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Pole Shift

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Pole Shift - Chapter 1

“Hi Woodie,” called Denton as he entered the café section of the large service station, convenience store and café business owned and operated by his friend.

“I got the message that you wanted to see me when I came down from the mine. What can I do for you?”

“Actually, it’s Dayton that wanted to talk to you. You could have just called.”

“That’s okay. I needed a break anyway.” Denton smiled at the waitress that set a cup of steaming tea before him. “I must come here too often,” he mused as Woodie laughed at his expression.

“No you don’t come here too much. You just order the same things every time you do come.”

Again, Denton smiled at his friend. “Maybe so. Anyway, what does your niece want to see me about?” Denton narrowed his eyes and scowled slightly. “You aren’t trying to set me up with someone again are you? Especially not your niece.”

“Of course not, Denton,” replied Woodie. She didn’t add that if something were to develop between Denton and her niece, she wouldn’t fret about it. “Actually, Dayton wants to talk to you about your theories of a polar shift.”

“Really?” asked Denton, brightening perceptively.

Woodie nodded. “Yep. She and I have talked about it. After Y2K.”

“Well, sure,” said Denton. “You know I love to talk disaster scenarios.”

Woodie smiled and nodded.

“Tell her she can come up to the mine office and...”

“Actually,” Woodie said, interrupting Denton, “I was hoping you could come by the house tonight. I’m having some kind of problem with my computer I’d like you to see if you can fix.”

“Sure. I have a couple more things to do up yonder,” Denton said, motioning with his head to one of the mountains visible through the café window. “I’ll grab a bite and be there about seven thirty or eight o’clock, if that’s not too late.”

“It’s not too late, but why don’t you just come over early and have supper with us.” Woodie smiled. “Got a big pot of chili cooking.”

“Well...I guess I can drag myself over there in time for a little of that chili.” Denton grinned and rose. “I’ll see you in a little while, then.”

Woodie nodded and took a sip of her coffee to hide her smile.

When Denton arrived at Woodie’s place, he scrubbed his feet on the coca doormat before he rang the bell.

Woodie shook her head when she saw Denton after she opened the door.

Denton shrugged and grinned sheepishly. “Got a little tied up, Woodie. I came straight here from the mine.”

“Why am I not surprised? I’ve been around buckaroos and miners all my life. You know the drill. Take off the boots, and leave them and the hardhat on the mud rug out there.”

“Yes, ma’am,” replied Denton with a grin.

“Don’t give me that Ma’am stuff, either. Or no chili.”

“Okay, Woodie. I don’t want to miss that.”

Denton had just seated himself at the large table in Woodie’s spacious kitchen when a tall, blue-eyed blonde woman stepped into the room. She wore a shimmery silver top and a pair of panties. The woman handed Woodie the short black skirt she had carried in her hand. “I can’t get that damn zipper to work, Woodie. Would you see if you could fix it? Who’s the hunk?”

“Deryn, why don’t you wait in your room? I’ll bring the skirt in shortly.”

“Oh, I’m sure...?”

“Denton,” replied Denton, when the woman looked at him questioningly.

“I’m sure Denton has seen a woman’s panties before. Haven’t you, Denton?”

“Well...not under these circumstances,” he replied as he rose. “I’ll give you a little privacy...”

He turned toward the door and stepped through it. Denton was just in time to bump into another tall, blue eyed blonde woman. This one was fully clothed. He did a double take anyway, for she was the spitting image of Deryn. Except for being fully clothed.

Suddenly Denton realized that the woman he was steadying was the second of Woodie’s twin nieces. If the one in the panties was Deryn, this must be Dayton.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “I should look where I’m going.”

“Considering what you probably have just seen, I’m not too surprised you weren’t watching where you were going. I tried to get down here to warn Aunt Woodie, but I take it I was too late.”

“Unfortunately,” Denton replied just before Woodie called for him to come back into the kitchen.

Dayton had the quick thought that perhaps she had judged him too harshly about having still been trying to see her sister. Another thought quickly replaced it. “Hey! That body is the same as mine! What’s he mean, unfortunately?”

She followed him into the kitchen, knowing she wasn’t about to ask the man what had just crossed her mind. Dayton wasn’t even sure why the thought had crossed her mind in the first place.

Denton’s eyes went to Dayton as she moved to the other end of the kitchen table. She was shaking her head just slightly and her long blonde hair was moving in luxurious waves.

“The one with all her clothes on is Dayton, of course,” Woodie told Denton as he seated himself at the table with familiarity.

“We met,” Denton said, pouring himself a glass of water from the pitcher on the table. “I almost knocked her down when I went out.”

“You really didn’t have to leave, you know,” Dayton found herself saying. “Deryn didn’t mind.”

Denton poured two more glasses of water, for Dayton and Woodie, before he made a reply. Dayton was beginning to wonder if he would respond at all. “Well, it made me a little uncomfortable.”

Woodie, her back to them as she stood at the stove, grinned. Dayton was up to something. Woodie had a feeling that Dayton didn’t even know it

herself. Normally her twin infuriated her when Deryn did things such as she had just done.

“Oh. I see,” replied Dayton. She rose, went to the sink, and poured out the water. “I prefer Woodie’s iced tea,” she said when she returned to the table and poured herself a glass of the tea from the pitcher that Woodie had just placed on the table.

Woodie saw Denton’s darkly tanned face turn slightly pink.

“I’m sorry,” Denton said. In an attempt to change the subject, since he wasn’t having luck with the first two, he continued, “Woodie tells me you wanted to talk to me about polar shifts.”

“Not really,” came the quick reply.

Woodie looked over and watched Dayton as her niece continued.

“I mentioned it and Woodie said she would ask you to come over.” Dayton shrugged her shoulders and her eyes dropped to her hands as she spread a large cloth napkin on her lap.

Woodie’s eyes went to Denton. It was only a moment before he responded. She saw the color rise in his face again.

“I’m afraid I misunderstood, then,” Denton said. “I probably should go back up to the mine, anyway. I’ll take a rain check on the chili, Woody, if that’s okay.” He was rising from his chair. Woodie didn’t have a chance to protest, much less offer to put some chili in a container for him to take with him. Dayton spoke first and Denton settled back in his chair.

“Please stay,” she said, her eyes not lifting from her lap. Woodie noticed that Dayton’s hands were folded in her lap, and she seemed almost to be ringing them. “I’m sorry,” Dayton continued, her eyes lifting to meet Denton’s.

Woodie turned back to the stove, the grin returning.

“I suppose...No, I know...that for some reason, since Der and I are twins, your lack of...um...interest in her wearing what she was wearing...bothered me. I’m not entirely sure why.”

“Oh. Well, if it makes you feel better, I’m sure you’re just as pretty as Deryn when you’re only wearing panties.”

“Oh, really?” Dayton said. “Well, thank you very much.” She glared at Denton.

“I didn’t mean that quite the way it sounded,” Denton hurried tried to explain. “I only meant...”

“You are not helping yourself, Denton,” Woodie said, stepping to the table to set down a cast iron skillet of cornbread.

“I...Uh...”

“I should apologize again,” Dayton said.

“For what?” asked Deryn. She’d just stepped through the door, this time wearing the skirt as well as the blouse.

Dayton’s glare was directed at Deryn now. “For you, I’m beginning to think.”

“Hey! You know I don’t like...”

“I know. I know. I’m sorry. And I didn’t mean it. I’m just upset and I don’t know why.”

“Can’t be the curse, I haven’t started yet.”

Dayton groaned and turned pink.

“Must be the hunk, here. I saw him first, so you better call dibs if...”

Dayton was bright red now and suddenly looked ready to maim her sister.

“Maybe I should...” Denton was starting to rise.

“Sit down.” Dayton’s voice was firm.

“Shut up,” was Deryn’s addition. Her looked matched her sister’s. They were glaring at each other.

“Okay,” Woodie said, sitting down at the table. “You two can work this out later. Deryn, enjoy your evening. Dayton, would you serve and pass the bowls, please?”

They’d always pretty much been able to get by with anything around their Aunt Woodie, when they were growing up. But when she stated something quietly and calmly like that, they’d learned to do it.

Mumbled ‘Yes, ma’ams’ from each of them ended the situation and Deryn hurried back out the door.

Dayton cut her eyes to Woodie as she handed her Aunt the full bowl of chili.

“Woodie,” she said, “I’m...” She looked over at Denton. “I don’t quite know what to say.”

Denton shrugged. “Happens to me all the time,” he replied, taking the bowl of chili Dayton was handing to him.

Suddenly Dayton was grinning, her smile nearly identical to Woodie’s, when Woodie asked Denton, “The lingerie fashion show or nearly getting two women into a cat fight?”

Denton turned pink again, through the tan. “Aw! Woodie! You know that is not what I meant!” He looked over at Dayton. “I just meant getting myself into awkward situations, then saying or doing something stupid.”

“So now I’m ugly and stupid?” asked Dayton.

Denton looked shocked. “No! I! Uh...”

He saw Dayton still grinning.

“You are pretty good at this, aren’t you?” she asked.

Woodie chuckled. “Come to think of it, this isn’t that much different than what happened down at Murdock’s Landing that night.”

When Dayton saw Denton color once again, she asked, “What happened.”

“Denton ripped a dress off one woman, and she and the woman he was with got into a big fight. They both wound up almost naked. Ralph barred Denton for a month.”

“I didn’t rip off her dress!” Denton protested. He looked over at Dayton with a pleading look in his eyes. “I just stepped on the hem and it ripped and...I was with another engineer from the mine and when the woman sort of tried to attack me, Elaine stepped in and...”

Both women were laughing.

“Oh, Lord! Why do I even try?” lamented Denton. He looked down at his bowl of chili and began to eat.

After a few moments, and a bite of chili, Dayton said, “I really would like to discuss your ideas about a polar shift. Woodie has told me you have some interesting ideas.”

After a glance at Woodie, Denton said, “I’m not sure about that. I’ve just done research and come up with my own spin on the idea. Actually, most of what Woodie and I have talked about is preparedness for after the fact if one actually occurs. Any and all types of natural and human caused disasters, actually.”

“I’ve never heard it put that way. Human caused, not man-made?” Dayton asked.

“I try really hard not to be a chauvinist. I’ve found women to be just as good at troublemaking as men.” He shot a hard look at Woodie.

Again both women laughed.

“Touché,” said Dayton.

“Before we get into the discussion...” Woodie said, “Of polar shifts and preparedness, not troublesome or troublemaking women, let’s finish dinner, and then let Denton check my computer. Then the topic at hand can be taken up without interruption.”

“Probably a good idea,” Denton said, smiling over at Dayton. “She did warn you that I get a little...intense...about preparedness?”

Dayton smiled back. “Oh, yeah. She mentioned it.”

Forty-five minutes later, dinner finished and a large container set aside for Denton to take home, with Woodie now knowing how to run the diagnostic wizard in her computer, they were grouped around the monitor, Denton at the keyboard.

Three hours later they were at the kitchen table again with several maps, lists, and books spread out on the table. Almost at the same moment the phone rang Dayton looked up from glancing down at her watch and said, “I wonder where Deryn is. She said she’d be back by now.”

“Dayton,” Woodie said quietly, handing her niece the telephone receiver. “It’s Deryn.”

“Deryn, where are you?” Dayton fell silent and listened for a moment.

“What! How much? Geez Louise, Deryn!”

Woodie looked over at Denton and rolled her eyes slightly on hearing Dayton’s end of the conversation.

“Okay, okay! Don’t cry!” Her voice lowered. “Unless it helps. You always could make that work better than me.” In her normal voice she said, “I’ll be there as soon as I can. You and I are going to have a serious talk about this, Sis.”

When the phone was back in the charging stand Dayton turned to the other two and said, “I have to take some money down to that place you mentioned... Murdock’s Landing. Deryn ran up a tab and **forgot** her wallet.”

“Look, despite what Woodie implied, Ralph and I get along. Just call him up and have it put on my tab. We can straighten it out later. That is a long drive there and back. If she is still there this late, your sister should probably just get a room and come back tomorrow. If you go in, it’ll be morning before you get back.”

“I don’t know. Not only would I like to be there to wring her neck right now, I don’t like taking help, especially money, from anyone, especially a...Uh...I don’t like accepting help from anyone.”

Woodie knew the reason for the flash of pain in Dayton’s eyes.

Denton had seen it, too, and had noticed the rewording of the rather forceful statement.

“It isn’t a big deal, really,” Denton added.

“He really wouldn’t mind,” Woodie said. “You know I’d offer, but I seldom go in to Murdock’s. I doubt he’d do it for me, at least over the phone, like this.”

“Or I could take you in. You could ride back with your sister,” Denton said when Dayton still looked hesitant.

“No. No. There is no real reason to go in, if you are willing to help. I do need to be here first thing in the morning.” Dayton sighed. “I hate this. But if you are sure...I mean, Deryn ran up a tab of over a hundred dollars...”

“Oh, that’s not a problem. Let me call Ralph and I’ll have him switch her tab to mine. Then you can talk to your sister.” Denton took the phone when Woodie handed it to him.

When Dayton had replaced the phone on its charger after a rather lengthy, low voiced conversation with her sister, she turned to Denton and said, “I’m afraid I don’t have that much cash with me. I’ll have to go to the bank tomorrow and get it.”

“That’s okay,” Denton said. “You can just give it to Woodie when you get a chance. I stop at the café regularly.” Seeing the look of protest on her face, he quickly added, “Or if you just want to give me a check, that would be all right.”

The stubborn look still on her face, Dayton replied, “No. I prefer to give you the cash, personally. If you will tell me where you will be tomorrow afternoon, I’ll take it to you there.”

“Tomorrow afternoon really isn’t good for me,” Denton started to explain. Before Dayton could protest, Denton hastily continued. “I’m going up to one of the remote properties to do some reclamation survey work. I’ll be there all day. Won’t be back until very late.”

“I still prefer to bring you the cash,” Dayton insisted. “I don’t mind taking it up to where you are. Or dropping it off late, if need be.”

This time Denton frowned. “It really is not necessary.”

“I insist.”

“You are not going to win, Denton,” Woodie said.

“Very well,” he said after a quick look at Woodie and a much longer look at the expression on Dayton’s face. “I’ll stop by here on my way home to pick it up.”

“I prefer to take the proactive role. I’ll take it up to you or drop it off at your place. All I need is directions.”

“Better if you have a map,” responded Denton, after only another moment’s hesitation. He added a USGS survey map of the local area to the various world and regional maps on the table. He had the two locations marked, with routes, in moments. He refolded the map and handed it to Dayton. “That should get you to either place without any problems.”

“Good. Thank you.” Dayton added it to her bag, which, like Denton’s, was on the floor under Woodie’s large kitchen table.

With one quick sideways glance at Denton when she rose up, Dayton tried to gauge his reaction to what she knew was something of an unreasonable obsession. She saw only his normal expression as he began to gather up the materials on the table.

“Could we... would you mind if we went over some of this again, sometime. I’m afraid that even with my notes; I may not remember all of it, because of the distractions.”

Denton’s grin was genuine. “Absolutely. Woodie can tell you I could never spend too much time on these subjects.”

Dayton smiled back at him and Woodie chuckled. “You name the date and time,” Woodie said, “And Denton will be there. He never misses an opportunity to spread the word.”

“Hey, I know I go overboard sometimes. But I only do get into it when someone asks. As long as one doesn’t ask, one is safe.”

The three laughed. “But Woodie is right,” Denton said as they moved toward the door. “Just name the time and place, and barring a problem at the mine, I’ll be there.”

“Okay. And thanks,” Dayton said. She held out her hand when they reached the door. “For everything.”

“No problem,” Denton said with a shrug. He started slightly when he took her hand to shake it. Denton couldn’t remember ever feeling anything quite like it. It was smooth, yet with defined contours. So soft, yet somehow still very firm. Cool warmth.

Woodie watched with a touch of wonder the reactions of the two when they shook hands. For Dayton seemed to be having some type of similar reaction to that Denton was having.

Dayton’s sensations were almost identical to Denton’s. She expected the slightly rough surface of his hand. He worked outdoors much of the time, often with geologist’s hammer; surveying equipment; and literally at times, a pick and shovel.

Despite that slight roughness, Dayton could feel a soft flexibility. His hand was dry, but it seemed that it was a perfect dryness. Not rough or flakey or scratchy dry. The soft flexibility made it seem just moist enough as well. Not damp or clammy. A perfect moistness.

She could tell there was tremendous power in his hand. He gripped hers and actually shook it, rather than just a cursory motion. As she gripped back, his adjusted, matching her grip exactly. Not too tight, nor too loose. A perfect balance to her choice of the tightness of the grip. She had controlled the handshake, not he. The temperature of his hand was...neutral. It seemed to be exactly the same as hers. Not just a little warmer, or a little cooler, but... Dayton couldn't formulate an exact description in her mind.

Denton had to clear his throat before he could speak when their hands parted. "Uh...I'll see you tomorrow, then."

"Um..." was all Dayton was able to vocalize. She nodded, her eyes locked on his for that fraction of a second

His eyes, too, stayed locked on hers for a tiny moment, and then cut to Woodie. "Night, Woodie. Thanks for the chili."

"Sure, Denton."

Dayton moved forward slightly and watched Denton slip into his boots and pick up his hardhat. His back was to the door side glass as he did so and he did not see her watching him. She realized that Woodie had, for when she turned around Woodie was looking at her, a small smile curving her lips. "What?" Dayton asked, her lips curling the opposite way, showing a slight frown at Woodie's smile.

"Nothing. Nothing at all," Woodie replied, the smile growing as she turned away from her niece.

Pole Shift - Chapter Two

When Denton saw the low slung convertible approaching, he hurried down from the mine waste dump he was surveying with the GPS satellite equipment. He was surprised that Dayton would show up in such a car. She had seemed to understand the map well enough to know that the route he had marked up to the property was barely a trail now.

The road, such as it was, now consisted mostly of a somewhat rutted set of tracks. Unlike most of the trails that followed the contours of the land, the mine road had been cut and graded to allow the best travel times for the large ore trucks. During the operation of the mine, the road maintenance crews kept the road in good condition, including several long straight grades. The rains and snow runoff had done much more damage on the steeper sections of the road than occurred on the generally flatter trails that used switchbacks to change elevations.

When she saw Denton scrambling down the steep slope of the ore waste dump, Dayton found a reasonable spot to stop and park.

Denton set aside the high precision backpack GPS unit and stepped up to the car. Seeing the rather disheveled appearance of Dayton, he asked, "Are you all right? You look terrible."

"Yeah. Thanks again. You really know how to make a woman feel welcome."

"I'm sorry. I..."

"Oh, it's not you, Denton," Dayton said with a sigh and opened the car door. "And thank you for not taking me to task about bringing up Deryn's car instead of Aunt Woodie's Suburban like I should have. I do dearly love my sister, but sometimes I'd like to ring her neck. Last night being one of those times and this afternoon being another."

“Well, I wasn’t going to take you to task...But I probably would have said something. Maybe.” His voice had trailed off and he hadn’t moved any closer.

“I only look like I bite,” Dayton said with a wry smile. “I’m just a little annoyed with myself for letting Deryn slip the switch past me. I should not be taking it out on you.”

Dayton moved around to the trunk and opened it. “I want to get the spare...er...the ruined tire, secured in the spare tire space and the jack and tools. I just threw them in here when I changed the tire. It sounded like they were bouncing all over the place on the last stretch back there.”

“Should I ask what happened?” Denton asked, stepping forward to hold the tire while Dayton secured the jack, jack handle and wheel nut wrench.

“Apparently some guy Deryn met last night is into SUVs and she wanted to impress him. So, naturally, she took Aunt Woodie’s Suburban and left me this. And a note. If I have another flat on the way down and have to walk back, I may no longer be a twin. At least, after I get my hands on her.”

She took the tire from Denton absently when he handed it to her after the other items were secured. “She does this stuff to me all the time,” Dayton continued as she worked. “I just never seem to anticipate what spot of trouble she is going to get me into next. I can plan like a champ, about everything except those things she does.

“Okay. That should do it.” Dayton closed the trunk lid and stepped back, dusting her hands off against each other, then against the seat of the well worn jeans she was wearing.

When Denton saw her suddenly stiffen and the parts of her neck that he could see around the long ponytail hanging down her back, he took a

step back and basically went brain dead, which was indicated by the single sound he made. A rather drawn out “Uh...”

Without turning to face him, Dayton’s fingers checked the center seam on the seat of her jeans a little more thoroughly. Realizing the extent of it, she whirled, placing her rear against the car.

Glaring at Denton, voice low, controlled, and rather menacing, Denton thought, she asked, “How long has the seam been out of my jeans, and why didn’t you say something? And if I hear any hint in your voice that you are enjoying this, your mine is going to be shy one geologist.”

“Actually I’m an engineer with a degree in...”

Denton took another step back when the glare turned into a glower. Denton knew the two words were supposed to have the same meaning, but that is what came to mind where her expression became even more ominous.

“Uh...Well...Geez...”

“Uh? Well? Geez? That’s the best you can do? You have a death wish or something?”

“Uh...” Denton quickly added, “No. No, I don’t have death wish. And your jeans were ripped when you got here. I just...”

Denton was beginning to get concerned. Dayton’s face had been somewhat red, due to the glare, then the glower. Now it was an even brighter red, probably because of embarrassment, Denton thought. “Actually, getting kinda purple,” he muttered, not realizing he had voiced the thought aloud, though mostly under his breath.

