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Simpler Times

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Simpler Times - Prolog

Glenn Murphy smoothly merged the big old Cadillac Fleetwood Talisman into the high speed stream of traffic on Interstate 55 South, leaving St. Louis behind him. Actually, it was less that Glenn was leaving as it was he was headed for something.

Glenn's Uncle Titus had died and left his farm and ranch near Cape Girardeau, Missouri to Glenn. It had been a very long time since he'd visited his Uncle. Not since he was a teen. His memories of the summer he'd spent on the farm and ranch were fond ones.

He was tired of the nine to five, conniving, back stabbing life of the corporate world. It was time for a change. A change back to simpler times.

...Well, it was a thought.

Simpler Times - Chapter 1

Glenn arrived at the hotel just in time to freshen up, change clothes, and get to the graveside funeral service. There weren't very many people in attendance. Glenn remembered his Uncle as a gregarious man, with a ready tip of the hat to women, and a slap on the back or handshake for men. It had seemed he knew everyone they met when Glenn went into the Cape with him to pick up supplies, or look at a prospective purchase of farm equipment, or attend a stock sale that Uncle Titus either had stock in to sell or was there looking to buy some.

Very much to his surprise, the black veiled widow was pointed out to him. Glenn didn't even know Uncle Titus had remarried after Aunt Cecelia's death. With the first handfuls of dirt on the coffin, the small group began to break up.

An elderly man in a black suit came over to Glenn and introduced himself. “You must be Glenn, Titus’ nephew. I’m Harvey Benbeck, your Uncle’s attorney. We have quite a bit to talk about. A few things have come up since I called you about your Uncle’s death.”

“Okay. When and where?”

“At my office, before the official reading of the will. If you want, you can follow me in.”

Glenn nodded, his glance suddenly going to the widow. The veil was still down, but Glenn could tell she was laughing, along with the man at her side. He suddenly had an uneasy feeling in his stomach.

It took nearly twenty minutes to get to Benbeck’s office. Glenn had a hard time keeping up with him. He was a very fast and risk taking driver, unlike Glenn. But they both got to the office alive, much to Glenn’s surprise.

Benbeck looked at his watch as they entered his office suite. “The reading of the will is set for one. We have a few minutes.” Again Glenn followed Benbeck, this time into his private office, past a very attractive secretary/paralegal.

Motioning to one of the leather chairs in front of the desk, Benbeck sat down behind the desk. “Okay, son, there are some things you need to know. I’m skating on thin ice, but I’ve been Titus’ attorney and friend for many years. I think I owe it to him to try to see that his wishes are carried out.”

“But the will... That would be his wishes, wouldn’t it?”

“Debra is going to contest the will. She says she has a more recent one that Titus entrusted her with just before his death. She’s always had her

own attorney. She says he wrote it up and Titus signed it. She hasn't produced it yet, but she will at the reading. I just wanted to let you know that this will not be cut and dried the way I thought it would."

Glenn could only nod. So much for going back to simpler times.

It was as Benbeck said. When she arrived, no longer wearing black, or a veil, she had her attorney with her, and he immediately gave an envelope to Benbeck as they seated themselves around the large table in Benbeck's conference room.

"Who's this? The kid's lawyer?" Debra asked, looking closely at Glenn.

"Not quite," Benbeck said, carefully hiding his smile. "This is Titus' nephew, Glenn."

"Him! But Titus' nephew is twelve!"

"Afraid not, Aunt Debra. I was twelve when I came to stay with Uncle Titus when my mother was going through a difficult pregnancy." It still pained Glenn to bring it up. His mother had died giving birth to Glenn's sister. Still unnamed, the baby girl died after two days in pediatric intensive care.

"But Titus said..." Her words faded and a grim line replaced the earlier smile.

"Be that as it may," Allan Stockmeyer, Debra's attorney said, "Glenn's age does not matter. If you will be so kind as to look at the papers I handed you, you will see that his presence, no matter what his age, is irrelevant in these proceedings."

Benbeck opened the envelope and took out the legal papers it contained. He read through the entire document silently. Stockmeyer and Debra were whispering back and forth. Glenn just stared into space, the

memories of his mother occupying him.

Finally, Benbeck put the papers down. He looked at Debra and said, "File the papers. We'll see you in court."

"Allan you said..."

Stockmeyer cut her off. "I know what I said. I told you this was not only possible, but probable. Let's go. I've already got the papers ready to file with the court."

"Of course you know that you will have to produce the original will in court. Titus had a very distinctive signature."

