? Thank God you are okay! What happened?”

There were people pouring out of the house now, two pairs of them dragging bodies as they came. Two more people dragged the man that Wiley had shot, headed in the same direction.

“Wiley!” Tommy yelled. “Y’all can come on over now. Things are back to normal now.”

“Did he say normal?” asked Yolanda.

“That’s what he said,” Wiley said. He went around to the other side of the Blazer, slinging the M1A. Maggie was looking a little uncertain at all the commotion this late and held on to Wiley’s hand tightly. Yolanda came around the truck, slinging the shotgun. Until she knew her baby was completely safe, she’d have the shotgun handy.

When they came up to those on the porch, Maggie saw several children of her age or near being herded back inside by one of the young women. The woman saw Maggie and waved her over. Maggie slipped her hand from Wiley’s and ran over to join the other children.

People began to traipse back inside as the rain that had been holding off started to fall. When the adults all had a seat in the huge living room of the old farm house, Tommy made the introductions. “That’s Paw, with the bandages on his face. Maw...”

Wiley and Yolanda both lost track after that. There were just too many brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles and cousins to keep everyone straight. After Tommy wound down, Wiley asked, “Where is Uncle Fred? Is he okay?”



“You didn’t get the word? Pops died about a year ago. Wondered why you didn’t show up for the funeral. Grandmaw said that wasn’t like you. You got some stuff from the estate we been holding since. Tommy, go get that briefcase for Cousin Wiley.” Tommy’s father, also Fred, appeared to be head of the clan now.

“Much beholden for helping out the kith and kin, come these trying times. Like Pops always told ya, you have a place here any time you need one.”

“That’s going to depend on what the rest of the world is like.”

Fred sighed. “Not so good, I’m afeared. We come through and then got sloppy. Didn’t think anyone would find us way out here. But one of the men was a soldier with Cousin Lucinda. She was kind of sweet on him until he took to hittin’ her. She got rid of him, but had already spilt the beans about the home place. He hooked up with some buddies of his and came looking. Twas Cousin Lucinda that put the knife in him while ago when Tommy couldn’t shoot him without hittin’ one of us.”

“It’s late, Paw. I’m kinda tired,” Tommy said. The Cousins Wiley and Yolanda might be wantin’ to hit the hay. Here’s the case, Cousin Wiley.”

“Yes. It is late. We’ll get Maggie and go back up to the cave...” Wiley didn’t get it all out.

“Shucks no. We got rooms to spare, though it might not look like it. This is a big house and the other two almost as big. Probably put you and the little girl up in Cousin Morris and Candy’s. They haven’t sprung any babies yet, so have a couple extry rooms.”

“Honey?” Wiley asked. Yolanda nodded. And then yawned.

“I guess we’re staying,” Wiley told Fred.

Maggie was fast asleep when they carried her over to Cousin Morris and Candy's house. Unlike the old farm house, this was a fairly new house, rather Regency in style. "Wait a minute," Wiley said. "You have power? Did the power come back on?"

Wiley and Yolanda looked hopeful.

"Sorry, Cousin. Got us a set of gennies and three wind turbines, with a more than you can count'em solar panels. We make our own. Don't even have a grid out here."

"Oh. Okay."

Wiley, Yolanda, and Maggie stayed the night, but went back to the cave the next day. They loaded up a few things into the Blazer and headed home, not knowing what to expect. They ran across a National Guard detachment and showed their ID.

Having proven their residence, the Guard let them pass so they could check the place out. They couldn't live there yet; there were still some brigands on the loose, but were welcome to take a few things from it if they wanted in the meantime.

Wiley and Yolanda didn't bother to explain they'd moved everything they'd really wanted to a cave in the forest already. But, then, it really didn't matter, anyway. Their house had been looted, vandalized, and mostly burned to the ground. They didn't even get out of the Blazer.

On a hunch, Wiley drove them down to where their insurance agent had an office. Sure enough, she was there and the office was open. It took a two hour wait in line, but finally Wiley and Yolanda, with Maggie on Yolanda's lap, described the destruction of the house.

The very tired looking agent gave them some papers to fill out and bring back for vouchers for food and water, temporary housing, and a few things they didn't really need. Another set of papers would result in

having a new house built, within certain standards, in no more than five years, if the government came through with the money. If they didn't want to wait they could get more vouchers that some contractors were accepting on the assumption that they would eventually get paid off by the government, so construction could start almost immediately.

They were headed back to the cave when the radio suddenly blared. "We're back on the air, people! Back on the air! Here is today's news."

Wiley and Yolanda listened to the descriptions of destruction all over the nation, but also the herculean tasks that the government, corporations, and people were taking to recover from the blow. Less than four hundred warheads had made it to targets in the US, leaving vast areas almost completely untouched except for minor fallout.

There was an outpouring of help and supplies from those areas to the areas that were deemed to be fit for rehabilitation.

"What do you think, Yolanda?" Wiley asked a few days later. "We going to become Cousins and farm the land or stay in the city and find something else to do?"

"How about a compromise. We see if Cousin Fred will sell us the property with the cave on it, and we'll build there. The internet is back up, or so the insurance lady said, and a bunch of companies are sourcing work to those that can do it on-line. Perhaps one of us can get a job like that, and the other help out on the farm."