“What? Purple what?” nearly shouted Dayton.

“Calm down!” Denton said. “Uh...Look. I knew there wasn’t anything you could do about it. You obviously didn’t bring a change of clothes. Why would you? I mean, it’s no big deal.”

“What do you mean, it’s no big deal? I’m parading around essentially in my panties, and you think it’s no big deal? I’ll have you know, I am not in the habit of giving every guy I meet a detailed look at my panties, particularly when they covering my posterior. Even more particularly when they are supposed to be covered with a pair of jeans.”

It popped out before he could stop it. “Just skirts and dress, huh?”

When her eyes popped wide and her jaw dropped in amazement, Denton stared in fascination. He muttered something under his breath, however, and started backing away rapidly when Dayton started toward him, her hands rising to just about the height of his neck, fingers curled just about right to go around it.

“I’m sorry! Really! It just popped out! I didn’t mean it! Really.”

Her advance stopped, but she was close enough for Denton to see the huge tears start to roll down her cheeks. “How could you?” she asked. “How could you just stare at my panties like that while I was working at the car and not say anything? Woodie always spoke so highly of you.”

“I did not stare at your panties. As soon as I noticed, I avoided looking at...that part of your anatomy.”

“Just when did you notice?” The tears were still rolling down her cheeks, though rather more slowly now.

“When you got out of the car,” Denton asked without thinking.

There were still some tears, but some of the glare was back now. “Oh, really? And you didn’t tell me then, or even try to not stand behind me?”

“I told you I wasn’t looking at you. And I thought you said tears didn’t work for you the way they did for your sister.”

“They don’t. She uses them intentionally. I just sometimes...Never mind. And wait a minute. This is the second time you’ve implied I’m not worthy of being seen in just my panties.”

“I did not imply that! I think it would be...” Denton realized what he was about to say and managed to stop in time. “Wait a minute! Which is it? You get mad if I do see and get mad if I don’t see. That doesn’t make any sense. How am I supposed to deal with that?”

“I don’t know and I don’t care. But I do have an idea. Give me your pants. I’m not going back to town like this. I’m going to have to stop to get gas before I get to Aunt Woodie’s.”

“I am not going to give you my pants.”

“Look. That wasn’t reasonable, I know. But from what Woodie has said, I bet you have something else in your truck I can wear.” She started to glare at him again. “You said there wasn’t anything you could do. How do you explain that? You always have spare supplies, I bet.”

“Of course I do. I practice what I preach. But...I’ll take you over to the truck and you can see for yourself.” Denton pointed out the path he had taken down the waste dump. “Up and over that edge. I’ll follow in case you slip. It’s steep.”

Glaring at him again, she stood with arms crossed, facing him. “Not even in your dreams, buster. I’m not about to let you get behind me again. You lead. I’ll follow.”

“But...Never mind.”

It was a few minutes before they reached Denton’s truck. Denton noted that Dayton was not breathing any harder than he was. He told her as

much. “You are in excellent condition. Not many people can come up to this elevation without having some difficulty breathing after activity such as the climb we just did. You are breathing no harder than I.”

“I swim every chance I get. And I’m taking some dance classes to strengthen my leg. Part of the extended therapy.”

“Therapy?” Denton asked, setting the GPS pack in the bed of his truck.

“I thought Woodie would have told you. I broke my leg about a year ago. There was some minor muscle damage. It’s fine, but I’m continuing the therapy program. Not only has it been good for my leg, it has helped keep me in shape after my leg healed.”

“I can’t believe you couldn’t dance,” Denton said, his surprise evident on his face.

“I could dance before I broke my leg,” replied Dayton, her exasperation showing at his thought that she wouldn’t know how to dance. “It was ballet at first, which I’m continuing. I just became interested in ballroom dancing.”

“Ballroom dancing is just regular dancing in a ballroom. They play everything.”

Denton cringed slightly at the very annoyed look on Dayton’s face. She stood there, standing with hands on hips, arms akimbo, as she looked at him.

“Are you always this dense? I’m talking about competitive ballroom dancing. I don’t have any compulsion to compete, but they are some of the best dancers around and I want to be able to dance the best I can. I guess...Maybe...I’m over compensating because of my leg, but...Never mind.”

She nodded at Denton's truck. "Surely there is something in there that I can wear instead of these ripped jeans."

"I tried to tell you," replied Denton, opening the tool box spanning the bed, and the rear door of the crew cab truck, "Sure, I have some stuff, but you are not going to want to wear it. I'm wearing the extra gear."

"I trashed what I had on this morning working on the D-11 we brought up to open up access we'd blocked when we quit using this waste dump. It blew a hose and I got soaked in hydraulic fluid. Used pretty much every piece of cloth I had with me to get cleaned up."

"Oh." Dayton looked at the pile of oily, dirty clothing and other stained material.

"No tears?" Denton asked, seeing the dismayed look on Dayton's face and could have kicked himself when the dismayed look directed at the clothing became one of further annoyance at him. He wondered where his mental clutch was. Denton felt like he was allowing every random thought to pop right out of his mouth completely without review.

"Needle and thread?" Dayton asked after another moment.

"Huh?" responded Denton. "Lord," he said to himself, able to keep the thought internal. "I hate saying *huh*."

"Do you have a needle and thread? I can probably repair these if I had a needle and some thread. Doesn't even have to be blue."

"White would probably be better, anyway. The seat of those jeans is faded and polished to white. And worn thin. Reason they ripped at the seam."

Despite the near growl that emanated from Dayton at his words, she felt a glimmer of hope when Denton reached into the truck. Which promptly disappeared when he spoke.

“Moot point. Delgado didn’t move my pack to this truck when he went in to get the parts in mine.”

Taking a step back in alarm when Denton turned around holding a huge end wrench in his hand like a club, Dayton stared at him and then relaxed when he opened the tool box and put the wrench in.

“Delgado and I are going to have a little talk about keeping his truck organized. He said he didn’t have this wrench. He’d be back with the part by now if I’d had the wrench to use to break things down.”

Denton turned around and again Dayton took a step back. Denton was unbuckling his belt. “No matter,” he said.

He’d thought about it and there really wasn’t another solution he could find. Denton was not going to let her go home with her rear exposed like that. He’d thought about giving her his shirt, to wear with the arms tied around her waist to cover herself. With the weather the way it was and the work he was doing, however, it would be better for him to keep the shirt and give her the pants.

“What do you think you are doing? Just because we are alone up here doesn’t mean...”

The total puzzlement on his face when he looked up at her made her realize what he was doing. Probably more so than his words.

“I’m giving you my pants, just like you demanded. What did you think I was...Oh! Crimeny! You didn’t think I...Crimeny!”

The puzzled look was replaced with a look of annoyance similar to the one that had appeared on hers. “That’s a little insulting, you know,” Denton told Dayton.

“I know. I’m sorry. I don’t know why I...” Her words trailed away and she gave a small shrug in apology.

Denton simply sighed and nodded, and then continued with the process of removing the khaki work pants. His normal slip on steel toe boots had been replaced for this work with tall lace up boots, also with steel toes. He decided to just work the pants over the boots rather than take the time to unlace, remove, then put them back on again.

When he had them off he handed the pants to Dayton and stood there in his shirt and long underwear bottoms.

He started slightly when Dayton looked at him for a moment then asked, “Are you going to turn around?”

“Oh! Of course!” Denton spun on his heel to face away from her.

When Dayton’s “Okay” came Denton turned back around. The pants were far from being a perfect fit, but he supposed they were probably better than the jeans now lying crumpled on the ground.

“It’s not like I’m going to change my mind, but... Are you sure you’re going to be okay to get back to where you’re going?”

“Oh, sure,” replied Denton. “Delgado will be back well before the snow gets here. Even if he doesn’t, it isn’t like I can’t wear the other pants. I just don’t want to.”

“Wait a minute. Aren’t you heading back down now?”

“Now?” asked Denton. “Of course not. I won’t be finished until late this evening. The Cat blowing the hose is going to delay me three or four hours.” Denton shrugged. “What I get for getting talked in to using a loaner. Our guys would never leave a machine in this condition. But there was no real reason to bring ours up since this one was already in the area. The guy wants to do contract work for us and keeps offering

things like this. The boss said to go ahead and do it since was just to open up the road. Should have brought one of our own machines up.”

“You don’t mean you’re going to go ahead and keep working up here? And you said it was going to snow? I don’t remember that in the forecast this morning.”

“It will only be on this side of the ridgeline, and up here. I doubt it will get down into the valleys.”

“But...” Dayton’s voice trailed away. “I feel bad about this,” she said a moment later, looking down at the pants she was wearing.

Suddenly Denton grinned at her. “You can always do what your sister did. Just go down without pants.”

“I don’t feel that bad,” Dayton replied with a smile. “So thank you for the loan of your pants. When and where do you want me to drop them off? I’d like to talk about a few of the things we were going over last night in more detail, too.”

“We aren’t going through that again, are we? Look where it got you this time. You can just leave them at the café. I can pick them up there some time.” Denton was amazed at how quickly Dayton’s expression could change. The smile was gone and the annoyed look was suddenly there. “Never mind,” he hurriedly said. “How about I stop by day after tomorrow? I’m taking a day off to get some stuff done at my place. I can stop at Woodie’s then. I’ll get the pants then and we can go over whatever you want, too.”

“I’d really rather be the one to...”

“Okay, okay. Day after tomorrow. You already have a map. But the road isn’t that much better to my place than this one.”

“I will definitely have a different vehicle. My sister can be a little... different... sometimes, but she really is not usually this bad. I’m not sure what has happened... Well, never mind. I don’t usually air dirty laundry in public.”

“You are just concerned. Talk to Woodie, if you haven’t already. She is a very good listener.”

Dayton’s look at Denton showed her slight surprise.

“What?” asked Denton, not knowing what to expect.

“I don’t know. Just a little surprised you understood the situation with so little information.”

“Seems obvious to me.” Denton shrugged. “Family members care about each other.”

A puff of wind had Denton looking up to the sky toward the northwest. “You probably better get headed back. It’ll be a while before the snow starts, but you do not want to be up here when it does. Stepping to the truck again, Denton reached in to get something and handed it to Dayton.

He asked, “You know how to use a radio?”

Denton saw the flash of annoyance on Dayton’s face, but she didn’t answer.

“Hold it like this and push this button to talk. Release to listen.”

“Uh...Yes. And I know you don’t like to accept favors from people, but I am going to insist you take this with you. You don’t have to check in with me on the way down if you don’t want to, but you will be able to get me until you are back on traveled roads. If something happens on

this upper section I can come down. Once past the halfway point I'll just contact someone with my long range radio and send them up."

Denton realized it probably took a great deal of her patience to wait until he had finished. Dayton simply pulled out her cell phone and held it up.

"Check the display."

"Oh. No service." When she looked back up at his face she had to smile at the stubborn look plastered on his face. He obviously expected her to protest taking the radio. Suddenly protesting taking the radio didn't seem so important. He obviously would do the same for anyone in the same situation. "Okay, Denton. I'll take the radio."

They were heading back to the car, working the way down the slope when Denton suddenly asked Dayton. "You aren't going to jump up and down and scream, or have some kind of conniption fit, are you?"

She looked back at him. "What in the world are you talking about?"

They were on level ground again and he nodded toward the car.

Dayton didn't jump up and down, scream, or have a conniption fit. She did turn toward Denton and glare at him after she saw the two additional flat tires on her sister's car.

"I'll go radio it in and have someone call our tire guy. Or someone else if you have a preference."

With a deep sigh Dayton said, "Just whoever would be best. I don't have my own Tire Guy out here." After a long look at the car, and a shake of her head, Dayton followed Denton back up the slope. When they reached the truck she said, "Maybe you'd better call the coroner, too. I'll probably kill Deryn when I finally get back."

“No, you won’t. You’ll just admonish her and try to get her to be more responsible.” Denton reached in and picked up one of the three microphones from their hangers on the dash.

“I’m not so sure, this time,” Dayton told him. She was not paying much attention to Denton’s end of the radio conversation. Instead she was looking around the old mine site. She could see wooden stakes with various colors of marking tape tied to them.

She walked over to the nearest to look more closely. Not only did it have colored tape tied to it, several numbers and letters had been written on it with some heavy marker. Dayton looked more closely at the entire area. There were also paint markings on the ground here and there.

Denton called her over to the truck. “You want the bad news first, or the really bad news first?”

“Lord,” sighed Dayton. “Now what?”

They can’t get a tire truck up here till tomorrow since this doesn’t classify as an emergency.”

“This isn’t an emergency? I have two flats and a flat spare!”

“True, but in this area lost production is a bigger emergency. One of my guys would go in to get a couple of tires and we’d bring one of our service trucks up here, but no one has that tire locally, and we can’t really spare the service truck anyway.” Denton watched her reaction. It wasn’t as severe as she thought it might be.

“Okay. I understand that. What do you suggest?”

“I can have Delgado stop and pick up my tandem wheel trailer. I’ve been hauling away some old pallets every few days and it just happens to be at plant. It’ll carry the car all right, even on this trail.”

“Won’t driving it onto the trailer damage the tires?”

“There’s a Cat loader with forks same place the Cat is. I’ll bring it over and load the car onto the trailer with it.”

Dayton looked at Denton somewhat skeptically.

“I’m still pretty good on the equipment,” he reassured her.

“Okay. I guess,” she replied.

He picked up the microphone again, but before he spoke he looked over at her and said, “You realize you’re going to have to stay up here till I’m done. At least until Delgado is done. You can ride down with him and I’ll bring the rig in tonight. But I won’t be out of here until well after dark. I’m not sure what else to do. I have to have the trucks here or I’d let you take one down to the plant and have it brought back up. I could get hold of Woodie or someone to come get you.”

“No. Woodie is really busy today, and Deryn...it would be better if she didn’t try. I didn’t have anything else planned. I do hate to just sit around. I don’t suppose there is any way I could help?”

“You serious?” Denton asked. “No. You can’t. Shouldn’t even have let you out of the car. For a couple of reasons.” The last part was mumbled, but Dayton heard it any. For some reason she let it pass. “MSHA inspector would have my head if I let you work up here without safety training.”

Dayton was grinning. She reached into a shirt pocket and produced a pink slip of paper. She handed it to Denton. “Went through the class. Woodie said it would make it easier if Deryn and I took the safety classes, in case we wanted to see some of the operations up closer.”

Dayton frowned then. “Deryn was the hit of the class. All the guys wanted to help her put on... and take off... the safety harness when we

got to that part. And then the CPR... But never mind that. The thing is,” she said, taking back the pink paper, “I can safely work up here.”

When she grinned at him, Denton grinned back, reached into the bed of the pickup and pulled out a sledge hammer. “You can help me drive marking stakes.”

“Geez! How much does this thing weigh?” she asked when it nearly slipped from her hand when Denton gave it to her.

“Just twelve pounds. A sixteen busts up the stakes too bad.”

She thought he was joking, but when she turned to glare at him he was reaching for the GPS backpack. Obviously, he had not been joking.

“The stakes are over there,” he said, pointing to a bundle of wooden marking stakes that had already been opened up for use. “Grab about a dozen if you will. Oh, there’s a pair of gloves on the seat of the truck. You’ll need them. And even though this mine is shut down, I want you wearing a hard hat and safety glasses. I’m glad to see you wore a pair of Woodie’s steel toe boots. Things would still have been iffy.”

“I don’t think Woodie has any footwear other than a pair of heels that aren’t steel toe. And I’m not sure about those.”

Denton was adjusting the GPS pack on his back, but he looked over and smiled at Dayton. “Wouldn’t surprise me. You ready?”

When Dayton nodded Denton turned and began walking over to an area devoid of stakes or any other markings. Denton showed Dayton how to mark a stake, and then drive it into the precise spot he indicated. After the first one, Dayton marked and placed them as Denton indicated. From time to time he had her mark the ground with coded information.

“What are these for?” Dayton asked at one point, looking around at the small forest of stakes, their attached coded marking tape.

“This is a waste dump. We’re going to be adding to it next spring and need to plan the contouring to make it weather worthy and stable so it won’t start washing down over the years of heavy weather up here. We build it to very tight specs, so once it is finished it is almost like the mountain the rock came from initially was just shifted over a bit.”

“Makes sense.”

They had worked for some time, taking frequent water breaks, before Denton suddenly looked up and nodded toward the area where the car was located. “Let’s head over. I hear Delgado.”

“I don’t hear anything except the wind,” replied Dayton.

“Listen close. There is an occasional metallic rattle.” Denton had been walking in the direction of the car but stopped to stand quietly when Dayton did so she could listen for the sound he had described.

“Okay,” she said after a moment. “I do hear something.”

“Wind is from that direction, so he is still a ways off, but I want to stow the GPS and get the Cat ready to install the new hose. I secured everything to keep out contamination in case we couldn’t get a replacement hose today and had to leave it down.”

By the time they had put away the equipment, done what Denton needed to do to the Cat, and made their way down to the car, Delgado was pulling up to it with the trailer.

“Hello, Miss,” he said to Dayton when he climbed out of the truck. “Hey, Dent,” he called, shifting his look to Denton. “I ran into Carla when I was in town. She asked me to tell you to please stop by on the way in. She wants to see you.”

“Okay. Thanks, Delgado. How’s Lucy?”

Dayton had to smile at the huge grin that split the dark Hispanic face.

“Looking good. She and Eduardo, Junior can come home tomorrow.”

Seeing and hearing his joy, Dayton had to smile.

“Okay,” Denton replied. “Let’s get this done and get you home, so you can get things ready.”

As Dayton and Delgado were moving the hose from Delgado’s truck to the other truck, Delgado looked over at Dayton and asked, “You’re one of Woodie’s girls, aren’t you?”

“Niece, not daughter,” Dayton told him.

Rolling his eyes over at Denton, he said, “Woodie let you associate with him? I’m surprised. The man has been known to run around in just his long handles.” The last two words were said rather loudly.

Denton looked around. A glance at Delgado, then he looked at Dayton with a smile. “You can tell him if you want, but I’d just as soon let him wonder about it. It’ll drive him nuts. You don’t have to worry about him starting any rumors or anything.”

“Regardless of any rumors, I’d rather explain. It would probably drive me nuts, too, so I know how he feels.”

Delgado laughed several times as Dayton explained what had happened.

“Definitely related to Woodie,” commented Delgado. “You must have a lot of panache. Something like that would normally have him headed down the mountain, pack straps flapping in the wind, he’d be moving so fast.”

“Bottle it and stick the cork in, Delgado. We got work to get done,” Denton told him rather firmly.

For a moment Dayton thought he had been offended by Delgado’s remarks but she noticed his bright red face.

“You want to borrow some sunscreen, Dent? You look a little red in the face there, Ace.”

Denton ignored the second rejoinder, simply turning a bit deeper red. “Sorry about that,” he told Dayton as she looked at Delgado.

Dayton was grinning like Delgado. Denton going an even deeper red. “Figures.” He turned to the D-11. “Stay back out of the way,” he told Dayton. You can watch if you want, though it’s going to be boring. Or you can go wait in the car until we’re done here.”

“The loader you said...”

“Have to get the Cat going first, so Delgado can be on his way. This comes first.” There was no apology in his voice. Dayton started to protest, but he’d been so casual about it she held her tongue. And began to watch as the two men worked on the big Caterpillar dozer.

There was the occasional grunt or groan, as the men wrestled with the large hydraulic hose, getting it into position so the connections could be made. Dayton’s eyes stayed mostly on Denton. She noticed that while Denton and Delgado were about the same height, Delgado was quite a bit heavier. But Denton was doing the lion’s share of the work, making sure things were just so.

The snow started shortly after the connections were made and it was coming down hard by the time they were torqued to just the proper tightness. Denton and Delgado both stepped down off the track of the dozer and wiped their hands on shop rags.

“Good job, Delgado. See how much faster it went with that wrench?”

“Yeah. Sorry about that amigo. I’ll do better with keeping track of things.”

There’d been no rancor in Denton’s remark and Delgado had inferred none. The anxious look on his face, Dayton realized, was his eagerness to get home to get ready for his wife and new baby to come home the following day.

“Okay,” Denton continued. “Time to you to hit the road. Drop Miss Blankenship off...”

Dayton interrupted Denton. “It’s Jones.”

Denton looked at her in surprise. “I thought you were Woodie’s brother Jack’s daughters.”

“We... I am. I was married... I’m a widow. It’s Mrs. Jones.”

“I’m sorry,” Denton said hastily, seeing the pinched look on Dayton’s face. He was sure it was from something about her past rather than the cold wind that was now blowing.

“And I’ll stay until you get the car loaded and ride back with you,” Dayton said, the stubborn look Denton had learned was almost impossible to counter on her face.

Denton sighed. “Okay. Delgado, take off.”

“I can stay and help...”

“Naw. She’ll never allow it,” Denton said with another sigh.

Delgado smiled and Dayton frowned. But just a little. She was getting cold and wanted to get the car loaded and in the truck so she could warm

up. She couldn't understand how Denton could stand being in just the long john bottoms. Though he did have several layers on top.

Delgado waved and made for his own truck. "I'll go get the loader," Denton said. He wasn't surprised when Dayton said she was going with him. He started to protest, but suddenly shrugged. "Okay, I guess. Let's not waste any time. I want enough light to see how to load the car."

Again Denton was surprised that Dayton stayed with him every step of the way. He was getting chilled and had picked up the pace somewhat. "I just hope thing starts better than the D-11 did," Denton said and began to climb up to the cab of the larger loader. A pair of lifting forks was attached to the bucket; Dayton saw and finally figured out how Dayton would load the car.

She started to climb up behind Denton but Denton turned around on the ladder and said, "MSHA says only one person to a cab, unless there are seatbelts for more, or there is training going on and special precautions are taken. You have to walk back. You take off. I'll be with you as soon as I get the loader started.

It was Dayton's turn to see a stubborn look. She had a feeling that Denton wasn't one to break safety rules, even if it would be just a little break. So she nodded and hopped down to the ground.

She had her arms wrapped around her chest as she slowly made her way back to the truck, trailer, and car. A few minutes later the lights of the loader cut the descending darkness of night, highlighting the falling flakes of snow.

Dayton tried to hurry, but it was too dangerous on the rough ground. Denton seemed fine just pacing her from behind as she walked. When she reached the side of the truck she was amazed as the exhaust of the loader bellowed slightly and made a hard left turn. Denton seemed to work in fast speed as he moved the loader to the convertible and very carefully slid the forks under the frame.

Up came the car and then he had it over the trailer. A couple of delicate moves and the convertible was sitting on its two flats and two good tires on the bed of the trailer. Either the size of the trailer made the car look little, or the car made the trailer look big, Dayton thought to herself.

She jumped slightly when Denton suddenly appeared out of the snow, in the light from the now idling loader. Though she wanted to help, Dayton could only stand and watch as Denton expertly tied down the convertible so it would ride safely. It seemed second nature to him, Dayton decided.

The task was done and Denton disappeared into the snow again. A few seconds later the headlights and work lights on the loader went out and the snowy darkness surrounded Dayton for a moment.

“Ready to go?” Denton asked, making Dayton jump again.

“Stop that! You scared me to death! Give a girl some warning, will you?”

“Oh. Sorry. Sure. Let’s get in the truck and be on our way.”

“Aren’t you cold?” Dayton asked Denton after they were seated in the truck and Denton had started the engine and put the truck in gear.

“A little. Little more snow and wind than I was expecting. But these wool long johns are heavy weight. My legs don’t get too cold, as long as my head, feet, and hands are warm.”

With that, Denton took off first one and then the second glove on one hand and then the other, to grip the steering wheel bare handed. The trip up hadn’t bothered Dayton, partly because she could see where she was going and partly from being distracted by her thoughts about her sister.

But now she eased toward the center of the seat as Denton went around a curve on the mine road. There was just enough light left to see that there

was nothing on her side of the road except falling snow. How far down it was falling she couldn't tell.

"You okay?" Denton asked his concern evident.

"Yeah. Yeah. Just a little spooky out. The snow and the mountains and the drop offs."

"Guess I'm just used to it. Have to be really careful up here. It is ingrained in me. I'll slow down a little and give a little more room on the edges."

Since it wasn't condescending, and it did make her feel better, Dayton nodded. The two were silent all the way down the mountain, and then into town, bypassing the processing plant located just off the highway. They were out of the snow long before hitting the valley.

Dayton was a little surprised when Denton pulled into one of the tire places in town. It was dark, the shop obviously closed. "I'll drop the trailer and get you home."

"Will it be alright here?"

"Sure. No one messes with stuff here. Between the law catching them, or Big Bill, most everyone would prefer the law, so no one does much. Just call in the morning and tell them I sent you. They'll treat you good."

"Okay." Dayton waited in the truck while Denton unhooked the trailer.

It might not be snowing, but the wind was whistling and it was cold. Even Denton looked cold when he got back into the truck. "Gonna be a three dog night, for sure."

"Three Dog Night? The musical group?"

“No,” Denton chuckled. “From the saying their name comes from. When it’s cold you need three of your dogs in the bed to keep you warm.”

“Ah. I see.” Dayton chuckled. “At least you do feel the cold. I was beginning to wonder.”

“I stand it pretty good. But a person better be a few steps from a warm place or dressed for it out here. Not unusual to get twenty below with wind chills thirty below and lower.”

“How do you work in weather like that? Aunt Woodie says the mines almost never stop.”

“Matter of preparation.” The two were silent on the way back out to Woodie’s.

“Here we are,” Denton said, pulling into Woodie’s place, around to the house behind the commercial business.

“Thank you for getting the car back down here,” Dayton said. “Give me a minute and you can have your pants back. Wouldn’t want Carla to think something was going on...” Dayton bit her lip to shut it up. “Where did that come from?” she asked herself silently.

But Denton just laughed. “She wouldn’t even bat an eye. Carla is okay. But where she is, there would be questions. I’ll wait.”

Dayton desperately wanted to ask Denton where Carla was and who she was, but knew it was none of her business. “You want to come in and wait for me to change?”

“Uh...” Denton hesitated. He could see that Woodie’s Suburban was in the driveway. “Looks like your sister is here. I’ll just wait, if you wouldn’t mind bringing them back out here.”

“You don’t have to...” Dayton began to say, but suddenly decided that it might be better if Deryn didn’t see Denton in his long johns. “Okay. I’ll be right out.”

True to her word, Dayton was back in only a couple of minutes, dressed in another pair of jeans, with a heavy coat on over her shirt. She noted that Denton hadn’t wasted any of the two minutes. He had his laptop computer open and was typing away when she knocked on the window glass.

“Here you go,” Dayton said. “Thanks for the loan.”

“Sure thing. Anytime. Uh... forget that. Just... It’s okay. I need to be on my way. Carla will be waiting for me.” Denton didn’t see the frown on Dayton’s face. He was setting the pants down on the truck seat beside him. She had a neutral expression on her face when Denton looked back at her.

“See you in a couple of days. And, seriously, get a four wheel drive vehicle before you come up to my place. You’ll need it. There be a snow accumulation of five or six inches, unless I miss my guess.”

“Okay... I...” Dayton wasn’t sure what she wanted to say, but it was a moot point, anyway. Denton had his finger on the window button and it was already almost up. Then he was backing down the driveway.

“So, Sis? What was that all about?” Deryn asked when Dayton went back inside.

“Nothing. Just returning something Denton loaned me where we were up at the mine.” Dayton put a stern expression on her face. “I didn’t have a chance earlier, but Deryn, I...”

Dayton sighed and put her arms around Deryn when Deryn started to cry. “I’m sorry, Dayton. I really am. I didn’t realize...” A sob wracked her body and Dayton, knowing that Deryn was running a game on her

simply patted her sister's back and said, "It's okay, Sis. It's okay. No real harm done... Except your car needs new tires."

The crying stopped and Deryn stepped back. "What? Tires? Why?"

"I took it up to... Well, dang it! I took it up to the mine to return the money to Denton. I completely forgot about giving it to him! Dang!"

"My tires?" Deryn asked again.

"Yeah. Three flats. It's at Big Bill's tire shop. I'll call in the morning and we'll get them replaced."

"Oh. Okay. You're going to pay for it, aren't you? Since you did take it up there."

"Oh, Sis! You took..." Dayton shook her head. "Yeah. Yeah. I'll pay for the tires."

Deryn smiled. "Thanks, Sis! You're the best. And I'll give you the money for the bar tab when we get next month's checks from the trust fund."

"Next month! But... Oh, never mind. That'll be fine. Hey. I'm starving. What's Aunt Woodie got cooking for supper?"

"Oh. Left over chili. I already ate. I think I'll get on the computer and do a little facebook and twitter."

Deryn turned away and headed for Woodie's study while Dayton went to the kitchen. She gave Woodie a big hug and sat down at the kitchen table when Woodie said, "I'll have you some chili dished up in a minute. How'd your day go? I was expecting you back way before this."

"I'm sorry, Aunt Woodie! I should have called... At least when I was back in the service area. You won't believe my day!"

Woodie sat down as her niece began to wolf down the chili. Between bites she told Woodie everything that happened. She stopped at one point, the spoon of chili halfway to her mouth. “Do you know who ‘Carla’ is?”

“Oh, I think you’d better find out who Carla is on your own. I’m not one to be carrying tales about a friend.”

Dayton frowned at her Aunt. But that smooth, pretty face showed nothing. Dayton decided she wouldn’t get anything from her and went back to telling of the ride down the mountain.

Pole Shift - Chapter 3

Dayton thought about Denton occasionally the next day as she made sure the tires on Deryn’s convertible were replaced and got it home. Big Bill, a name that Dayton decided fit the man perfectly, insisted she not worry about the trailer. Either Denton would be back for it or he would drop it off himself next time he ‘went up that way’.

Reluctantly, wanting to spend some time with her new friend from Murdock’s Landing, Deryn, at Dayton’s insistence, took Dayton over to the next large town so she could rent a four wheel drive vehicle so she didn’t have to tie up Woodie’s Suburban, or try to get around in Deryn’s convertible.

After picking up the truck and seeing Deryn off to have a late lunch with her friend, Dayton took a few hours to do some shopping. Mostly some new pants that wouldn’t split the seams if she had to change another tire or something. Some long underwear, a few flannel shirts, a pair of hard toe boots, a hard hat, heavy coat, gloves, and some emergency supplies rounded out her purchases before she headed back to Woodie’s.

Deryn wasn’t there when Dayton returned. “I wanted to talk to Deryn. Her car is here, but she wasn’t in the house.”

“Went skiing with Doug Kindricks. Don’t worry. He’s an okay kid.”

“Oh. Well, talking to her will just have to wait, I suppose. Is there something I can do to help out here, Aunt Woodie?”

“No, Honey. Got it all covered. Why don’t you go in for a bit? Look over the town some. It’s a nice little rural town.”

“Yeah. With three brothels,” Dayton snorted.

“All strictly legal. People take different paths in life. I’m not one to condemn other people’s choices, without knowing a great deal more about them than their profession.”

Dayton frowned. Woodie’s voice had been slightly chiding.

“Might even want to go in and thank Ralph at Murdock’s Landing for handling Deryn’s little problem so nicely.”

A little dejected at needing to be reminded of her social duty, Dayton muttered, “Yeah. Okay. I’ll be back in time for supper.”

“You might want to get something in town,” Woodie said. “Margie can’t come in this evening and I’ll be working until midnight.”

A customer came in and Woodie hurried over to serve him, a small smile on her mouth. Dayton was a good girl, as was Deryn, but every once in the while both of them needed a kick in the posterior to keep them in the real world.

Dayton went to the house to take her purchases up to the bedroom she was using and changed into some of the new clothing after running them through a warm rinse in the washing machine and then dried them in the dryer while she put away the other things.

So it was late afternoon when Dayton made it into town, and pulled into the parking lot of Murdock's Landing. The wind was swirling some light snow when she opened the door and went inside.

The place wasn't too busy, and most of those inside turned to look at whoever it was that came in, ready to say hello to anyone they knew. The bar wasn't lighted too brightly and coming in from the whiteness of outside Dayton paused to let her eyes adjust.

She saw people starting to turn back around to their drinks and video poker at the bar, except for one table where three men sat. Their eyes were all on her. Dayton was used to it and just ignored them. She headed for the bar to ask for Ralph when one of the men called over to the woman behind the bar.

Dayton's eyes were just taking in the sight when the man said, "Carla, get Deryn a beer on me."

Half turning her head toward the table, but keeping her eyes on Carla, the bartender, Dayton made it clear she wasn't Deryn. It wasn't the first time Dayton had come into a place after her sister had made her mark on it, and it was always the same.

"Oh. Never mind, Carla." The men turned back to their conversation.

"You're... Carla?" Dayton asked when she made it up to the bar.

"Yes. And you're not Deryn." The woman reached her hand out over the bar. "Welcome to Murdock's."

"Uh... Thanks." Dayton finally snapped out of it and shook Carla's hand. Dayton knew that she and Deryn were attractive, even considered beautiful women. But Carla was every bit their match. And Carla obviously knew it and carried it well.

"What'cha having?" Carla asked.

“A... uh... do you have a premium Amaretto?”

“Sure do, Dayton. It is Dayton? Deryn referred to a twin sister by that name.”

“She sure made an impression, I take it,” Dayton said. “And, yes, it is Dayton.”

“Ah, not to worry. She was okay. Just very... open and vivacious. Charmed all the guys, most of the women, and had Doug wrapped around her little finger. Too bad he was broke and couldn’t cover her tab. He would have loved to do that.”

“About that... I’d like to thank Ralph for letting someone else cover her tab over the phone.”

“Yeah. That Denton. Always coming to some woman or another’s rescue. Ralph will be in about seven, if you’re still here. Or I can pass it along for you.”

“I might be around.” Dayton picked up the glass Carla had set in front of her and took a sip of the Amaretto. “Oh. This is good.” But she took only a small sip and set the glass down. “So Denton does stuff like this often?”

“Well, I wouldn’t say often, but he’s been known to lend a helping hand when someone needs it. He’s a good man. Made a big difference in my life.”

Anxious to hear all about it, Dayton was disappointed when Carla got busy and couldn’t talk any more. Dayton took her drink and walked over to one of the tables near the juke box. She set the drink down and went to select some music on the jukebox.

The selections were mostly country and western, not quite her taste, but there were quite a few oldies rock and roll albums, as well. Not a huge fan of oldies, she decided that was what she wanted to hear. So she fed the machine and made her selections before going back to the table.

The music had barely started when one of the three men from the table that had thought she was Deryn came over and asked her to dance. She was going to say no as a matter of course, but the man said, "Want to apologize for my friend. He should've bought that drink, not because you were Deryn, but because you were obviously her sister. I'll make it up if you allow me to buy you the next one."

The man was respectful, and quite charming, Dayton decided and lifted her hand up for him to take. Only a few seconds into the dance the man's eyes sparkled and he said, "I think I'm way out of my league! You are a terrific dancer."

"Oh, you're holding your own," Dayton said. "Just don't let me take the lead. I do that sometimes."

"Don't bother me none, only I couldn't keep up with you, I'm thinking." The song was already almost half over so the dance was a short one. "Thank you, Dayton," said the man when the music stopped and the juke box began shifting to the next song on the list.

"Thank you," Dayton replied. "I didn't get your name..." She was just sitting down.

"Calvin Ness. At your service." He looked over at the two men approaching. "If you need an out, just give me a high sign and I'll come over and occupy you for a while. A guy named Denton taught me to do that when a woman is about to get overrun with want-a-be dancers."

There was a small smile on the man's mouth that Dayton trusted immediately. "Okay," she whispered. "Thanks." Seeing the men coming, she quickly added, "I might just take you up on that."

Feeling good suddenly, Dayton danced, and danced again, each time with a different man. Suddenly there were other couples up, dancing as well. Though a couple of the men she danced with wanted a bit more, her firm no and stately presence, along with a word from another man or two quickly put an end to any inappropriateness.

Dayton finally had to rest and go to the bathroom. The other dancers left the dance floor as the music she'd selected ended. A bit surprised, she wasn't bothered while she rested and finished her drink.

Carla had another one on the table before Dayton could ask for one. "From Calvin," Carla said. Dayton lifted the glass slightly and nodded at Calvin, now playing pool with his friends. "No more for a while," Dayton said.

"Sure thing. You're a wise woman. I'll just stack the shot glasses. You let me know when you do want another."

"Thank you," Dayton said. She still wanted to know more about Carla, but Carla was just too busy. Deciding that even two drinks, both on an empty stomach, was pushing it, she went over to the bar and asked for a menu. But Carla stepped away just as she did and didn't hear the request. One of the men at the bar leaned over and picked one up from the group of them by the well drink rail and handed it to her without even looking at her or saying anything.

Her "Thanks" brought a grunt, and that was all as the man concentrated on the video poker screen before him and the beer at his right hand.

Taking a seat at her table again, she looked at the short menu and decided on a small pizza. It took a few minutes before Carla could take her order. It took even longer for the pizza to be ready.

A second bartender had come on duty and she was the one that brought it over, dashing Dayton's hopes to be able to have a conversation with

Carla again. But then Denton came in the door, letting in a swirl of cold air and snow inside the building.

There were good natured calls back and forth as Denton went up to the bar. Dayton, like the others, had turned to see who had come in. She was about to call out to him when she saw Carla hand Denton a set of keys. Denton then turned around and went back outside.

Curious, to say the least, Dayton slowly finished the pizza, wondering what Denton was doing. This time, when he came back in a few minutes later, he was talking to Deryn and a man, obviously the Doug she'd gone skiing with. She waved, and like twins often do, Deryn looked at over at her immediately, before her arm was half raised.

Deryn led the way to Dayton's table, being greeted occasionally by one of the locals. But Denton veered away and Dayton saw him give the keys back to Carla. She was burning with curiosity when he came over and sat down beside her at the table, with Deryn and Doug already sitting across from Dayton and the empty chair.

Deryn quickly introduced Doug to Dayton, and then took him out on the dance floor as someone fed the juke box again. A smiling Calvin came over to the table and asked, "You need rescuing from this letch, I'm your man."

"Funny, Calvin."

Calvin laughed and took the hand of the woman that had come up behind him. The two went out on the dance floor and Dayton finally had a chance to get a good look at Denton. "Are you all right? You look like something is bothering you."

"It's Carla. She isn't doing too well tonight."

"What?" Dayton asked. She looked over at the bar. "She looks fine. Gorgeous, actually."

“Oh. Not that Carla. Carla, her daughter. Her daughter is named Carla, too. She wants to be a mining engineer when she grows up and I’ve been helping her study geology and such.”

“How old is she?” Dayton asked. Another look at the Carla behind the bar, and Dayton decided she couldn’t have a daughter much older than five or six and that didn’t make sense.

“Fourteen. She’ll be lucky to make it to adulthood. She’s very ill. Has good days and bad ones. I try to keep her hopes up by helping her with her studies.”

“Oh. I see. That’s too bad... I mean it’s good you’re helping her. Just her situation...”

“Yeah. Tom, Carla’s father does all he can, as does Carla, her mother, but both put in so many hours at work that every little extra bit of time people can spend with her, the better.”

“Carla’s parents are divorced?” Dayton asked, anxious for the answer.

“No. Where’d you get that idea?”

“I... uh... I don’t know.” Dayton gave a casual shrug, hoping Denton wouldn’t pursue it and try to find out her interest in Carla. Because she wasn’t sure what it was, anyway. But someone came over and Denton was distracted for a few moments exchanging greetings with one of the mining company employees that he worked closely with.

Hoping Denton would ask her to dance, she turned down a couple of requests. Denton made no comment. He seemed to be well known, and liked, and seemed to be having a good time. After the third time she was asked and declined to dance, Denton turned to her and leaned forward. “Don’t worry about dancing here. People won’t make fun of you if you are awkward. With your bad leg, and all.”

Dayton frowned. "I'm perfectly able to dance without embarrassing myself. How about you? I noticed you haven't been out on dance floor once."

"I'm not a very good dancer. Most of the women know better than to ask me."

"Well, why don't you ask one of them to dance? A lot of women don't like asking men to dance. Thinks it gives the wrong message."

Dayton was getting annoyed. One of the more insistent of her previous partners was headed toward the table, with a gleam in his eye and more than enough alcohol in his system to be a problem she didn't want to handle. Besides, it was as good of an excuse as any...

"Come on, dance with me." As much as she hated to say it, she added, "Rescue me. I don't want Austin over there asking me to dance anymore."

It seemed automatic. Denton had her hand and they were on the dance floor. Come to a woman's rescue, but not have a good reason to dance with her, otherwise. Dayton was more than annoyed now. She was edging over into angry, primed primarily because her feelings were hurt more than a little.

She was used to being one half of the center of attention when she and Deryn were out together. And Denton had spoken to almost everyone in the bar at one time or another, and ignored her. Until she asked him to be rescued.

Denton had not been kidding when he said he wasn't a very good dancer. He didn't even try to hold her. He just shuffled his feet slightly, his arms hanging almost straight down, even on the slow song that started after the rock and roll song finished.

“Here. You really don’t know how to dance. Take my hand with yours, and put the other around my waist. You won’t break me.” She eased against him. He tried to back away, but Dayton had a hold of him.

She could feel him relax slightly as she guided his moves, her body moving against his slightly as they went around the dance floor, in time with the music. Dayton heard one of the women call over to Denton, “See, Denton! I told you you could learn to dance! You look great!”

There were half a dozen other comments, all to Denton, about how well he could dance now as Dayton held onto him and kept him on the dance floor for five songs. As soon as they sat down for a break, the young woman that had first encouraged him came over and, without asking, Dayton noticed, took his hand and pulled him up onto the dance floor before he could protest. It was another slow dance.

Dayton’s foot began tapping the floor and her arms crossed in front of her chest. There was a frown on her face she didn’t know was there. But Deryn saw it and smiled. She leaned over and whispered to Dayton, “You started it, you know. None of them wanted to dance with him until you got him up there, doing it properly. If you want him, you’re going to have to brand him, you know.”

“Brand him!” Dayton whispered back. “Where’d you pick up that expression? And besides, I don’t want him. He’s just...” But her words stopped suddenly when she felt a hand on her arm. The music had changed and it was Denton asking her to dance this one. Another really slow song.

She rose and took his hand. Why no one had ever shown him how to dance was amazing. He was a very quick study. He was actually leading, rather than following, as he had on the first dances with her. And he held her just tight enough to make it interesting, without being threatening.

When they sat down after the music faded away and no one fed the jukebox again, Denton looked over at Dayton and said. “That was

amazing! You're a great teacher! I thought you couldn't do very well because of your leg."

He suddenly looked at his watch and then said, "I need to be going. I've got a lot to do tomorrow. Haven't taken a full day off in quite a while. You guys able to get home okay?"