"Sounds like a plan to me," Wiley said.

"Me, too!" Maggie said from her car seat. "I like plans. My cousins have a dog. Can I have a dog, too?"

Wiley and Yolanda laughed. "We'll see about that, Maggie," Wiley said. "For right now, we need to design a good house and then go from there."

It was later that day before Wiley remembered the brief case from Uncle Fred. He got it from the third chamber and called Yolanda over to see what was in it. Maggie heard too, of course, and ran over to join her mother and father at the fold up table.

When Wiley opened the brief case, he found two large cloth bags and a sheath of papers inside. When Wiley moved the bags to get the papers, the bags clinked. “Can’t be,” Wiley said, remembering the gold he’d seen Tommy retrieve from the dead men.

But, sure enough, when he opened the smaller bag and tipped the contents into the brief case out slid a couple dozen gold coins, all of a kind. US one ounce Gold Eagles. “Wow!” Maggie said. “Those are pretty! Can I have one?”

“Not right now, Maggie,” Yolanda said. “We need to find out why they are here.”

Disappointed, Maggie asked, “Can I go play now?”

“Yes. Of course you can,” Wiley said. When Maggie was out of earshot, Wiley dumped the other case. The contents of this one didn’t clink. They thudded. Half a dozen rolls of dimes and a dozen rolls of quarters.

“I don’t believe this. Surely there is some mistake,” Wiley said, opening one of the quarter rolls to expose the pre-1965 circulated silver quarters it held. He didn’t bother opening the other rolls. They would be silver coins, too. “There is a fortune here.”

“See what the papers say,” Yolanda suggested.

Wiley slid the papers from under the coins and began to read, muttering from time to time. It didn’t take him long. “Well?” asked Yolanda rather impatiently when Wiley didn’t say anything.

He handed her the papers and began to gather up the coins. Yolanda read through them, too.

*Dear Nephew, if you are reading this, then I am dead and buried. You should be getting two bags of precious metals with this letter and deed. They will be there, I'm sure. My family is honest as the day is long. But anyway, the reason for the coins and the deed. Your father and I never saw eye to eye on many things, especially the farm lifestyle.*

*Clyde wanted the city life. But he still believed in family. He helped me set up the farm and other property just the way I wanted it, and made me promise to take care of you and your family if you ever had one, in case of big troubles.*

*He was the one that insisted we turn some of our profits each year into precious metals. Those coins are a legacy from your father as much as from me. You've been a good nephew, looking in on us from time to time. Not as much lately, but you had a family to care for, just like I did.*

*I remember your fascination with the cave on that one piece of property. I'm deeding that over to you as the second part of the legacy. It ain't good farm land, but has a lot of good trees that can be harvested over time. You might consider replanting with fruit and nut trees for future income. That's what I would do. But you can use the land for whatever you want.*

*I'll wrap up by saying that having you as a nephew was a pleasure for me. Hope you live a long and happy life.*

*Your Uncle, Fred Abo.*

“Well, don't that just beat all?” Wiley asked. “Almost like he knew what would happen.”

“From what you told me of Uncle Fred, he may have envisioned something very much like what we are going through. Do you think we should keep it?”

“You think the family would take it back?” Wiley asked.

“Uh... No. They wouldn't. It's ours to do as we wish. But I'd like to go like Uncle Fred suggested. And build a house that is ready for whatever happens next. And with a place for any of the Abo families that might need a place.”

“I'm good with that. Let's go talk to Fred.”

It turned out that Fred knew all about the legacy that his father had left to Wiley and his family. And he was more than pleased at the offer of succor and safe haven if anything else ever happened. He'd explored the cave with his father and told Wiley and Yolanda that there was plenty of room in it to shelter the whole clan if need be. “Just need to stock some extry supplies, and we'll furnish them for us. Done deal?”

Wiley shook his hand and said, “Done deal.”

Yolanda went to find Maggie and Wiley and Fred walked out to the Blazer. “What do you think this country will do in the future?” Wiley asked his Cousin Fred.

“We're a tough bunch, we Americans. The rebuild is already starting, according to some of the Hams we been talking to. Everywhere that rebuilding can be done, is being redone. The Abos may be a bit back country, but we'll be part of the recovery. We have good land and the means to grow a lot of crops. We'll furnish food to the effort at cost, and sell the rest at a small profit. Just enough to get what we can't provide for ourselves.”

“I think we'll do the same. Furnish some of the lumber for the rebuild and then, when we start getting product from the orchard, will do the

same as you with your crops. I wish I knew more about farming and orchard management,” Wiley said.

“Well, Cousin, you might be surprised to know that one of the boys and two of the girls been to college for such things. We have a lot more book learning and practical experience combined than you would believe.”

Yolanda showed up with Maggie and the three got into the Blazer.

Cousin Fred waved and said, “Don’t be a stranger, you hear.”

“Count on it,” Wiley said and pulled away.

They had a plan, and it was a good one. It took years to complete, but by the time Maggie was grown and ready to add a husband and then a child to the family, the US was well on the way to recovery.

End \*\*\*\*\*

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