Dayton frowned again and started to protest his assumption that they might not be able to fend for themselves. But he was already moving. And Dayton had to get to the bathroom. When she came out he was gone.

It was only after she sat down again that she realized she could have given him the money she owed him, but had become distracted and let it slip her mind. So she sighed and asked Deryn, just in case, "You have your wallet with you tonight?"

"Yes, I do."

"Okay. I'm going back out to Aunt Woodie's. I'll see you in the morning."

"Not too early, okay?" Deryn said, glancing over at Doug's face. "I might be late getting home."

Dayton rolled her eyes, but didn't say anything. Gathering up her coat, hat, and gloves, she moved over to the bar cash register. "I need to pay my tab and get home, Carla," she said.

"Oh. Denton took care of the table bill before he left."

"Oh really?" Dayton said, suddenly annoyed again.

Carla nodded but couldn't hang around. The bar was really starting to hop. Dayton headed for the door, and was pleased to see half a dozen

people wave goodbye to her. It wasn't just the men. A couple of the women waved too.

"This is a nice town," Dayton mused as she got into the truck and started the engine. She had to let it warm up a bit as the light snow had frozen to the windshield in the hours since she'd been there.

When she pulled out of the parking lot she saw a country patrol car pull out behind her and follow her all the way out of town. She was a careful driver and had only had three drinks total, over the hours she'd been at the bar. Apparently the deputy sheriff decided she was okay since he didn't stop her and turned around when she picked up the interstate to get back to Woodie's.

The house was dark when she went inside, though there were several cars at the pumps and convenience store. So she moved carefully up to her bedroom in the dark and went to bed, promising herself she'd get Denton paid off the next day, come what may.

Neither Woodie nor Deryn were up when Dayton got up the next morning, so she went around to the café for a hot breakfast. There was an inch or so of snow accumulated and the wind was blowing hard and cold. She pulled up the hood of her coat over the hat as she hurried inside.

The morning waitress greeted her and took her order. Taking a booth along the front window of the café part of the building, Dayton watched the wind swirl the snow, and the cars pass on the interstate that was only a couple hundred feet away. It started to snow again just as her breakfast was served.

She had some second thoughts about trying to go up to Denton's place in the mountains, but reminded herself of her promise to pay Denton what she owed him. "Actually, what Deryn owes him," came the thought as she started up the truck and turned the defroster on high.

With the map on the seat opened beside her, she followed the directions Denton had given her, looking at the map occasionally to confirm her route. The higher in the mountains the harder the snow fell. But even on these roads there was some traffic. Mostly four wheel drive pickup trucks similar to the one she was driving, but also quite a few semi trucks, often with double trailers, carrying goods up to the gold mines to be used in whatever way those things were used.

Dayton noticed the hazardous materials placards on some of the trailers, from her MSHA safety training and gave them a wide berth. She was in a high valley when she came to the turn that would take her up the blind side valley to Denton's place at the end of it.

There were no signs of movement on the road, or, as Denton had warned her, the track up the valley to his place. Just a wide expanse of thick white snow. At least the snowfall had stopped and the sun was out. Dayton stopped and got her sunglasses out of her bag and put them on.

Hoping she was staying on the road, such as it was, Dayton headed for the small, steady stream of smoke climbing into the cold air high up on the valley wall at the far end. She slammed on the brakes suddenly when, even though it was bright outside, or perhaps because of it, she almost ran into a huge snow drift.

"Geez!" she thought and shuddered. The drift went off into the distance on each side of the truck and loomed over her. Afraid a sudden wind would bury her in the truck, she began to back up, slowly and carefully. But despite that, she felt the right rear tire slide off into a ditch. She quickly shifted into four wheel low range and tried to get out. But though the truck had good tires and four wheel drive, with the center of the rear axle sitting on the edge of the ditch, she quickly realized she wasn't going anywhere anytime soon.

Muttering a curse word she jumped when her cell phone rang. She quickly answered it, not recognizing the number.

“Dayton?” came Denton’s voice from the phone.

Relieved more than she cared to admit, Dayton said, “Yes. This is she.” Before she could say anymore, Denton continued.

“I don’t think you should try and come up here today. We got a bit of snow last night and my road wanders all over the place. It’s easy to get off track. I keep planning to put up delineators, but haven’t got it done yet.”

“Uh... Too late,” Dayton said. “I’m up in the valley. Stuck. I almost ran right into a big drift.”

“Shouldn’t be any drifts,” Denton said. “There wasn’t much wind last night.”

“Well, I’m staring at fifteen feet of snow that disappears to either side of me.”

“Hang on a minute. Let me take a look.”

“What do you mean, take a look?” Dayton asked.

There was silence for a moment and then Denton was back on the phone. “Okay. I spotted you. That’s not a drift. That’s... well never mind. Just believe me it isn’t a drift. It’s good you didn’t run into it. But don’t get close to it. The snow on top could bury you. Just hang tight and I’ll come get you out.”

“But how...” Dayton frowned and closed the phone. Denton had hung up. Not wanting to use up too much fuel, Dayton turned off the engine and bundled up in her parka, glad she’d dressed for the weather.

She adjusted herself in the seat so she could watch up the length of the valley, toward the smoke climbing into the sky. After only a few minutes

she saw a dark spot appear against the snow. It seemed to take forever before it began to enlarge in size. And then it loomed up, huge. It was a front end loader.

Not as big as the one Denton had used to load the convertible onto his trailer, but still big enough to be startling. Denton whipped around and backed the loader up to the back of the truck. He was out of the cab, down between it and the rear of the truck when Dayton got out and made her way around to the back through the deep snow.

“Surprised you made it this far off the road,” Denton said. He was on his back in the snow, hooking a pull strap to the frame of the truck.

“Off the road. I’m just barely in the ditch!”

“What? This? This is just a little gully. The road is back there about a half a mile,” Denton said, pointing down the tracks the truck had plowed in the snow. “Get in. Let me do the pulling. You just steer. Don’t gun the engine.”

Frowning in annoyance, Dayton did as Denton suggested and was out of the gully. Again, before she could get out and around to the back of the truck, Denton was already on the ground, the wheels of the loader chocked, and was unhooking the tow strap.

“Just follow me back to the road and you can head for Woodie’s,” Denton said when he’d secured the pull strap to the back of the loader.

She knew she was being stubborn, but Dayton spoke up anyway. “No. I’m going up to your place to give you the money I owe you.”

“Just give it to me now and we’ll be even. No need to go all the way up and then just back down,” Denton said in what he thought was a reasonable voice.

Dayton didn't seem to take it that way. "I said I'd deliver it to your house and that is what I am going to do. You just lay on, MacDuff, and I'll follow."

"But..."

The stubborn look was on Dayton's face and Denton decided it wasn't worth standing out in the middle of the valley to argue. It would only be a few minutes and then she would be gone and he could get on with what he had planned for the day.

So, silently, he pulled the wheel chocks and put them in their racks and climbed up into the cab of the loader. He lifted the bucket and put the loader in gear. He moved only a few feet until Dayton had the truck turned around safely and was in place behind him. Once she was ready, he headed the shortest distance to the road and turned toward the far end of the valley.

The route Denton had started on appeared to be taking her back to the entrance of the valley at first and she started fuming. But when he made the turn and they were headed for the far end of the valley she realized just how far off the road she'd gone and began to cool down.

She had no idea how Denton could tell where the road was, as he went back and forth up the valley, weaving a winding path in the snow. But she had no trouble following him and was sure he was staying on the road, not just leading her around by the nose for spite.

Half way to the house, Dayton saw what was obviously a stack of huge hay bales, covered on top with a blue and white tarp and decided that it had been another such stack that had been entirely covered in snow that she'd driven up on inadvertently. A few minutes later and they were beginning to climb slightly. Then, suddenly the ground leveled off and Dayton got her first look at the outside of Denton's home.

It was rock. Just a ridge of rock. Rock with window and door openings cut into it and fitted with weatherproof door and windows. The large flat area in front of the 'house' was clear of snow and had equipment of various types parked neatly in rows along one edge, against a tall berm that would prevent them from being driven off the edge.

Dayton was out of the truck, still looking around, when Denton came up to her after parking the loader with the other equipment. He held his hand out, a neutral look on his face.

"I need to go to the bathroom," Dayton said. She wasn't about to just give him the money and leave, now that she was here.

Denton sighed and turned toward the door of the house. Dayton let it slide, a small smile curving her lips. "Still got it, Babe!" she thought to herself.

She stopped short in surprise when Denton opened the door and let her precede him into the house. It wasn't what she was expecting from the look outside. Instead of bare rock, she saw neatly painted drywall, a hardwood floor, and white dropped ceiling panels with lighting fixtures here and there.

It was warm, but not overly so. "Back down the hall, third door on the left," Denton said.

It took a second for what Denton had said to register on Dayton, but then she moved quickly to the hall bathroom, remembering that she had said she needed to go to the bathroom. Again she was a little surprised. Expecting the normal look of a regular house bathroom now, it was still surprising to see it so neatly kept for Denton being a bachelor.

She realized that she did need to go to the bathroom and quickly did so. She washed her hands and then joined Denton in the living room of the house. "Oh. So that's how you saw me," she said, seeing the long black telescope pointed out one of the windows facing the valley.

“Yep. I can see all the way down to the main road and quite a ways up the facing valley, until it curves out of sight.” Denton looked at her expectantly, but didn’t hold out his hand this time.

“This is an amazing place!” Dayton said, looking around the room. “Are all the rooms finished like this?”

Denton held back a sigh. Which wasn’t really hard. He was proud of his place and very seldom got to show it off. Especially to a beautiful woman. Denton walked her through the house, explaining as he went.

“I found a small vein of high grade ore in this ridge and staked a claim. I mined it out, with the house in mind. When I had enough money I bought the property as a homestead because I liked the view and the location.”

Denton opened another door. This one led to a large room, but unfinished. The lights glared off the black and gray rock of the walls, floor, and ceiling, except for one spot. There glints of reflected the light from the fixtures. “The vein pretty much petered out here.”

“Is that gold?” Dayton asked, walking over to where the sparkles of light were.

“Yes. In a vein of quartz. I guess most people would have continued until they had it all, but I decided I’d keep some in reserve, on the hoof, so to speak, for a rainy day. But actually, it just wasn’t paying off going after it at the price gold was then. I considered the property and house more than enough return on investment.”

“I’ve never seen real gold before,” Dayton said, looking closely at the tiny flakes of yellow in the almost clear quartz. The quartz was only about half an inch wide and two inches high, with perhaps a dozen flakes of gold visible.

“Oh, I doubt that. You’re wearing a gold necklace, unless I’ve lost all of my abilities to spot the real thing when I see it.”

“Oh this. Yes. But I meant... real gold. Not processed.”

“Ah. Yes. Gold in the raw. Never really had gold fever the way some do, but it sure has a draw all its own. I’m around gold all the time and it doesn’t bother me, seeing the millions of ounces that come out of these mountains from just the mine I work for.

“Most of it is microscopic gold that takes tons of ore to be processed to get an ounce of gold. Not much of this placer type out here. I was really lucky to find this when I was prospecting on my time off. And that it was in an unclaimed area.

“All around my valley has been bought up and mineral claims filed. I wouldn’t have been allowed to find this a year after I did. It would have been just another piece of rock to be processed for the mines.”

“That’s amazing. The whole valley is yours?”

Denton nodded and led the way back to the living room. “At least, I have the use of it for my life time. I kind of believe what some of the Native Americans do. That the land is only on loan to them for a time and then another comes along and uses it for their lifetime and so on.”

“From the tops of the three ridges down to the main road is all mine for now. I’m too busy to do much prospecting any more, and I really already have what I want, so I just grow some hay in the valley and graze a few cattle on the areas that aren’t irrigated.”

“I saw the hay pile when we came up. That’s what I almost ran into, wasn’t it? Another of your hay piles?”

Dayton noticed Denton turn slightly red. He hadn’t done that around her for some time.

“Actually... No... That wasn’t a hay stack you almost hit. It was something else entirely.”

“What was it? It was huge!”

“I’m a little reluctant to go into it,” Denton said. But she saw the change in his face when he continued. “But... you seem genuinely interested in a possible polar shift, as well as other disasters. You want to continue our conversation from the other night? That... thing... you almost hit is tied into it.”

Eagerly Dayton nodded. “Sure! I would love to. But first... Here’s the money.” She handed Denton a handful of currency she took from her coat pocket.

“Oh. That. Okay.” He took it and put it in his wallet without counting it. She was suddenly glad she hadn’t included the amount of the tab from the night before with the money from Deryn’s tab. She didn’t know why, she was just glad.

A few minutes later, after she’d removed her insulated boots, coat and insulated bibs and Denton had put them up in a closet, she joined him at the large drafting table in the room he called his work room. It had the large drafting table, computer system with fully half a dozen large flat screen monitors, a printer and a large plotter, with the rest of the space taken up with cabinets of several types.

They pretty much picked up from where they’d stopped at Woodie’s that first night.

“Would you go over your thoughts on a pole shift again, Denton? That still seems to be the most catastrophic event that could happen, except for something impacting from space or a problem with the sun. I think I understand, but...”

“Sure. The way I see it there are several possibilities. One is pretty much an accepted fact. The magnetic poles shift from time to time. They are moving around forty miles a year the last couple of years.

“Another accepted fact, in most geological circles, is that the poles don’t just move around, they change polarity fairly regularly. The magnetic signatures of old rock and mineral structures show the changes in polarity.

“Now, that is just the magnetic aspect of the poles. There are magnetic lines that arc out from the poles and create the magnetosphere, which is what protects us from solar radiation. It is believed by many that the magnetosphere is affected by the sun, and that, in turns, affects the magnetic field in the earth. So which causes which? Not sure. I’m a believer in the Sun having a large influence, but don’t discount the movements of the magma core of the earth from also having influences.”

“I think I’ve got that. The physical aspect...” Dayton said, watching Denton intensely.

“There is far more controversy on a physical polar rotation shift. Some say it simply isn’t possible. There isn’t much geological record of it, but there are some curious anomalies that a physical pole shift could be the answer to.

“There are a couple divergent thoughts on how a physical pole shift would take place. One is that the crust of the earth would simply slide on the upper mantle... or the crust and upper mantle would slide on the inner mantle... or the entire mantle/crust structure would slide around the core.”

“Yeah. I get that,” Dayton said with a smile.

Denton smiled back and continued. “Others think that the whole earth would change rotation as a whole. Then, with either possibility, there is the difference of opinion on if the rotation would change in relation to

the solar plane. Some say it would. That the earth could spin the way Uranus does.

“I’m of the belief that the actual rotational poles will stay very close to where they are now, but that there will be mass movements of the entire planet, changing the relationship of what parts of the earth are at the poles, and those that are along the equator, and of course, what is in the temperate zones.

“There is just no way of knowing what will wind up where in relation to the Earth’s plane with the rest of the solar system. There is very little evidence of this happening. But there is some that can be interpreted as being caused by physical pole change. But most of the ‘evidence’, if it can be called that, is in the legends of many different cultures of a great flood and/or upheaval of catastrophic proportions.”

Denton leaned back in his chair and looked at Dayton. He decided he wouldn’t mind doing more of it. She was certainly beautiful. So was Deryn, since they were twins, but Deryn hadn’t attracted him at all. Dayton was another matter entirely.

“So,” he said, wanting to hear her voice again, “What do you think?”

Dayton took a deep breath and released it slowly, which Denton appreciated in several ways. “I’m sure of the magnetic pole aspects. You are right. The evidence is overwhelming. Just recently an airport had to change its runway headings because the magnetic pole had moved so much. If it is just that, a magnetic pole shift, what would we need to do?”

“Well, since it is changing now, not much different than we’re doing now. Preparing for all the natural disasters, along with human caused events. The position of the magnetic poles, as long as they are relatively stable, doesn’t create many problems.

“However, if there is a reversal, or the collapse, of the magnetic field for anything more than a few seconds, there will be repercussions. Many different animals use the magnetic field for navigation. There’d be animals acting strange all over. Many would die, especially birds, from high radiation levels if the magnetosphere weakens or collapses.

“For humans, the increased amount of solar radiation reaching the surface of the planet would call for protection. Staying out of the sun would be the easiest. But if you had to be exposed in the daytime, long sleeves and pants, wide brimmed hat, very good UV rated sunglasses, gloves, and thick sunscreen would protect against some of the radiation.

“If it is bad enough that hard radiation starts getting through in much higher amounts, overhead mass shelter would be needed.”

“Okay. That’s about what I thought. And what we discussed before. What about if there is a physical rotation change?”

“That would be bad. Very bad. Even a minor change would be catastrophic in my opinion. There would be tremendous releases of tectonic forces. Earthquakes and volcanoes just about everywhere there is a stress point or weak point in the earth’s crust.

“Couple that with the seiches that would slop the big lakes, seas, and even the oceans, back and forth in their basins could have almost any point on earth underwater for a time, until things settled down again in a few days, weeks, or months.

“And if that happens, there is going to be horrendous rains because of all the moisture spread out over the land that the sun would evaporate and put into the atmosphere all relatively quickly.

“And there would be the magnetic effects and solar radiation effects, too, for if the physical rotation changes, the magnetic poles will be changing, too.”

Dayton looked a bit dejected. “Isn’t there any way someone could survive that?”

“I think people have in the past. I think people will, if it happens again. But only a small portion of the current population. Some areas might not have any affects at all, depending on the severity and duration of the event.

“Others will have nearly impenetrable shelters, that as long as they don’t wind up at the bottom of a new sea or lake, that will probably make it. Some will do as Noah did and build an Ark.”

Dayton looked at Denton for a long time when he fell silent. She could tell he was considering something and wanted to know what it was. And only patience would give her the answer.

She could tell when he made the decision. His face changed just slightly, and he suddenly seemed closer, though he hadn’t moved in the chair. “That last... That’s what I plan to do. Build an Ark. Of sorts.”

She wanted to laugh. But she didn’t even chuckle. He was dead serious. And she felt a little shiver go down her back. And she believed him implicitly. “But how? That is a huge undertaking. And you aren’t in an area with a large tree population to harvest for the wood.”

“Isn’t wood. It’s mostly metal.”

“Uh... You said ‘isn’t’ and ‘it is’. Like it’s already been built.”

“Not completely, but close. Very close.”

“Where is it? Must be close to the ocean...” she mused, looking down at the items on the table as she thought. A sudden realization hit her. Even before Denton confirmed it, she had it figured out.

“The snow drift! It’s not hay. It’s your Ark!”

Denton nodded and watched Dayton carefully. Would she burst out laughing, or take the project seriously?

“It was huge! The original ark... it was... what...”

“About four hundred-fifty feet long and seventy-five feet wide, forty-five feet high,” Denton said.

“And yours?”

“Four hundred feet long, eighty feet wide, and thirty-two feet high. But it isn’t hollow. I’ll only have the top deck space.”

“I don’t get it? Not hollow? And it is metal?”

Denton got out of the chair and went over to cabinet set against one wall of the room. He opened the doors wide and Dayton hurried over to see what it was as he stepped out of the way. It was a model of the ‘Ark’.

“It is built with four hundred used ISO forty-foot shipping containers arranged in four layers. Ten by ten in the second and fourth layers and two by fifty on the first and third layers. Just a huge rectangular box.

“I bought up old ISO containers that the mines didn’t want and the shipper didn’t want back. Apparently it is cheaper to build new ones in China and ship goods here than it is to return and reuse the containers. They come in by the dozens.

“Most of them are in pretty good shape. Some I had to repair. All of them I sprayed an industrial rubber lining inside, putting a double thickness where the doors closed and fastened. When I closed and latched the doors I had a big floating box.

“I stacked them after clearing that spot in the valley for a level base, exposing the bedrock for it to sit on. Each container is attached to those

around it at the regular tie-down points with welded iron rings. At least seven of the eight tie points were used on all the containers to fasten it to those around, on, and under it. There was a blind corner on the center ones I couldn't get to, of course, so that corner wasn't fastened, but all those around it were.

"I went with four layers because I have my doubts about every single container remaining water tight. I wanted as much buoyancy as I good get, for the minimum amount of money. The top layer will have access from above into a few of the containers for storage. All I have left to do is finish the superstructure on the top deck and it will be ready."

"But where will the animals go?" Dayton asked.

Denton could see she was serious.

"I can't save the world, like Noah," Denton said quietly. "I plan to have some cattle, milk cows, chickens, pigs, horses, and dogs on board, but that is all, other than anyone I can convince to ride out the earth changes on it, if they occur."

"I see," Dayton said, looking at Denton's face. He looked as vulnerable as a little boy about to lose his favorite toy. "It is certainly better than nothing. If something happens. Does Aunt Woodie know?"

"Not yet. She is one I plan to ease into the idea if it looks like the event is going to happen. I keep an eye on some internet sites that monitor various tectonic events. I'm hoping to get some warning... I'm not sure there will be much, if any."

"I see..."

"And I'd like to offer you and your sister a place, if you'd consider it. No strings attached. It wouldn't be fair to offer Woodie and not her only living relatives."

“I accept for all three of us,” Dayton said immediately. “But I want to contribute in some way. Supplies, some money, whatever you need.”

“Really?” Denton’s look brightened. “Well... Not to be indelicate, but if you’d take care of getting four or five years’ worth of supplies that women will need that won’t be available for a long time after things settle down... I’ve read there are reusable items... Same with baby diapers and such. I’m in the process of getting food supplies and equipment gathered up.”

Denton was pink, but didn’t go bright red, which surprised Dayton. “Okay. Deal. How much should I get?”

“I don’t know. I’m not really planning on very many women on the Ark, but there are bound to be women that survive that don’t have any preparations. I’d suggest you get what you can, and I’ll add to it if I don’t think there is enough. I just wasn’t looking forward to shopping for the items.”

“I understand,” Dayton replied.

Denton closed the cabinet door and turned around. “What else would you like to know?”

“Well, if Deryn and Aunt Woodie and I are going to be aboard, I think we should provide our own supplies. Not that what you would get wouldn’t be acceptable, I just want to pay our way. The feminine hygiene items are just a start.”

Denton frowned. So did Dayton, and she added, “I really insist, Denton. We all pay our own way.”

After a moment Denton shrugged and smiled. “Okay. Can’t really object to getting plenty of extra supplies. There really is no way to tell how long we might be afloat and how long it will take to get crops in suitable

ground. Sure. I've got a basic list on the computer I meant to show you as an illustration of what you need to get for normal emergency times."

Dayton sat down beside Denton again. The computer was on, but the screens had timed out and all were dark. It was quite a sight when Denton moved the mouse and all the screens came to life.

Denton's eyes roved over the information presented on each of the screens. "This is how you monitor so many different things," Dayton said, also studying the monitors. "I think you have a Skype message."

"Oops. Sure do," Denton said. He clicked on the symbol and opened up the Skype chat window. "It's Lightray 5, down in Cape Coral, Florida. Been talking to him a couple of years. A real go-getter and into preps. He's worried about being in Florida if there is a major event that involves the oceans."

"I can understand why," Dayton said. "Florida might just wash away in some of the scenarios you've mentioned."

Denton smiled. "Yes. Just don't mention that to Lightray 5. But he's got a couple of plans in the works. He wants to be a firefighter, as well as internet entrepreneur. He may come out to Elko and go to the Firefighting School just west of the city, and then get a job in this area.

"His other plan is to help get one of the large community underground shelters that Radius Engineering makes, and Greeneyetech sells and installs, up and running for a place in it."

"I thought that underground in a pole shift wouldn't be a good place to be," Dayton said as Denton typed a reply to the question Lightray 5 had asked.

"Well, I'm opting for a floating Ark. He's okay with a land Ark. If they do it right, the shelters might easily stay livable under water for quite a

while. As long as the water doesn't stay for too long, they might be okay. Just no way of knowing for sure beforehand."

"I think I'd rather be above ground," Dayton said, with a slight shiver. "I'm a little claustrophobic."

"Doesn't seem to bother you in here?"

"This is different. I know I'm underground, but there are several ways out and it doesn't look all pinched in."

"I think the shelter arrangement he's planning on would be okay, but hopefully we'll never have to find out. Okay. I guess he's off to school."

"How old is he?" Dayton asked.

"Be eighteen soon. He can hardly wait. Now. Those lists..."

For another two hours the two discussed long term storage items, both for use on the Ark, and for Dayton and Deryn for their townhouse in Chicago. Denton had to go to the bathroom at one point and turned the computer over to Dayton to go over some things by herself. Since Denton then said he would prepare them some lunch, she stayed at the computer, informing herself of quite a few aspects of preparedness that Denton hadn't touched on.

He'd kept things pretty general, geared to someone new to prepping. But Dayton learned quickly, picking up quite a few ideas that she intended to incorporate into her preps that Denton hadn't mentioned.

"I hate to eat and run, Denton. And it was very good, by the way, but I need to get back. I promised Aunt Woodie I'd lend a hand at the café this evening."

“No problem. I need to get a couple projects finished up before dark, anyway. Uh... What we’ve discussed... the Ark in particular...”

“No one will hear it from me,” Dayton said immediately. “The other prep things I’ll probably try to get Deryn to start doing, but I won’t mention the Ark. Not even to Aunt Woodie.”

“Thanks. It’s just...”

“I understand, Denton. Mum is the word.” Dayton was putting on her outdoor clothing and Denton held the parka up for her to put on. He walked outside with her and watched as she got into the pickup and headed down the valley. With a sigh he turned toward the garage that was also cut into the rock of the ridge to continue the work he’d started that morning.

Pole Shift - Chapter 4

Denton was disappointed when he stopped in at Woodie's a few days later after work. Woodie was in the café, but there was no sign of Deryn, Dayton, or their vehicles. Woodie saw the expression on Denton's face.

"They went back to Chicago. Big charity doings for the holidays. They might seem a little frivolous, especially Deryn, but they do use their inheritance for some pretty good works, if I may say so."

"Oh," Denton said. "That's good. They are both remarkable ladies. I'm not surprised they are the type to help out those that need it."

"Exactly. A lot like you, actually. You have quite a bit in common with both of them, though it might not be apparent."

Denton looked startled. "I don't think..."

"Oops!" Woodie said and got up from the table. "Customer."

Denton thought long and hard about what Woodie had said and just couldn't come up with that many things that he and Dayton had in common. Much less Deryn. He shook his head, and then gave his meal order to the waitress. She repeated the last three items with him. "I have to start varying my orders some," he muttered.

Winter came and went, as had spring, and it was a beautiful summer in the mountains. Denton still thought about Dayton often, wondering what she was doing, how she was doing, and if she still really believed in the Ark project.

He'd just stepped out of the truck, on the same waste dump he'd been on when Dayton had come up to give him the money she owed him. The thought suddenly struck him, "I wonder if Deryn ever paid her back?"

The sound of tires on rock had him turning around to see who might be coming up. Delgado was scheduled up to help him, but not until afternoon. Denton had come up early to get things ready and reestablish the benchmarks he'd put in the previous fall. There were always a few that the weather obliterated. With the GPS surveying unit it would only take a few minutes to replace the missing ones and start on the other side.

It was a pickup truck he didn't recognize. He couldn't keep the smile off his face when the truck stopped and out stepped Dayton. "Hey! What are you doing up here?"

"Came to see if you needed any help today. Woodie said you mentioned you'd be up here today."

Denton walked over. "When did you get in?"

"A couple of days ago." Dayton saw the look of disappointment on Denton's face. But it didn't stay long when she handed him another MSHA pink slip showing she'd done her yearly safety class. "Wanted to get this out of the way so I could come up. I didn't get to see much of the operation last year. I was hoping to get an insider's tour."

"Sure. Sure." Denton handed the document back to her. "I can't right now, but tomorrow..."

"That's okay. Tomorrow is fine." Dayton looked at the GPS unit on Denton's back. "I thought we got all that work done last fall."

"Did. Just need to reestablish a few that the weather took out and start on the other side. We'll start dumping here in less than a week."

"I'd be glad to lend a hand. Like last time. I even have on pants that won't rip, so you'll be able to keep yours on."

Denton laughed. It was amazing how good it was to see Dayton again. “Sure. But remember, you asked to do this.”

Dayton chuckled and took the sledgehammer from Denton when he got it out of his pickup. She saw the stakes in the bed of the truck and grabbed a handful with her already gloved hands.

Denton asked how her winter had been, as he stopped and took a reading at one of the broken stakes.

He was looking at the GPS display when Dayton began to answer. But it was obvious that he wasn't listening. “Denton? Are you listening to me?”

“What? Oh. Sorry. I need to calibrate the GPS.”

Dayton looked at him curiously as he stood and worked with the GPS controls. He seemed intense. More so than the situation seemed to warrant. He stood over the broken stake again and stared at the GPS readout for a long time.

“Denton, what's wrong,” Dayton asked when he moved to another spot, this one with an intact marker. One after another Denton took readings at several more stakes.

“I think my GPS is screwed up,” he said finally. “Let's go back to the trucks. I want to check another area.”

Dayton followed along and put the hammer and stakes in the truck as Denton shrugged out of the GPS pack. He set it carefully on the back seat of the crew cab truck and got behind the wheel. “Does your rental have a GPS in it?”

Dayton nodded, and Denton said, follow me, if you will.”

“Okay.” Dayton hurried to her truck and picked up the wheel chocks and threw them in the back. She followed Denton’s truck for almost fifteen minutes, going up and down and over some rough mine roads until he came to a stop at a cluster of small buildings with dozens of mining vehicles parked around them.

Dayton got out and walked over to Denton. He was putting on the GPS pack. He still wasn’t saying anything. She could tell he was thinking and kept quiet, not wanting to interrupt the flow of whatever he was trying to figure out.

A couple of the miners working on the equipment came over to see what was going on and Denton waved them away. Used to his intensity when he was working, even when they didn’t have a clue what he was doing, they laughed and went back to work, casting an appreciative eye at Dayton, which she ignored, as she always did.

“This could be a Gabriel,” Denton said, mostly under his breath.

“What, Denton?”

“I said this might be a Gabriel. Let’s check the GPS in your truck.” He shrugged out of the GPS pack and put it in his truck before joining Dayton at hers. She started the vehicle and leaned back in the seat as Denton stretched over her legs to look at the GPS.

“Oh, this is bad. Very bad. It’s a Gabriel, for sure.”

“What is a Gabriel?” Dayton asked.

Denton straightened up and stood by the open door of Dayton’s truck. “Gabriel? The Archangel?”

“Yes. Gabriel. The Archangel. I know who it is. But what does Gabriel have to do with any of this?”

Denton shook his head. “I’m sorry. I’m not making any sense. This is just a major shock. Gabriel was the messenger from God. And the trumpeter of the last days.”

Dayton suddenly paled. “You think it’s started? Something to do with the GPS readings not matching? How far off were they?”

Denton nodded. “Only a couple of centimeters. I’d wave it off if it was just the waste dump. Would be hard to believe, but it might have shifted during the winter, as unlikely as that is. We’re on solid rock here. And the same discrepancy. We need to get to my place.”

“Okay. I’ll follow. But Denton, don’t go too fast. I’ve got no clue where I am now and I don’t want to get lost up here.”

“Yeah. Okay. I’ll take it easy.”

Normally, Dayton would have reveled at the beauty of the mountains they were travelling through, with the mine detracting from it only marginally. The mine, as big as it was, was tiny compared to the entire majesty of the mountain range. But she kept her eyes on the road. It was left hand traffic part of the way; with the huge ore trucks they were meeting dwarfing the pickups.

Finally they were off the mine proper and on the main road. She knew where she was now and easily kept up with Denton when he speeded up. Dayton was surprised when they got on Denton’s road in the valley up to his place. He hadn’t been kidding, she decided. The road wandered along, following the contour of the rising ground.

She saw a few cattle, and the sprinklers going in his hay fields, several haystacks and off where she’d left the road during the winter, the dark splotch that was the Ark, halfway across the valley from the road.

Denton waited for her to park and get out of the truck before he hurried inside and to his work room. He fired up the computer and the monitor

screens came on. Dayton's eyes were doing the same thing Denton's were doing. Looking for anything to corroborate or disprove Denton's thoughts on what was happening.

"Look. Dead birds. And fish. All over the world. And look at the sun display. That doesn't look normal."

"But there is no mention of any physical changes..." Dayton looked over at Denton.

"I know. If any of the powers that be have noticed this, they aren't talking. Doesn't matter. I'm activating my plan." Denton pulled out his cell phone and opened it. Dayton heard it ringing on the other end.

"Hi, Janet. Bruce in? Yeah? Thanks."

Dayton listened as Denton talked to his boss. "I need a few days off, Bruce. Something has come up. An emergency. Actually, a leave of absence would be better. Two months? Thanks, Bruce."

Denton closed the phone and turned to Dayton. "I need to know if you're okay with this. Are you willing to help me get things ready? As ready as I possibly can before this... if this happens?"

"I'm in. I just hope we have time. I've got two semi trucks of supplies on the way."

"What?" Denton asked, stunned at her words.

She smiled slightly. "You know. 'I pay my way'? The supplies we talked about me getting."

"Two truckloads?" Denton looked amazed.

"We'll, there are a few additional things I thought might be useful."

“Oh. Okay. I guess. At least I got the majority of the work done on the superstructure during the winter and this spring. The Ark is as ready to go as it is going to get. We just need to get everything aboard.”

Denton left the workroom and turned down a hallway. He opened another door, and like the room where the gold vein was, a room cut from the living rock was suddenly lighted when Denton flipped a light switch.

“Holy cow!” Dayton exclaimed. It was a huge room, and it was stacked floor to ceiling, wall to wall, with all manner of containers.

“How long have you been gathering supplies?” Dayton asked.

“A very long time. If you’ll get the lift door, I’ll go start the forklift and we can start moving things.”

Nearly overwhelmed with the entire situation Dayton just nodded and moved over to the rollup door controls as Denton went through a smaller outside door. He was letting a Bobcat skid steer with loading forks on it warmed up while he hooked his trailer to his truck.

“My other trailer,” Denton said to Dayton when she came up to him. “Your truck has a hitch. Would it be...”

“Of course. I’ll back the truck up to it. You may have to teach me a little about pulling a trailer.”

“Not a problem. You’ll pick it right up.”

A few minutes later, with one of the large trailers connected to each pickup, Denton began transferring pallet loads of gear and equipment from the storage room to them. Another few minutes and Dayton was following Denton slowly down his road. Handling the trailer wasn’t as hard as she thought it would be, but she balked about driving it up the long, narrow, ramp from the ground to the deck of the Ark.

Denton didn't make a deal of it, just getting into her truck and taking it up the same way he had his. Dayton walked up the ramp and was looking for Denton to ask him how they were going to unload the trailers when he came out of the large wooden building he had built on the deck of the Ark.

He was driving another Bobcat vehicle, this one a Toolcat all-wheel steer with forks on the front lift arm. It took only a little more time to unload as it had to load. On the third trip Dayton didn't hesitate, she drove up the ramp right behind Denton.

They worked until dark. Just as they were parking the trucks and trailers, Dayton's cell phone rang. "Hi, Aunt Woodie. Yeah. I'm fine. I'm helping Denton with... a project. I'll be home in a little while."

"Could you unhook the trailer?" she asked Denton. "I don't want to have to avoid answering a bunch of questions."

"Sure. Just take a minute."

"I'll be back early in the morning," Dayton told Denton when she got into her truck with Denton standing there beside it.

"Okay. Be careful. And thanks."

Dayton closed the door, but the window was down. On impulse she reached out and cupped the back of Denton's head in her hand and pulled him forward. Their lips met for a kiss that startled both of them. Dayton released Denton and cleared her throat. "I'll see you tomorrow."

"Uh... Yeah..." Denton could only stand there and watch the woman of his dreams drive away in the middle of an ongoing disaster.

But she was as good as her word. She was back the next morning. Denton had already made two trips and was coming back for his third when Dayton backed up to the trailer she would be pulling. It was hooked up by the time Denton stopped and got out of his truck.

“That... That kiss...” Denton said, not quite sure what he wanted to say.

“Yeah. That,” Dayton said. She stood on tiptoes and kissed him again. “Just so you know it wasn’t a mistake or something.”

“Nope. No mistake,” Denton said. But that was as far as either of them would take it for some time. For time was of the essence. The GPS reading at Denton’s was off almost five centimeters from where it should be.

There was still no news about a possible pole shift, but both Denton and Dayton had seen the news reports that morning over breakfast of more and more strange animal antics and die-offs all around the world.

With about half of the goods transferred by noon, the two took a break and Denton prepared a quick lunch while Dayton got on the internet and looked for additional information. There simply wasn’t any, other than the animal stories that were being blamed on a variety of factors, none of which included a pole shift.

“Denton! You have a message from Lightray 5.”

“Lunch is ready. In the kitchen,” Denton said as he came into the work room.

Dayton had read the message. She waited to see what Denton would answer.

“I think this is the real thing. Get out of Florida and head for the hills.”

A single letter, 'k' was the response. The Skype indicator for Lightray 5 went white. He was off-line already.

"I sure hope he makes it," Denton said. "I'm going to give the warning to a few more people I trust. I'll be in to eat in a minute."

Dayton brought the plate and glass in to him a few minutes later. He was still using Skype to warn his web of like minded friends. Denton looked up at Dayton. "Thanks."

"Sure thing. Hey! What just happened?"

"Lost the satellite. I changed the heading this morning to compensate for the shift, so I'm pointed at the satellite. It probably got fried by solar radiation if the magnetosphere is weakening. This is going to start the panic. I've got a wide brim hat and some sunscreen I want you to put on while we're outside."

"Okay," Dayton said. She was getting scared. She looked up at the sky when they went back outside, but not at the sun. The sunlight did seem a bit harsher. Denton had pinned a radiation badge on the outside of his shirt to monitor any hard radiation they might start getting.

Again they worked till dark. But they'd emptied the storage room, as well as the two semi trailers that had showed up shortly after noon at the turnoff at the mouth of the valley. Denton chose to unload the trucks where they were rather than take them up to the Ark.

Both drivers had manual pallet forks to get the palletized goods to the back of the trailers so Denton could transfer them with the Bobcat skid steer that Dayton managed to drive down the long winding driveway road with quite a bit of aplomb and no real bobbles.

This time Denton followed Dayton down to Woodie's, with the trailers still attached. It was time to talk her into getting ready to get to the Ark when whatever was happening became more evident.

It didn't take much convincing for Woodie to start bringing things out of her own storage spots on the property. They loaded Dayton's trailer full, but Woodie said that was all she had that she didn't want to lose. All the while Dayton was worrying about Deryn. She'd tried calling, but the cell system as down.

When Deryn got to the house shortly before ten, Dayton threw her arms around her. "Oh, Deryn! You had me so worried!"

"What's going on? Did you know the cell system is down? And TV, too?"

"Yes. There is something going on that we need to talk about. Right now."

"What? You look like you been rode hard and put away wet, Sis."

"Where in the world did you hear that expression?" Dayton asked in surprise.

"Doug used it once. You know, Dayton, I think he might just be the one..."

Dayton bit her lip. She knew how Deryn felt, for she was feeling that way about Denton. She looked over at him.

"I'll go get him. Woodie?"

Woodie tossed Denton the keys to her Suburban and Denton ran out of the house.

"What is going on? You are all acting like it is the end of the world!"

Dayton could tell Deryn wasn't convinced several minutes later after a detailed explanation. She ran to Doug when he came in behind Denton.

“Is this for real?” Doug asked Deryn. “Or some kind of big city joke on a county hick. Denton almost dragged me out here.”

“I’m telling you, Doug, it is real. Perhaps it won’t be as bad as I fear, but it is going to be bad. You saw what it was like in town. With no more than what has happened, people are starting to panic.”

“But that’s just weather or something causing...” Doug’s words stopped suddenly as the floor of the house shook.

“Just an earthquake. A small one.” It was more question than statement from Doug.

“Kind of a coincidence, wouldn’t you say?” asked Denton.

“I don’t know...” Doug looked over at Deryn. “What do you think? What should I do?”

“Stay with me, Doug. Just do that. I don’t want to lose you now that I’ve found you. If it’s nothing we’ll just laugh about it later. But if it’s real...”

Again the house shook and the lights went out.

“Denton, how much room do you have?” Woodie asked. “I’d like to get my people on board if that is okay.”

“Sure, Woodie. There’s room for thirty at least. I want to get some people from town, but there’ll still be plenty of room.”

“Okay. I’m going over and get people started closing up and getting ready.”

Doug, standing close to Deryn looked at Denton. “I need to get some stuff...”

“We’ll wait and see what Woodie’s employees do. They might want to go in, too.” I need to get to town for those other people, anyway.”

Woodie was back, fighting back tears. “No one believes me. They just want to go home and wait out what is happening. I don’t know what to do.”

“There is nothing you can do, Woodie. This is a big pill and a hard one to swallow. Everything happening could be explained away. It is the total package that makes me think we’re on the cusp of a physical pole shift.”

Woodie nodded and wiped her eyes with a bandana. “Then I guess I’m ready. Dayton? Deryn?”

“I’m going in with Doug to help him get the things he wants to bring along.”

Everyone there understood that Deryn would not be talked out of it. So Denton asked Doug, “How much space do you need?”

“Not a lot, I guess. A small U-Haul trailer’s worth maybe.”

“Okay. Dayton, if they take your truck and trailer...”

“Of course,” Dayton said before he could finish the thought. She pulled the keys from her jeans and tossed them to Doug.

“Woodie, if I could use the Suburban? And your trailer? I’m hoping to get several people to go. It has the best passenger capacity. The trailer will have to do for what they want to bring.”

“Absolutely. You’ve still got the keys.”

Denton looked at Dayton. “I need you and Woodie to take my truck and the loaded trailer up and start unloading. You think you’ll be okay?”

Dayton bit her lower lip. She wanted to stay with Denton. But time was obviously of the essence. “Yes. We’ll be fine. Aunt Woodie?”

“Let’s go.”

Denton saw Woodie pause before she climbed into the front passenger seat of his truck. She looked around the property, and watched her employees driving away. With a shake of her head she entered the truck. Dayton waved to Denton and got in the truck with Woodie.

“You two don’t waste any time,” Denton told Doug. “But be careful. The law is going to be out and about because of the power and communications systems outages. You don’t want to get stopped and delayed. I don’t know how much time we have, but it might be short.”

Denton headed in, going straight to Murdock’s Landing. The place was packed. Ralph had a generator and the place was lighted up just like normal. Denton signaled for Carla to meet him over by the juke box.

“Carla. I’m not sure how to convince you of this, but I think we’re in for major trouble. I don’t have time to go into details, but we might be in a huge flood in a few hours. I’ve got a place... An Ark. I want you and Carla and Tom to come with me. Get to safety before things can get too bad.”

Carla looked frightened. “Joanie! I’m taking a break,” she told the other bartender. Joanie didn’t look pleased, but she didn’t say anything.

“Come on. Tom is playing chess with Carla at the trailer.” Denton followed Carla through the back of the bar and out the back door. They hurried across the back lot and eased through a hole in the fence that separated the bar property from the trailer park where the family lived.

It didn't take long for Denton to understand exactly the way Woodie had felt when her employees refused to be helped. Little Carla, though she believed absolutely in Denton, refused adamantly to go with him. And if Little Carla wasn't going, Big Carla wasn't going. And if they weren't going, Tom sure wasn't going.

"But it could be your only chance!" Denton pleaded.

"Denton, I have no life to speak of. We all know I'll never be a mining engineer. I'll be lucky to see my eighteenth birthday. But I want Mother and Father to go." She looked over at them.

It wasn't going to happen. And Denton wasn't one to force people against their will. He had to wipe the tears from his eyes when he left the family and went back to the bar. From the front door Denton called over to one of the men playing pool. "Hey, Parker! Can I talk to you a minute? In private?"

"Sure Denton. I'll be right out. I just lost, anyway."

When Clyde Parker joined Denton outside, he asked, "What do you think is going on, Denton. Lot of things happening all at once."

"Yeah. I know." But Denton didn't go into the details of what he thought was happening. Instead, he asked Clyde, not a man he particularly liked, "How much would you take for your horses up near my place?"

"You want to buy some of my stock? Now? What are you, Nuts?"

"Just got the sudden urge to own some horses. I'll give you a check right here and now. Name your price."

Clyde's eyes narrowed. "You know something, don't you? The BLM going to cut me off or something?"

"No clue, Clyde. Just give me a price. Need tack for the horses, too."

“Well, if you want them that bad, you’re going to pay for it. And the tack is almost brand new. Be a premium price since I have to order new.” Clyde gave Denton a price per head for the horses that was three times the going rate even for the well trained horses that Clyde had in his various herds.

True to his word, and without a qualm about the fact that Clyde might not ever see the money, Denton wrote the check and handed it to Clyde. The money was in the bank to cover it. But the bank probably wouldn’t survive the pole shift. Clyde probably wouldn’t either, though he did tend to land on his feet no matter what the situation.

“When do you want me to move them over to your valley?” Clyde asked.

“Don’t worry about it. I’ll handle it.”

That was fine with Clyde. Less for him to do. But he warned Denton, “You’d better only take what you paid for. I’ll have the Sheriff on you if more than what we agreed on is gone when I go up there next week.”

“Understood. You know me, Clyde. I’m not going to take anything that doesn’t belong to me.”

“Yeah, yeah. The famous Denton. Good guy extraordinaire. I’m going back inside. And believe me, that money better be in the bank when I cash this tomorrow.”

Denton didn’t reply, but he did follow Clyde back inside Murdock’s. Two men and a woman that he talked to quietly for a few minutes quickly downed their drinks and followed him out of the bar.

“You sure about this? What if you’re wrong?” asked Foster Punchen.

“Then you’re just out a few hours sleep and get a big check from me. If I’m right, you’ll probably live.”

The second man, Brian Hanks, said, “I’m in. All the way. These bird and fish die offs have me spooked, anyway. And now the power is out. Cell is out. Regular phone is out. TV is out. Yeah. Count me in.”

“Same here,” said Pattie Petty. Like the two men, she was a part time Buckaroo for the ranches in the area. Also like the two men, she was unattached and had few real strings in the area.

Each headed for their own vehicle. They were to load up what they wanted to take long term and head for his valley. All three were light drinkers and were fine to be on the road.

Denton made another stop, again with mixed results. But when he headed back out of town, he had eight more people in the Suburban and the trailer and roof rack on the Suburban were filled to overflowing.

It was past midnight, and the three children in the group were fast asleep. Denton took them up to the house and let the parents put them to bed. He went back down with the three men and they began to unload the Suburban and trailer.

Woodie and Dayton were just finishing up unloading Woodie’s things, but Denton ushered them back up to the house to get some rest. When Brian, Foster, and Pattie showed up one after the other, Denton went down to meet them at the road. Pattie and Brian were both pulling horse trailers with their own horses and working dogs. Pattie had two horses and two dogs, and Brian three horses and one dog. Foster had his two cattle dogs.

They saddled up three of the horses and rode off in the darkness to gather up Denton’s cattle and the horses Denton had bought.

With the vehicles and trailers unloaded, Denton took Rabbit Jackson and Chuck Majors back to the house to wait with their families and get some rest. He left again, in his truck with trailer, now with sideboards installed, before Dayton could wake up enough to insist on going with him. Doug and Deryn showed up, just as he was leaving.

It was daylight when he returned, with both the trailer, bed of the truck, and cab full. The Austin family was in the cab with Denton. Father, mother, and three kids. The bed of the truck had several chicken crates with very disgruntled chickens in them, plus the family's personal goods.

The trailer held two milk cows and several hogs, also rather unhappy about being disturbed in the middle of the night.

Ambrose Austin and his son, Ambrose Junior, helped Denton get the animals settled in the area of the superstructure of the Ark that Denton had built to suit them. After the unloading, Denton took the family up to the house.

People were already stirring, including Woodie and Dayton, who were preparing breakfast for everyone.

"Why didn't you wake me so I could go with you?" Dayton whispered to Denton when she finally got a chance to speak to him.

"I needed you here, doing this," he said simply. "Be sure there is enough for eight more. They should be showing up any time." Both of them grabbed something to steady themselves as the house shook violently. A couple of things fell off shelves, but nothing major.

"I'm going down to meet them. Get everyone up and fed, and get them down to the Ark. I think we'd better take up residence there until we know for sure what is happening."

“Okay. Dayton kissed Denton and reluctantly let her hand slip from his as he headed for the front door again.

Brian, Foster, and Pattie all looked beat, as did the horses they were riding. Even the dogs would stop every chance they had and lie down until they needed to help herd the stock. The three humans looked up at the Ark in awe as Denton directed them up the ramp to the deck.

The horses, wearing their tack, were herded into a fenced in area with access to the barn that was part of the superstructure. The cattle went into another on the opposite side of the Ark. The dogs went into a multi-cage kennel. All were fed and watered.

Denton, tired but happy with the way things were going, helped with getting the Buckaroos’ other horses up and in with his. They brought the six horse trailer up and parked it in the parking lot area of the deck, with Pattie’s truck. It was in the best condition of the three trucks, and diesel, which Denton considered vital to future use. The other two trucks and the trailer were parked well away from the Ark.

Half a dozen more vehicles showed up. Delgado and his wife and new baby, plus five more people that Denton had alerted and asked to come to his place if things seemed to be getting out of hand. It hadn’t taken any of the group long to decide to come out. They all trusted Denton.

Denton met the convoy coming down as he took Pattie, Brian, Foster and the others up to the house to get something to eat and at least a little bit of rest time. Woodie was still at the house and immediately served up breakfast to the group after each took a bathroom break.

Denton sat down to take a rest while the others ate. He fell asleep sitting there, until a tremendous shake nearly tossed him from the chair. Dishes clattered in the kitchen and someone let out a yelp.

“Everyone okay?” Denton asked struggling both to come fully awake as well as clamber out of the chair.

“Yeah. Just spilled coffee all over everything,” Foster complained. “I had some doubts about all this, and still wonder why we’re getting on a boat at five thousand feet above sea level, but I’m convinced that something is going on.”

“Yeah,” Pattie said, mopping up some of the spilled coffee with her napkin.

“You guys head down. I’m going to secure the house, just in case... Well... the water might not get this high. I hope. And the quakes may not bring it down around our ears.”

Woodie took the time to clear the table and stove, and put the dishes in the dishwasher. She didn’t start it, but felt better about the kitchen looking as pristine as it had when she’d started that morning.

“You need some help?” Woodie asked Denton before she went to the front door to join the others outside.

“Naw. I got it covered. Want to load a couple more last minute things, but that’s it. Just takes a few minutes to shut down all the systems. May be a moot point, but I won’t willing let equipment destroy itself for lack of care.”

Dayton was on her way back up to see about Denton when the truck lurched and she went off the road. But things were solid and she was able to get right back on. She saw Denton coming and quickly turned the truck around.

Denton was right behind her when she went up the ramp. There was one dicey moment when the truck lurched into the berm at the edge of the ramp when the ground shook again, the heaviest and longest shake so far.

The trucks were parked, chocked, and tied down in the parking area. Everyone was outside, looking around, holding onto something substantial. There were birds crying and flying all around the area. Looking out into the valley, people saw all sorts of animals on the move, in random pattern. Predator and prey all just seeming to try to get away from something they couldn't understand.

"You feel that?" Denton suddenly asked out loud.

"What? Another shake? I don't feel anything," Foster said.

"No the breeze," Denton said. "Feel the breeze? It's beginning to get stronger all of a sudden. From the North. And look at the sun. Not at it, but toward it."

"Does that mean something?" asked another of the group.

Denton didn't answer. The Ark shook mightily and the breeze was now a wind, getting stronger every second. The sun could actually be seen moving across the sky, though it was just barely perceptible. And it wasn't going east to west. It was going more south.

"I'm going to see to the horses," Foster said. Pattie and Brian went with him to keep the horses and dogs calm. Whatever was happening the animals seemed to sense and were very restless, the horses whinnying and the dogs giving off with low wailing howls.

"Everyone hang on!" Denton yelled as the Ark began to shake again, making a tremendous amount of metal on metal noise. Though the intensity lessened, the sounds continued, as the Ark continued to shake. More a vibration than a shake, it was still disconcerting.

"This isn't so bad," Doug said after a few minutes. You sure this is anything more than just some earthquakes?"

"Hush, Doug," Deryn told him. "Denton has been right all through this."

“I think we should all go inside, Denton said, raising his voice a little to be heard. The seats in the main room have seatbelts. Buckle in.”

As the group began to move inside, Dayton asked Denton, “What are you going to be doing?”

“Keeping an eye out. I think we’ve started moving. Fast. The water could show up in a matter of a few hours.” Denton paused. “That’s the only thing I’m not sure of. I don’t really know if it can possibly get this high, on this side of the mountains. We may be wasting our time and efforts.”

Dayton curled her right arm around his left and took his hand in hers. “It won’t be a waste of time. Whatever is happening is a major disaster. Catastrophic. People are going to need everything you’ve put aside, water or no water.”

“Yeah. I suppose so. I’m going up topside.” Dayton stayed right with him. She wasn’t going to let him face things alone.

For over two hours the clanking and clanging of the Ark components moving constantly continued as Dayton and Denton, and then a few others kept watch all around them from what amounted to the fly bridge of the Ark.

The children were allowed to unbuckle and began playing inside under the watchful eyes of mothers and older sisters.

The wind was strong, and clouds were forming. Heavy, threatening clouds. There was no real sensation of movement, now that the sun could not be seen. Another four hours, shortly after a midday meal was prepared and served, it began to get cold. It had been bright and sunny, with the temperature already at seventy-five degrees when the major motion had begun.

Denton checked the triple weather instrument on the bulkhead wall. The temperature was down to under fifty degrees. And the barometer was pegged below the scale. Humidity was over eight-five percent. Raindrops began to fall and people scrambled for the cover and warmth of the main hall.

Denton and Dayton stayed under the canopied area of the flying bridge, but Dayton had gone down to get their coats when the temperature had begun to fall.

“What if it stops with us in the arctic?” Dayton asked Denton quietly as he shrugged into his jacket.

“If there is no flood, we’ll just load up and head south, once we figure out where it is.” Denton suddenly looked closely at Dayton’s face. “You’re sunburned!” he said. “We’ve lost some of the magnetosphere!”

“I haven’t been wearing my hat because of the wind,” Dayton said. Her right hand went to her face. She could feel the tightness of the skin caused by the beginning sun burn. “We’re under the canopy now...”

Denton checked the radiation badge he was still wearing. “Should have been checking this all along...” He studied it for a moment. “Though it looks like the magnetosphere is holding fairly well. No perceptible change. But that could change. We’ll just have to hope the magnetic aspect of the change happens quickly and the magnetosphere develops again fully.”

“Denton,” Dayton said a few minutes later. You need to take a rest. You’ve been going for over thirty-six hours now.”

“Yeah. Yeah, you’re right. I am tired. I think I’ll go inside and grab one of the bunks in the men’s bunkroom. You let me know if something changes?”

“Of course. If you don’t feel it yourself, I’ll wake you.”

“Okay. Thanks.” He was asleep before his head hit the pillow, despite the noises the Ark was making as it continued to vibrate slightly.

Woodie, Deryn, and Doug came up to join Dayton for a while. But it was getting colder and the wind was howling now, with the heavy clouds blocking the sun. The slight glow that did make it through the clouds was strangely out of place, creating an overall eerie effect.

As the others went back down and inside to dig out their cold weather gear, Dayton wrapped her arms around herself and continued to watch the mouth of the valley, turning around in a full circle to check on things elsewhere from time to time.

When she looked at her watch she was surprised to see that it was only three in the afternoon, but it was full dark now. And cold. Dayton shivered. It was much colder than earlier. She was headed down to get a warmer coat when she met Woodie coming up.

“Why don’t you take a break. I’ll keep an eye out for a while. I need something to do.”

“Okay, Aunt Woodie. Thank you. If there is anything, wake Denton first and then me. How is everyone doing?”

“Okay. I’m surprised at Deryn. She’s pretty much taken over keeping an eye on the children so the adults can make a little sense out of what they brought with them. We’re going to need blankets for sleeping for sure. I hope Denton packed a few away.”

“He did. I’ll get them out before I lie down.” Woodie went on up, and Dayton down and into the cabin. She went to one of the many storage rooms in the superstructure and found the pallet that held a mass of bedding, including several blankets.

She handed them out to those in the main hall that weren't wearing warm enough clothes yet. Then she checked the women's dorm room. She found two women sleeping. One had her hand and arm wrapped protectively around her swollen belly. She was seven months pregnant. Quietly Dayton slipped out of her coat and boots and crawled into one of the bunks, pulling the blanket around her.

It took her longer to fall asleep than it had Denton, but she was soon breathing lightly in a deep sleep. She woke to the smell of food being prepared. When she had her boots on and went into the large kitchen of the Ark she saw most of the women that were on board there, preparing a meal for the evening.

"What can I do?" Dayton asked.

"We've got it covered," said Pattie. Denton was around a little while ago. He was looking for you, but didn't want to wake you."

"Oh. Okay. Thanks. I'll go find him." She had her coat on, but soon realized that the main cabin of the Ark was now being heated. She looked around the room for Denton and noticed the propane heaters she hadn't noticed before. The infrared heaters were glowing bright red, casting welcome warmth throughout the room.

"Anyone seen Denton?" she asked.

"He went up to keep watch just a few seconds ago," Deryn told her. Deryn was on the carpeted floor, playing patty-cake with one of the youngest children while Doug held another on his lap and watched.

Dayton was smiling slightly as she went outside. She tugged the coat around tightly and zipped it up. It was bitterly cold now. Dayton met a bundled up Woodie coming down the stairway up to the fly bridge.

"He just came up," Woodie told her niece. "Boy, it is cold out here." She hurried inside as Dayton went on up. She walked over to Denton, who

saw her coming. He opened his arms and she stepped into them. She felt safe and warm within his arms.

“At least there is no sign of the rotation slowing down,” Denton said quietly.

“You say that like it’s a good thing. Don’t we want the rotation to slow and stop?”

“Not while we’re located at or near the top of the world.”

“That’s why it is so cold! We’ve shifted enough to be at the top of the planet?”

“I think so. And I don’t want to have to move everyone to a warmer place in the middle of continuous blizzards.”

“Don’t say things like that,” Dayton said as flakes of snow began to touch her cheeks. They were barely visible in the darkness. At least until a tremendous bolt of lightning crackled, followed by an equally tremendous clap of thunder. Then the falling snow was visible for a second or so, off and on, as the lightning continued.

That was about all there was to see for the long hours through the night. At least the night marked off in hours. When it should have been six in the morning with the sun coming up, there was only continued darkness. Even as the clouds began to dissipate, the sun barely broke the horizon for a few minutes and then disappeared again, leaving behind only bright Aurora borealis flickering and shimmering in the sky almost directly overhead.

Everyone bundled up to come outside to see the light show, but hurried back inside to get breakfast and try to deal with the realization that they were traveling on a journey that could put them in any climate from where they were on top of the world to the bottom. When the world

stopped spinning. Or, more accurately, settled down into what would be the new normal spin for eons to come.

Whether it was something physical or just the physiological aspects of what was happening, no one was really very hungry, even as hour after hour passed, the skies once again clouding up and covering the Ark with a thick layer of snow.

But then that changed after several hours and it was once again raining. The rain melted the snow that had accumulated on the Ark and on the ground. There was a veritable river running down the normally just a trickle of a stream in the valley when it began to become light enough to see once again.

The heavy coats were exchanged for jackets and rain coats and people began to look around. The rain was heavy and drummed on the Ark, but Denton suddenly cocked his head slightly and looked down valley. There was the sound of many powerful engines headed up the main road.

They didn't go past the valley, they turned into it. Denton muttered, "We have visitors." He was about to go down to get a gun and urge some of the others to arm themselves with their own firearms, or from the armory he had on board.

But a haze was suddenly visible behind the vehicles. People began to gather at the side of the Ark to watch. It was a race, Denton and the others saw, and it was not by any means a given who or what would win.

For behind the line of huge mining trucks came a dark, encroaching presence with a mist rising above it. For a few seconds, when the low moving wall of water first touched the rearmost truck it seemed that the powerful engines and huge tires of the ore truck would persevere. But it was not to be. The water was moving deceptively fast and was soon halfway up the side of the last truck and well up on the truck in front.

Many on the Ark turned away when the last truck floundered and twisted under the force of the water, throwing a dozen or more people out of the bed of the truck into the swirling waters. Each driver tried their best, but the water was moving too fast, rising too high, and just too powerful. The lead vehicle was caught and inundated a quarter mile away from the Ark.

Suddenly Denton was yelling. “Get inside! Inside! Strap in! Get the kids inside and strapped in!” He was leaning over the rail of the fly bridge, glancing from the fast approaching water and those still standing on the deck. But as they looked around again and saw the water so much closer, it galvanized the stragglers. They made a rush inside and Denton turned to Dayton.

“Strap in!” he told Dayton, rushing her over to one of the four seats fastened to the roof of the superstructure under the fly bridge canopy. Denton made sure Dayton had her seat belt fastened before he took a seat himself.

The wall of water sloped from ground level up almost fifteen feet in just a few short yards. The foot of the wall hit the square front of the Ark and everyone heard and felt as the water began to spill around and between the connected ISO containers.

Water shot up the face of the Ark and fell back. But the water was still rising. The Ark seemed to be screaming in rage as the metal took the pressure of the water moving against it. Denton turned around to look up the valley. The water was still rising.

Suddenly so was the Ark. The water was now deep enough for the Ark to start floating. And as it did, the moving water began shoving the Ark up the valley, the bottom scraping the ground as it went. The earthen ramp held for a few seconds, but the Ark spun around it and was floating sideways to the length of the valley.

The water, carrying a thick covering of debris of all kinds, including more than one human body and countless bodies of wildlife, reached the top of the ridge, putting Denton's underground house under twenty feet of water.

The Ark grounded just before impacting the face of the ridge as the water continued to flow up and over the entire area. There was water as far as one could see, except in the distance past the ridge. And it began to disappear as the water continued to flow, filling the valleys and topping all but the peaks of the nearby mountain.

They were lodged there for hours as the water streamed past, the Ark shifting slightly and making horrible noises that half the people thought was it being torn apart by the water. But Denton was a very good welder and had used heavy materials for the connections between the containers. The Ark stayed together, despite the strain.

Always holding tightly to something in the cabin, as the Ark did shift from time to time, people were able to go to the bathroom, and even prepare and eat a meal as the sun headed for the horizon, in what was once the south end of range of mountains, rather than the west.

"Looks like we should be okay," Denton said not long after dark. The water flow had slowed. It was only when the flow reversed, and the Ark went with it instead of settling back down on the uneven ground, Denton muttered something under his breath.

"What did you say, Denton?" Dayton asked, looking around at him. The rain was coming down in buckets and lightning lit the undersides of the clouds enough to discern what was at first fairly slow movement down the valley. But then much faster as the water that had slopped up into the mountains out of the Pacific Ocean, began to drain back toward it.

"I think we're not out of the woods yet," Denton told Dayton. He turned on one of the powerful remote control spotlights and aimed it at what he thought was the closest wall of the valley. He was right. The valley wall

was rushing past faster and faster as the water flowed back toward its home in the ocean.

“We’re bound to snag on something that will stop us,” Denton said, loudly, over the sound of the beating rain. The rain was gritty with ash from numbers of volcanoes that the earth changes triggered. Denton gave orders for everyone to wear a dusk mask when outside the confines of the superstructure to prevent inhaling any of the ash. It wasn’t likely, with the rains, but he didn’t want to take any chances.

“I thought,” Denton continued, “that we might move for a ways, but not like this.” He nodded at the valley wall, now further away. But the flow was fast and steady.

Out of the valley they shot, and the Ark, spinning slowly with no keel or real control system, floated down the road, which was simply another valley between more mountains. Denton insisted that everyone stay buckled in, except to go to the bathroom, in case the grounding was a violent one.

But as the hours of darkness passed, in constant rain, the Ark continued to go with the flow of water ever travelling downward. At one point, where three streams of water converged, the Ark was caught in a whirlpool. Denton held his breath, but the Ark was ejected before it could be pulled down.

Every once in a while they would bump a projection. Denton knew that he would lose buoyancy in some of the containers from the impacts but hoped there would be enough to get them somewhere they would ground on relatively flat land.

Pole Shift - Chapter 5

At first Denton thought he was getting his wish. Thirteen hours after the trip started down his valley the Ark shot through the opening of a valley and into another broad valley. They slowed remarkably, but were headed for the far end of this valley. Denton wasn't sure just where they were, but the wide open area made him think it might have been the northern end of the Central Valley of California.

Every so often the Ark would bottom out and hesitate, but always moved on with the current. Apparently they were hitting either higher areas of the valley, or perhaps even the tops of buildings, if any still existed under the water.

Then, suddenly, the movement seemed to stop and the Ark slowly turned around and around five times. Dayton saw Denton's eyes widen dramatically and quickly looked down the valley where he was staring.

Both began to yell, "Hold on! Belt down! Get the kids inside!" as they moved to their seats on the fly bridge.

"It's another seiche!" Denton said, buckling himself in tight. While the water rise had been tremendous the first time, high up in the mountains, what was coming was a tall wall of water, moving fast. "The water receded, went the other way, and is coming back," he told Dayton. "Hold on tight. This could be rough."

Rough it was. Though the water didn't wash up and over the Ark, it hit broadside on one side, throwing water high into the sky and violently shoving the Ark back up the valley a quarter of a mile before the Ark's buoyancy had it riding on the surface of the water again.

There had been many yells of fright from the humans, but from the sound of it, at least one of the animals had been hurt in the process. Denton looked down the valley, and saw no more walls of water. They

were moving rapidly with the current, but he unbuckled and headed down into the barns.

Ambrose senior and junior, along with Pattie were already in the barn. One of the horses was down, struggling to get up as the three tried to hold it down.

"Quick, Denton! Get my rifle! It's in the scabbard over there on the wall with my saddle."

Reluctantly, but quickly, Denton got the rifle. "Hold him down," Pattie said, taking the rifle. She stood up and Denton got down on the horse's rump, trying to keep it from hurting itself any more, or hurting Pattie or the two Ambrose's.

Pattie worked the lever and put the barrel of the gun up against the horse's head. There were tears in her eyes when she pulled the trigger. The horse quit struggling, dead instantly. Pattie handed the rifle back to Denton and crumpled down, her arms going around the horse's neck, her face on its shoulder. She was crying softly.

Ambrose, Senior motioned to his son and Denton to give Pattie some privacy. Denton went back up to the fly bridge.

"What happened?" Dayton asked. I thought I heard a shot or something.

"One of Pattie's geldings broke a leg. She had to put him down."

"They couldn't splint it or something?"

"No. I guess it was a really bad. Pattie wouldn't have shot it if there'd been any chance to save it."

Dayton nodded and pointed toward the mountains. They were getting closer. Several hours later they were at the mouth of the valley they'd

come out of, but the Ark slowed and began to spin slowly again. Finally, while they were eating supper the Ark began to drift back to the south.

Once the next day they again went back up the valley with the current from another Pacific Ocean seiche, and then two days after that, again. From that point, however, they continued what used to be south, carried on a gentle current.

Denton took a sounding occasionally. The water was more than a hundred feet deep. But it was relatively clear seawater, mostly clear of debris. There were plenty of fish in the water, but there were also the fins of sharks swimming around the Ark regularly.

Though there were railings all around the edge of the Ark, the children were kept well away from them. Falling in would be a death sentence.

Denton finally decided to rig up the sails he'd equipped the Ark with. The rectangular shape of the Ark did not lend itself to much control, but with the sails up and the huge rudder deployed at the rear of the Ark, Denton was able to guide the Ark toward the inland side shoreline.

Several people were more than ready to get off the Ark and onto dry land, as were most of the animals. But Denton decided, and the others concurred, that they would wait until they found a good spot, with easy access from the Ark. It appeared that the polar rotation was over, and the magnetic field stable. The seiches had stopped and a compass needle held steady.

The rotation had not reversed, though the magnetic field had. Denton had not expected the spin to reverse. It just changed directions some and the magnetic poles realigned with the new rotational poles. The weather was warm, as were the nearly constant rains. There was still a lot of ash mixed with the rain.

They had not seen or heard any volcanoes, but with the number and severity of the quakes they'd felt before they started floating, Denton

was sure the Rim of Fire had let loose, and many of the other volcanoes all around the world, too.

Denton decided to wait for a while before he tried to pin down their exact location on the planet, and the relationship with poles and equator.

The water level did not go down any perceptible amount after the last seiche and Denton voiced the thought that Antarctica might now be in a temperate or tropical zone and was shedding most, if not all of its icecap, for, if anything, the sea level was rising ever so little, at a steady pace.

With the constant rain, the hills and mountains around them were still pouring water into the sea, making it difficult to find a landing spot that wouldn't be too dangerous to use. Everyone now knew the extent, for the most part, of the supplies and equipment that was aboard the Ark. There was no real need to rush the landing, though they did need to determine how much of a growing season they might have and still be able to take advantage of.

They were stretching their food stocks with fish, but there was a finite limit to how long the other stores would last. They also needed to get the animals on the land and reproducing.

Finally, a month after the adventure started, the rains stopped, and the person on watch, using Denton's telescope, now mounted on the fly bridge, called out, "There! There! I think that's a landing place!"

Denton ran up the stairs to the fly bridge and took over the telescope. There was a tiny bit of movement, but the Ark, in gentle waters, was still very stable, if listing about a half a degree to the starboard. Denton zoomed the telescope a bit more and looked over the area.

There were the remains of a highway bridge or overpass ending out in the new bay. The height looked about right for them to construct a ramp from the deck of the Ark to the pavement. If the remaining bridge structure and roadbed was still solid enough.

It was tricky maneuvering, and they did have to wait until the winds were right to get the Ark into position. Denton was one of the men that climbed down a rope ladder and jumped over to the pavement. He and the other three pulled the heavy line to secure the Ark to the bridge section and then began to check things over carefully.

“Can we use it?” Dayton called to Denton when he came back to the edge and looked up at those lining the railing.

“I think so, but I want to explore the area some first. Lower the ROKON down.”

Those that knew how moved forward, and, as the others watched, rigged up the swing arm boom hoist that was part of the Ark structure. A few minutes later and Denton had the bike started and disappeared down the highway.

Dayton stayed where she could watch the highway and waited until Denton made his way back. He waved mightily and shouted up to those that had come back to the railing at the sound of the diesel engine of the ROKON.

“Yes! Yes! It’s great! Throw us the other rope and we’ll get the Ark turned around so the rear is against the end of the bridge.

It took hours to turn the Ark around using just four people on the lines from it to the bridge. But the task was finally done. Some heavy timbers were lowered over the side to act as bumpers so the rough ends of the bridge structure wouldn’t cut into the containers making up the Ark.

Denton had planned well. There were enough timbers and lumber on board to build a ramp from the deck of the Ark to the bridge. Actually, there was far more than enough. Denton had been concerned of finding any spot that they wouldn’t have to build the ramp the full height of the Ark, so had plenty of materials and tools to do the job.

Another boom crane lowered the timbers down and half the group worked on getting the ramp completed. As soon as it was, everyone else headed down it to get on solid ground for the first time in many weeks.

The animals were ready to come down, too, but they were kept aboard until corrals and pens could be built on the surviving areas of grass that hadn't been washed away. The route of the interstate had not been one of major water flow, though it had been under deep water for a while. So, many items were still in place, some washed clean by the rains, some in protected areas still coated with sea slime and dead kelp.

There were more than enough open grassy areas to keep the animals fed for a long time, depending on the weather patterns that would finally settle down. At the moment, and based on the now steady passage of the sun across the sky, Denton and a couple of the others good with geography skills had determined they were now located near the new equator, with most of North America in the new Southern Hemisphere.

They were making educated guesses, but it was beginning to look like the Middle East was the new South Pole region and the South Pacific Ocean the new North Pole. The way the compass was pointing, the magnetic alignment had gone through nearly three hundred-sixty degrees with the north magnetic pole still on the same side of the galactic plane.

Most of Antarctica was probably temperate and sub-tropical, with the equator going through South America in approximately the same area, with what was the southern end of the continent now part of the northern hemisphere.

Africa was now entirely in Southern Hemisphere temperate zone to south polar region. Australia was on the new Equator.

Europe and Asia were in the temperate southern Hemisphere down into the new south polar region. The twenty-three and one half degree tilt from the galactic plane seemed to be the same.

Or not. The only sure thing the group knew, was their relationship to the rotation of the earth and the sun. Only time, space observation, and exploration would tell for sure.

The ash fall gradually tapered off and finally quit for good a week after the landing was made. People hung up their dust masks. For good, they hoped.

Everyone was still sleeping on the Ark, and taking their meals there. While some tended the animals, Denton, Dayton, and Woodie went exploring.

Woodie and Dayton used Denton's truck, and Denton used the ROKON, to go to places the truck couldn't go. None of them found any bodies. They did find more standing structures than Denton had said he thought they would.

Though dry wall was dissolved for the most part, and there was usually a stinking mess left inside the building as the water had receded, well constructed buildings, especially ones of masonry, had held up well where there had been no current to speak of. Only the slow rise and fall of the water.

Even whole forest areas had survived intact. Only time would tell if the short exposure to salt water would kill any or all of them. Those obviously damaged were harvested for fire wood. It wasn't needed for heat. But it was used for cooking.

Several of the good wood framed buildings were dismantled and the components used to rebuild the insides of the masonry buildings that had survived the quakes and the water. In a month, each family or single member of the group was living in their own house or building. Though they were living separately, everyone contributed to the community in some way.

Mostly labor outside their specialty, firewood harvesting, planting gardens, and the constant clean up of one section after another of their area. But working together.

One of the first things Denton had done once they'd made landfall was set up the communications system. Until the ash quit falling, he had very little hope of getting a signal. But a few days after it did taper off, Denton began to pick up signals from other small groups such as theirs that had survived the disaster.

Lightray 5 and Denton had agreed on a set of frequencies they would use in the aftermath of any type of disaster. Denton had one of the receivers connected to a large log periodic beam antenna pointed to what he was fairly sure was Texas. Sure enough, just five hours after setting up the monitor, a signal broke the squelch.

It was Lightray 5. When Denton was informed he came hurrying back to the settlement. "This is Denton. Come in Lightray 5!"

"Denton! You made it!"

Denton heard shouts of glee in the background before Lightray 5 released the mike key. "Yeah. And apparently so did you. Everything okay now, that things have calmed down?"

"Not really. We're basically on a small island in the middle of an inland sea. And when I say small, I'm talking a few hundred square feet. Most of the shelter entrances are still under water. We were able to hold out during the flood. Now, this one entrance is the only source of fresh air we have. Fortunately it is one of the elevator entrances. It is the only one that is above the level of the water.

"And Denton, the water went down a lot, but it's now coming back up. But only a fraction of an inch a day, the best we can tell."

“I think Antarctica is now in a warm zone, along with Greenland, and they are dumping billions of gallons of water into the oceans. The new poles will pull much of the moisture and lock it up with new ice packs, but it could be years. We need to get you out of there, fast.”

“I’m open to suggestions. We’ve got supplies for years, but no real way to go anywhere. We can’t even see another shoreline.”

“I’ll start working on a solution. You guys hold fast and see what you can figure on your end. Keep trying to find someone closer to you that can help, too.”

“Okay, Denton. Thanks. We’re relying on you. Lightray 5 out.”

“Denton out.” Denton slowly turned around and looked at the small group that had formed behind him. “I hope everyone understands that this takes precedence. I have to figure out some way to help them.”

“Can’t we just take the Ark and get them?” asked someone.

“No way to power and control it effectively. Besides, we’d have to go all the way around the tip of South America and then back up.

“I do have the Munson... But...” Denton fell silent, obviously thinking. He didn’t notice Dayton ushering everyone out except Woodie, Deryn, and Doug.

“Whatever it takes, Denton. We’re behind you.”

“Get my laptop. I have an idea.” He fell silent and Deryn, Woodie, and Doug left to let him think.

When Dayton returned a few minutes later, he took the computer and started to sit down. “Better do this elsewhere. Get whoever is on duty back on the radios for regular communications.”

When he went out of the room, Dayton spoke to Pattie, who was waiting in the next room. Pattie nodded and went into the radio room to take over the watch again.

Denton was in his room, the laptop open on the small desk the room contained. Dayton watched as he pulled up a map program and began studying it. He suddenly shook his head. “There is simply no way to know if we can get there.”

“But you have an idea how?” Dayton asked.

“Yeah. Yeah. I do. But it’s risky and might result in more troubles than we can handle.”

“You think it worth a try?”

“There are close to two-thousand people in that shelter. I can’t just let them stay there and drown.”

“No. You would never do that without trying something. What do we do?”

Denton sighed. “Not going to let me do this with just a couple other guys, are you?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Yeah. Neither did I. Okay. The plan is to take the Munson, plenty of fuel and supplies, and one of the trucks. The Munson can haul everything south... Well, whatever direction it is to get to Isthmus of Tehuantepec of Mexico. That is the narrowest point where we can cross. Lot closer than going all the way to Panama.

“And I doubt the Canal is still operable. We’ll carry the truck on the Munson on the water parts and tow the Munson across the Isthmus and then use the Munson again to get to Lightray 5’s location.”

“You don’t think the roads will still be there? Look at the shape the ones here are in.”

“I know. But the pathway should be there. It would be the easiest route, I’m thinking. Much better than going all the way across California, Arizona, New Mexico, and then into Texas.”

“Wait. The Munson! How will you tow it? I don’t remember seeing any trailers.”

“Well, I thought about getting one of those semi trailers we found and modifying it. But now I believe that just making a carriage and tow bar for it will work better. Be less to do and much quicker. We only have to cover about one-hundred-twenty-five miles of the Isthmus and probably that or less in Texas.”

“I’m not sure what you mean, but I have faith in you. Where do we start?”

“Let’s get the Munson unloaded and checked out. Then the truck and finally the fuel and supplies.”

It took a week to get things ready. Denton talked to Lightray 5 every evening and gave him and the leaders of the Shelter an update on their progress. Lightray 5 asked them to hurry on the night before Denton was going to leave.

“Can’t I talk you out of going?” Denton asked Dayton one last time. They were standing on the lowered ramp of the Munson 52 foot landing craft.

“No. Let’s go.”

“Okay.” Denton stepped back and operated the controls to lift the ramp of the Munson and signaled Brian Hanks to back the craft away from the shore. Foster Punchen, the other man going on the trip coiled up the rope that had secured the Munson to the shore. Denton, Dayton, and Foster made their way back to the cabin to join Brian.

Brian turned parallel to California’s new coastline and headed for Mexico. Though they were in a hurry, fuel was critical. Denton had calculated the probable use and they’d loaded enough drums of diesel to easily get the Munson and the truck it carried to the Shelter in Texas. So Brian kept the Munson at the highest speed the current sea conditions allowed.

Even with the amount of fuel they were carrying they’d have to refuel at the Shelter, but it had more than enough fuel to do what was needed. It was going to be a continuous run to the Isthmus so everyone took a watch on the wheel, with another keeping a lookout. The other two would eat and sleep the best they could in the small cabin that was barely more than a wheelhouse.

Rotating through that way they stayed fresh enough to be able to make the conversion from water travel to land when they reached the Isthmus. It didn’t take long to off-load the truck. It did take a while to rig the wheels to the rear of the Munson. It was dark by then so Denton and the others set up tents and spend the night resting up for the land journey. From the looks of where they landed, it was not going to be much tougher than the sea journey had been.

But they were up by sunup. An hour later, the tow bar assembly attached to the front of the Munson, and the old GMC 5500 Topkick that Denton had bought from the mining company when they replaced part of their fleet of vehicles was hooked up to it.

The truck had no problem pulling the Munson up out of the water. Denton did a thorough check of the wheel assembly now that it was out

of the water. A couple of bolts were loosened, the wheels aligned a bit better, and the bolts were tightened up again. They were ready to go.

It was fairly obvious that the Pacific Ocean or the Gulf, or both, had sloshed across the Isthmus, scouring it down to the bedrock. There was some debris left behind from the last seiche, but the Topkick was able to rumble over everything, and the Munson trailed along behind with no problems.

The trip was much shorter than the one-hundred-twenty-five miles that existed before the pole shift. With the sea level up, and the scouring that had taken place, the trip was only slightly over one-hundred miles. It took almost ten hours, but there were no major incidents.

The reversal of the process they'd used to get the Munson ready for tow was done, and Denton was again at the wheel, heading for Texas, following the coast line just as they had on the way to the Isthmus.

It was another hard run, but on the second day Denton made contact with the Shelter. "Lightray 5. Calling Lightray 5."

"Lightray 5 here. Go ahead Denton."

"I need a steady signal for a couple of minutes so I can get a directional heading. I've got a beam antenna rigged up, but with us moving and only a short transmission, I can't pin you down. We're going to slow down and wait for your next transmission."

"Roger that, Denton. Keying down now. One. Two. Three..."

Lightray 5 continued to count as Dayton held the Munson on a slow, steady course while Denton monitored the radio signal strength meter and Brian turned the antenna while Foster passed information back and forth.

Working together, they soon had the Munson pointed directly at the Shelter. The earth's magnetic field had stabilized enough to allow for steering a compass course now that they had an accurate bearing.

Brian and Foster disassembled the antenna and Dayton shoved the throttles forward on the Munson. As it climbed up on plane on the smooth surface of the Gulf Denton told Lightray 5, "We're on our way. We'll pin you down when we get closer."

The four went into the same routine they'd used on the first leg of the journey, running as hard and fast as the weather and sea state allowed, with two up and two resting.

Brian was at the wheel shortly before noon the next day when the depth sounder began signaling shallower water. "Denton! Hey, Denton!"

Denton was asleep with Dayton in his arms on the settee. He woke at Brian's shout and almost dumped Dayton onto the floor of the cabin in his haste to get up. She shifted and let him up. "Let's set up the beam again and try to refine the course."

Dayton took over the wheel and slowed them down as Foster and Brian rigged the antenna again. Denton began calling for Lightray 5.

It took a few minutes, but Lightray 5 finally answered. "Go ahead Denton."

"Going to pinpoint the direction again. Give me a couple minutes and we'll have the antenna ready. We just broke over the former coastline. We're getting closer."

Denton could hear the excitement and relief in Lightray 5's voice. A couple of minutes later Foster told Denton they were ready and Denton relayed the message to Lightray 5.

Three minutes later Dayton changed course slightly at Denton's word, and began to speed up again. They were on the last stretch. "Rig a radar reflector as high as you can, Lightray 5. We'll do our final course correction and home in on it when we get close enough."

"Will do, Denton. I'll get on it. Lightray 5 out."

"Denton out."

It was near dusk when the blip first showed up on the radar, with it on its longest range setting. It was just barely off center of dead ahead. "Yes!" Denton said. "We're right on target."

Denton called the Shelter again and reported that they had the radar reflector showing on their radar. "A couple of hours and we're there."

"Thanks, Denton. We'll be waiting."

Denton hung up the radio microphone and sat back, pleased. Things had gone about as well as could be expected. It would be good to meet Lightray 5 in person. And see the elaborate Shelter he was involved with.

A few miles away from the Shelter and Denton and the others could see lights reflecting from the few clouds in the sky. It was on a direct line with their course. It was the Shelter. A dozen people were waiting on the shore of the small island that was the only thing in sight when Denton eased the Munson up and killed the engines.

Brian dropped the ramp and the two groups met to shake hands. Denton was looking around. He couldn't see the other side of the barren island in the dark, but it was obviously very small. "Lightray 5?" Denton asked, seeing the slender youth that was reaching his hand out.

"Yes. It's Matt Ruby, in real life."

Denton shook his hand.

“Thank you, Denton,” Matt said. “I think you just saved a bunch of lives.”

“I hope so,” Denton said. “Can you fill me in?”

“I’ll do that,” said a tall, stately looking elder man. “I’m the one in charge.”

“Denton, this is Greg Mathews. He’s the one behind the whole shelter. Greg, Denton.”

The two men shook hands. Denton was the one that broke the shake when Greg continued to apply more and more pressure.

“Okay. Greg. Fill me in.”

“Down in the shelter.”

“Okay. My people could use some hot food, a shower, and beds,” Denton said as Matt led the way away from the shore.

“Of course,” Greg said. “We’ve got guest quarters. Be no problem.”

Denton was surprised when they walked over to where the lights were and he made out the large roofed platform. “Wow! A lot bigger than I imagined when you said elevator.”

Matt quickly explained. “This is the largest of three elevators that give access to the shelter. There is another one large enough for big pickups and the third is a personnel elevator. They are both still under water. And that is the periscope unit with antennas, cameras, and so on.”

Greg frowned at Matt and then looked at Denton. “Yes. That is correct. If you’ll just join us on the platform, down we’ll go.”

“Denton,” Brian said, “I’ll stay with the Munson. I don’t think I’d do very well underground.”

“I’m with him,” Foster said. “We’ll be on the boat.”

“Okay,” Denton said. “Dayton?”

She bit her lip but stepped up beside him and the others. They felt the platform begin to drop slowly and watched as the upper panel sealed the hatch and the rest of the assembly continued downward.

Denton was curious and looked all around at the Shelter as they entered the arch and domed construction. “This way,” Greg said. Denton and Dayton followed Greg, with Matt behind.

They entered a large, comfortable office and Greg ushered the two to the two chairs facing the large desk. “I’ll go get some food prepped and guest rooms ready. I’ll send some food up to your men, too.”

“Thanks, Matt,” Denton said. Denton turned around to face Greg as Matt left the room.

“Some place you have here, even what little of it I’ve seen. How far down are we? I was too distracted in the elevator to calculate.”

“Forty-five feet here on the base of the central dome. The main units are another fifteen feet deeper, in a circle around this dome. They all have at least one exit besides a connection to the units on each side and to this dome.

“This dome was set on the highest ground, and then mounded even higher. Not so much for this scenario, but it is fortunate that I planned it that way. As it was, we were completely underwater for three weeks, with the periscopes just clearing the surface at the worst. One of the

modifications I had made to the Shelter was the addition of air intakes on the periscopes, in addition to the regular air system.

“We were able to stay locked up for most of the time we were underwater using CO² absorption curtains and adding oxygen from the tanks. Another addition I insisted on. But once we were sure the periscope air intakes wouldn’t drown us, we began using them as air outlets with the elevator hatch open as the intake. It’s working well.”

“Sounds like some good planning as well as execution,” Denton said.

“Yes. Of course. I’m known for my skill at both. Now. How do you plan to evacuate us?”

“Well,” Denton said. “I assume we’ll scout out some dry land and start taking everyone there, along with everything we can salvage from here in the Shelter to use for building a community above the future sea level.”

“I’d like to preserve this shelter. Use it as our main base.”

“I’m not sure that can be done, Greg. The sea level will drop, a lot, eventually, as ice begins to form at the new North Pole and glaciation takes place on all the land surrounding it. But for the moment, it is rising as the ice from Antarctica and Greenland, and other glaciated areas, is melting, being in warmer areas now. At least, that is my take on where the earth has ended up in relation to the sun.”

Greg frowned. “That’s not good. I intended this place to be the center of a new civilization.”

“The people here could easily be the core of that civilization. The Shelter would make it easy. But people are adaptable. I have a feeling the process will take place with or without the shelter. As long as we get the people to a safe place, with enough equipment and supplies to

survive the next few years as agriculture and animal husbandry again become the normal way of life.”

“Yes. Well. Why don’t you take your leave, and I’ll work on the plans to get everyone safe.”

Denton didn’t like the dismissal. And Dayton really didn’t like it. But Denton’s strong hand on hers on the arm of the chair kept her from speaking her mind. For the moment. When the woman that Greg had summoned on the intercom system showed up, Denton and Dayton followed along behind her.

Dayton whispered forcefully in Denton’s ear, “That guy burns me up! They got lucky here and he’s making out like it was all planning on his part. And forming a new civilization, with him as either King or God, I bet.”

“Let’s not read too much into things. Not just yet, Dayton. Give him the benefit of the doubt.”

“Yeah. I’ll be better off working with Matt than Greg, though.”

“I think so. I guess we’re here.”

The woman hadn’t said anything, and still didn’t. She just opened the door of a room and left Denton and Dayton to their own devices. “Look. I’ll get another room. I’m sure they have more, and...”

“It’s okay, Denton. We’ll be married soon. As soon as I can find a minister to perform the ceremony. If you can stand it, I can, too. We’ll just have to be adults about this.”

“Adults. Yeah. Well. Okay. I’ll do the best I can. But for right now I think I’ll go find Matt and that food.”

Dayton smiled and nodded. “Okay. Chicken.”

Denton found himself smiling when he left the small room. Fortunately, he ran right into Matt outside the room. "I've got a tray for each of you. And I sent trays up to the boat."

"Thanks, Matt. Can we talk a minute?"

"Sure."

Denton knocked and then entered the room he'd just left.

"That was quick," Dayton said. She on the bed, her shoes off, but still clothed, obviously ready to take a nap. She swung her legs around and set up, taking the tray of food gratefully. "Thank you, Matt."

Denton took the other tray and sat down at the small desk at one side of the bed.

"What is it you wanted to talk about, Denton?"

"Greg. Is he always this way? He was very... Superior... I guess I would say."

"No. Believe me. He is a good guy. But sometimes... Well, sometimes he gets on a high horse and starts acting bossy. But I think it is only when he gets scared. He did a great thing here, financing this place. Most people bought their way in, but some of us, he let come just for what we could provide for the Shelter.

"I'm sort of a Jack-of-all-trades, I guess. I was in on the planning and resource selection, as well as salesman of sorts, to find people to buy into the facility."

"Okay. That's good to know," Denton said, between bites of Mountain House beef stew.

“He really got on my nerves,” Dayton said. “I’m Dayton, by the way.” She set her spoon down and shook Matt’s hand when he reached forward.

“Nice to meet you Dayton.”

“Same here. Wish it was under better circumstances.”

“Yeah. And speaking of those,” Denton said, “I’ve got an idea on what we can do, beginning in the morning. But I’m not sure what might or might not be able to be moved from the Shelter.”

“Well,” Matt said, looking thoughtful, “all the food and water shouldn’t be difficult. It is all in containers of one sort or another. We can move most of it with the small electric forklifts we used to bring the stuff in.

“Most of the mobile equipment, luckily, is all centered around the big elevator. Some of the pickups can’t be taken because their only access is the pickup truck elevator that is still underwater.

“Some of the big stuff... Generators, maybe... Fuel tanks... I doubt it.”

“Okay. I think if we can brainstorm things, we’ll come up with some ideas. But for right now, I want to get some real sleep.”

“Okay. I’ll leave you two alone. I’ll see you in the morning.”

Denton nodded. “Thanks, Matt. In the morning.”

Denton was up early. He left Dayton sleeping in the small room and went looking for Matt. He found him in the main dome, waiting. “Denton! You’re up! Whenever you are ready, Greg and the other leaders would like to start planning what to do.”

“Sure thing. Just lead the way.”

Matt turned around and Denton followed him. Rather than the office where Greg had talked to them, Matt led him to a larger room, set up as the Shelter meeting room. When the two entered, the handful of people there began clapping, and calling out thanks for Denton coming to help them.

Denton noted that Greg looked a little sour when whoever it was said Denton was there to save them. But Denton simply took the seat at the head table that Matt indicated. Matt sat down beside Denton.

“Okay,” Greg said. “Time to get this started.” He turned to Denton. “We’ve been discussing some of our options. We’ve decided that buying your boat and handling the situation ourselves will be the best option.”

“Oh, really?” Denton asked, immediately angry. “I don’t think so. I’ll help in any way I can, but the boat is mine and I intend to keep it.”

“I’m willing to offer you ten times what you paid for it,” Greg said.

“I didn’t pay that much for it. It was damaged in an accident when being trucked to the person that bought it. I got it for a song and dance. I did put quite a bit into it, but not all that much.”

“Just name your price. I have plenty of money in my safe down here.”

The corner of Denton’s lip raised in a small smile. “You aren’t trying to buy it for cash, are you?”

“Of course cash. I have...”

“I don’t care how much cash you have. Food and other supplies, equipment, gold and silver. They are the new cash, when people start doing things alone and not as a group.”

“All right then,” Greg said. “I made provisions for that. “I can pay you in gold. Any reasonable amount.”

“The boat is not for sale. Now, let’s get this meeting moving on. From the information Matt has given me during our radio contacts, the water is rising faster each day. We need to get everyone, and everything, out that we possibly can over the next few days.”

There was rapid agreement among everyone, excluding Greg. But he didn’t bring up the subject again as the discussion turned to the evacuation of the Shelter.

“How many people are we talking about?” Denton asked.

“We have one thousand, six hundred forty-two people. Some of those that had bought into the project didn’t make it,” Greg said calmly.

“It’ll take a few trips. But we need to scout out a location, first. Head for the nearest hilly or mountainous area.”

“That would be San Esteban to the southwest, or Barksdale to the east. San Esteban is closest, but the hills aren’t as high and there aren’t as many of them. Barksdale would probably be better,” said one of the men in the chairs facing the table said.

There was some quick discussion after Denton said, “It doesn’t matter to me. We just need the decision made and get going on an exploration trip.”

“Okay,” Greg said. “We’re going to Barksdale.”

Denton noticed that several of the men and women in the room weren’t too pleased with Greg’s announcement. But it seemed like it was the way he said, than what he said. The majority agreed with Barksdale.

“Okay. Who is going with us to check it out while people are getting ready? We can take fifty people per trip, or thirty with some equipment to set them up once they are there.” Denton was looking out at the group as he continued. “We’ll need a way to refuel every few trips. Who goes first, and who goes last?”

“I’ll be on the last load,” Matt said.

“As will I,” Greg said, bring him up quite a bit in esteem in Denton’s eyes. He wasn’t a captain leaving the ship first. He was sticking.

“Well, you all work that out.” Denton turned to Greg. “I need someone to go and give approval of the location, or to approve a new location if Barksdale isn’t suitable.”

“I’ll go,” Matt said.

“You’re too young,” Greg said immediately. Jamison Cord will go as my representative. He will have authority to make the choice, if one is needed.”

Again the stirring in the group, but no outcry. “Okay,” Denton said. “Where’s Jamison Cord?”

“That would be me,” said an elderly man that had been sitting quietly in the background. He stood up, leaning slightly on a fancy walking stick. “I’ll be ready in ten minutes.”

“Okay,” Denton said as he stood up, too. “Matt, I want you to come along, too. We may need some extra manpower.”

“He has no authority to...”

“I’m not taking him for his authority,” Denton said. “He’s going along as another work hand on the Munson.”

Matt grinned and hopped up. “Five minutes. I’ll meet you topside.”

“Okay,” Denton said. “I’ll go get Dayton and we’ll be on our way.”

The chairs emptied, other than Greg’s, as the group got up to thank Denton individually. He finally broke away and headed for the room he’d shared with Dayton the night before. She was up, waiting for him.

“You disappeared on me!” she said, a bit annoyed.

“Good thing. You wouldn’t have liked it at the meeting.” Dayton started to say something, but Denton continued. “But it is all right now. We’re headed for a town called Barksdale to check it out. It should be above sea level. At the very worst, it will lead to higher ground.”

“Okay. Let me go to the bathroom and I’ll be there.”

Leaving Dayton to find her way up, Denton headed for the equipment elevator. It was just coming down, empty. There were two men at the access doors. They worked the controls to open them and Denton stepped inside. Matt came running up, a medium sized pack on his back. The doors were closing, but Dayton hurried up and the man let her on, too.

Brian and Foster were just finishing the breakfast someone had brought up earlier. “Let’s get the engines up and running. We’re not on a life and death timeline. Yet,” Denton said. “But we don’t want to waste any time. This is going to take a while.”

The Munson was ready, the anchor shoved into the soil of the island recovered and the line coiled up and stowed. Jamison Cord came walking over and quietly walked up the ramp and found a place to sit down.”

“Where is Barksdale from here?” Denton asked.

“Almost due east,” Jamison said.

“Used to be,” Denton said. Things are topsy-turvey now. East is now west, more or less, but not exactly.”

“I see.” Jamison looked blank.

“That way,” Matt said, pointing off toward the horizon. “The relationship of the elevator to the lay of the land hasn’t changed. Barksdale was just a little north of the east west line of the hatch.”

“Okay. Good,” Denton said. He moved back to the cabin and took over the wheel. “Line us up on the hatch,” he told Matt.

Matt stood on the small rear deck of the Munson and guided Denton into alignment with the hatch. “That should be it,” he said suddenly.

Denton looked at the compass to get the reading showing when Matt spoke. “Okay. We’re on our way.” Easing the throttles forward, Denton had them up on plane in a few yards.

It wasn’t long before the horizon changed from curved and blue, to uneven and brownish. “Land ho!” cried Brian. “Dry land ahead!”

It still took a while to get there, but Denton and the others were pleased at what they saw. There was no sign of the town of Barksdale, except for a few sections of roadbed here and there and the occasional piece of a building foundation.

Denton ran the Munson up to shore and Brian and Foster secured the anchors onto the land. Another few minutes and the Topkick was off-loaded and headed inland to explore. Jamison sat quietly aboard the Munson, with Brian and Foster.

They traveled over twenty-five miles, climbing slowly in altitude. “I think we’re above what the sea level might eventually get to,” Denton

finally said, stopping the Topkick on a large level area. This would make a good staging area, at the least. Need to find fresh water, though.”

“I think you’re right,” Matt said. “But how do we find the water?”

Dayton was grinning. “Sounds like a job for me. Unload the ROKON and I’ll explore further inland, looking for a source of fresh water.”

Denton was reluctant, Matt saw. He merely smiled when Denton sighed and climbed down out of the cab of the truck. Matt helped him unload the ROKON from the rack on the front bumper of the truck.

“I’ll come back and wait here if I find water. By dark, for sure.”

“Okay. You be careful,” Denton said. He gave Dayton a quick kiss and then she was on the small two-wheel drive diesel converted bike and headed further inland.

“Let’s get back,” Denton said, “and get the people moving started. What do you think Jamison will say?”

“Jamison is okay. He’s Greg’s right hand man, but a lot different than Greg is. Jamison is always calm, cool, and collected. Smoothes things over when Greg steps on toes. I mostly worked with Jamison and not Greg when we were putting this thing together. I can’t believe it’s just been two years.”

“Yeah. We’re lucky we both got our projects ready in time.”

“Yeah.”

The two were quiet on the way back to the Munson. When they arrived they left the truck out of the way and walked over to the Munson.

“Jamison, there’s a spot twenty-five miles or so in. Level, up pretty high. Big enough to set things up. Maybe permanently, maybe not,” Matt explained when they walked back aboard the boat.

“I see. Do you think Mr. Mathews will approve, Matt?”

“Probably not completely, but it is the best we found at the moment. It is good enough to get everyone and the equipment out and safe from the flooding. Where we go from there... I don’t know. It will depend on what people think.”

“Very good. Shall we return to the Shelter and begin the operation so desperately needed?”

“As soon as we unload the rest of the gear from the Munson. Going to need the room.” Denton motioned to Brian and Foster. With Matt helping they began the unloading process.

A few minutes later, with the boxes and drums that had taken up the rest of the space in the Munson that the Topkick hadn’t now ashore, Denton had Brian and Foster raise the ramp. “We’re on our way,” Denton told Jamison.

“And where is the young lady?” Jamison asked Matt as Denton backed the Munson away from shore and turned it around.

“She’s scouting for the closest fresh water to the site.”

“Shan’t we drill for water?”

“Sure, if we need to. But we could be there temporarily. No need to tie up resources until needed.”

“Ah. You are wise for your youth. Very good. I shall rest my eyes now.” Jamison leaned back, his hands clasped over his walking stick.

Matt moved back to join Denton in the cabin. Brian and Foster took seats on either side of Jamison, a bit worried about the man just sitting there, asleep.

It didn't take long to top off the diesel tanks of the Munson when they returned to the shelter and tried out the pump system the mechanics and engineers in the Shelter had set up. There were thirty people waiting, with totes full of gear. A few minutes to load and the Munson was headed back to their new home, whether it be temporary or permanent.

Dayton was waiting for them when they landed, a big grin on her face. "Found it! A stream... Almost a river, just another ten miles in. And it is even a better location. Higher ground, and even larger open area. We just didn't go quite far enough that first time."

"That's great!" Matt said. "I wasn't looking forward to moving and then moving again."

"I don't think you'll have to. But I'm not sure what you'll do for building materials. I went further still, but didn't find anything still standing. Everything in the area seems to have been washed away."

"We'll figure out something. We have some building materials stored. Not a lot, but enough to get things started," Matt said.

"Okay. I guess we'd better head back for another load. Dayton, are you okay with leading Brian and Foster to the new location? It's going to take several trips to transfer everyone and their gear."

"Of course," Dayton said.

"Okay. Let's get on it. We have a lot of people and things to move," Denton said. He and Matt went back aboard the Munson and headed for the Shelter, leaving the others behind to take care of the first load of people from the Shelter.

They kept it up around the clock, Denton, Dayton, Brian, and Foster handling the Munson. The Topkick was kept on what was now a road with some of those from the Shelter driving it.

It took fifty trips to get everyone moved, except those that would leave on the last load. Then began the transfer of equipment and supplies, each of the vehicles that could be, was loaded up first and then brought up and loaded onto the Munson to make the trips as efficient as possible.

Denton was amazed at the variety of equipment the group had stored. With the equipment they had available setting up a successful town would be a near certainty. It took longer to shuttle the equipment than it had the people.

The fuel stocks in the Shelter looked like they would be a problem. There were two ten-wheel fuel trucks available, but there was no place to transfer it to. That is, until Matt, exploring the area for days at a time found the foundation of a service station. The concrete slab was still there, though nothing else above ground was. The in-ground fuel tanks were intact, but filled with seawater that had trickled in as the fuel had floated out through the broken pipes connecting the tanks to the former pumps and the tank vents.

The vents were replaced with some of the stocks of pipe and fittings from the Shelter. The pump lines were cleaned and also repaired. A generator and pump were set up while the tanks were being pumped out, and then flushed with a bit of fuel, that was also pumped out and stored in barrels to be run through the bio-diesel processor to recover it.

Once the tanks were clean enough, the process of moving the fuel, one tank truck at a time began. Through the entire process, the sea level continued to rise, an inch or so a day. But the surface of the island wasn't that high to start with, and with the occasional storm that would raise waves high enough to sweep completely across the island, the transfer had to be stopped, the hatch closed, and everyone returned to the new community.

After each episode, the process was started up as quickly as possible. But the water reached a level that made it impossible to keep the hatch open. A team went down and shut down all the systems, and upon exit, closed the hatch.

“Well, I guess that is it,” Denton said as he took Greg, Matt, Jamison, and the small crew that had closed the Shelter up back to dry land.

“I’ve been thinking,” Greg said, seeming very reluctant. “There has been some talk of asking your little community to join ours. Some people seem to think you have skills and resources that we don’t seem to have.”

“Oh,” Denton said, more than a little surprised. The thought literally had not occurred to him. But he saw the immediate advantages to making the move. “What does the majority of the Shelter residents think of the idea?”

Greg didn’t speak, and frowned when Matt did. “It was an overwhelming yes vote. Almost everyone wants you to join us. Not just for the equipment and supplies, especially the stock, but in gratitude of what you’ve done for us. We have much more of the basic needs, including medical personnel, than you have in your group.”

“Yes,” Greg added, cutting Matt off. “We have much to offer in return for what little you have. You would eventually need to join a larger group sometime, anyway, simply to avoid dying out due to the small population which cannot sustain itself genetically.”

“I’ll talk it over with my people when I get back,” Denton said. Despite his belittling way of expressing it, Greg had a point, as did Matt.

There was little fanfare when Denton, Dayton, Brian, and Foster loaded up the Munson with fuel and supplies and headed home. They took it

much easier than the trip out. It was otherwise when they made landfall at their own camp. Everyone was anxious to hear about the trip, and how the four had fared for the long time they had been gone.

It was more apparent now that they were close to the equator. Growing food would not be a problem. But when Denton brought it up about possibly moving lock, stock, and barrel to the other site, the decision of the others was nearly unanimous.

Just a bit regretfully, Denton added his hand to those that were lifted on the yes vote, making it unanimous. But it was not going to be an easy transition. The people and animals would be shuttled to the Shelter site first.

Then, with a joint crew of people from Denton's group and the Shelter group, the Ark would be dismantled and many of the containers would be moved, one at a time, loaded with supplies, until everything useful was moved to the Shelter site. It would take three years to do it, but it became a bit easier as the sea-level rose and the Isthmus narrowed down to just a two hour journey over land.

That part of the journey was made even easier and quicker by the stationing of a dedicated tow truck on the Isthmus to tow the loaded Munson from one side to the other.

Greg seemed to mellow out significantly once the animals were delivered and pastures and hay fields planted to support them. With only the few people in Denton's group added to the rolls, there was much more gain than there was loss to the Shelter.

The groups integrated quickly, with Denton and Dayton both added to the community council to help guide and direct the future of the Town.

Things were far from easy, of course, but compared to a few of the isolated communities the group was in contact with, the Town was lucky. They were in a tropical climate and needed little supplemental

heat, had a year round growing season, and plenty of rain to wash the salt residues off the land.

The bare earth that was left needed much enhancement to become as productive as possible, but with the animals' waste religiously kept and used on the fields they slowly improved. The tons of the kelp that began to grow in the shallows that was harvested, with plenty of fish added to the mix, improved the land even more. And with rotating green manure crops grown on one fourth of the tillable land each year, the land, after a few years, was as fertile as it had been before the topsoil had been washed away.

It would be eight years before the sea level dropped far enough after peaking at thirty-two feet over the hatch to allow reopening the Shelter and begin using its features again. There had been a bit of water infiltration, but not much, considering the situation.

Finally, two years later, the other hatches were clear and could be accessed. That allowed the rest of the vehicles and equipment to be moved from the Shelter to the now established town to make things a bit easier.

Decades passed. Elderly died, babies were born, and life went on. The population of the earth had dropped from almost seven billion to less than ten million during the Pole Shift. But those ten million that survived worked hard and prospered. The species would continue.

End *****

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