"Careful what you say, Benbeck," Debra said, her voice showing her anger. "You imply that we are doing something illegal, I'll slap a libel suit on you so fast you won't believe it."

"Not implying anything," Benbeck calmly replied, rising from his chair. "Just stating a fact."

"We'll let the facts speak for themselves," Stockmeyer said coolly. "Come along, Debra."

The two left and Benbeck turned to Glenn. "I can recommend a good attorney," he said.

"Oh. I thought you would represent me."

Benbeck grinned. "I need to be free to be an unbiased witness in the case. Stockmeyer isn't the Perry Mason he thinks he is. I intend to see that Titus' real wishes are carried out."

It took three months, but Glenn finally owned the farm and ranch. The

signature on the original documents Stockmeyer had drawn up were quickly proven to be very competent forgeries, but forgeries never the less. That, in addition to Benbeck's and three other witnesses' testimony that Titus had talked to them about what he wanted when he died, just three days before his death, a month after the supposed new will date, sealed the case.

Debra had received the clothes, jewelry, and car that Titus had bought for her, plus the condo that Titus and Debra had moved into after they were married. She claimed that it had been all Stockmeyer's doing and that she was innocent of perjury, and attempted fraud. Stockmeyer eventually got disbarred. Debra went scot-free.

Glenn got the farm and ranch property and operation, along with a goodly sum of money that Debra had not known about. Glenn had been under a restraining order not to approach the farm during the legal battle. When he finally was able to go out to it, he was shocked. The ranch house, barns, and other out buildings were a mess.

Immediately after they were married Debra began pestering Titus to sell everything, but he had resisted that. He had completely quit operating the farm, at Debra's insistence, selling all the stock and equipment, leasing out the land, and moving to the condo in the Cape. She continued to try to get him to sell the farm and ranch, up until the day he died.

Glenn was at a loss. He was no farmer or rancher. He'd expected to come to the place, hire a General Manager, and live on the property and learn how to run it over time. That wasn't going to be the case.

He did move to the ranch house, but was more camping out there than living in it. The place had been heavily vandalized, as had the other buildings over the last few years, with no one there to prevent it.

It had been a party house for college students for a couple of years, until the people running a meth lab took it over. A lot of damage was done

when the Missouri Joint Drug Task Force shut the lab down. That included hundreds of bullet holes in the buildings and several small fires caused by flash/bang and teargas grenades fired through the windows of the buildings. Titus was lucky the land wasn't confiscated because of the meth lab operation, despite his not knowing anything about it.

Glenn was sitting on what was left of the front porch of the house, contemplating the future for the place, when a pickup truck came up the lane and stopped. A young woman got out of the cab of the truck and walked up to the porch.

Glenn took note of the woman's youth and beauty, despite the ragged college sweatshirt and torn jeans she was wearing, her long blonde hair tied back in a ponytail. "Can I help you?" Glenn said.

"I hope so," the woman said. "Are you Glenn Murphy?"

Glenn nodded. "And you are...?"

Brittany Jones-Shaeffer. I want to talk to you about the farm and ranch."

He didn't know what he wanted to do with it, but Glenn knew he didn't want to sell it. His uncle had resisted some pretty strong persuasion to keep it in the family, and Glenn wanted to honor his uncle's wishes. He said as much. "The place isn't for sale."

"I doubt if we could afford it, anyway," Brittany said. "What I want to talk to you about was what it would take to start an organic farming operation on part of it."

"We? Who is we?"

"Some fellow graduate students at the agricultural college, and a couple of interested investors."

“I see. Look, I’d invite you in to discuss it, but the place is a mess. Can we meet somewhere else to talk about this? I have my doubts, but am willing to consider it.”

“Okay. I know the place has been trashed. I’m sorry about that. I hate to admit it, but when I was a freshman I came to one of the parties out here. It was a big mistake on my part and I never came back.

“How about the Steak & Shake in town? Tomorrow? You can pick the time.”

“Noon is... No it will probably be crowded then. Two o’clock?”

Brittany nodded. “Please do keep an open mind about this.”

“I will,” Glenn replied.

“I may bring a couple more people to help with the pitch.”

Glenn laughed. “The more the merrier.”

When he turned in for bed that night, he found himself looking forward to the meeting. He wondered if it was because of Brittany or the prospect of doing something with the place.

He was eating a steak sandwich, with fries, when Brittany arrived. She had indeed brought other people with her. A woman somewhat older than Brittany, by her looks, and a man about Brittany’s age.

The three sat down at his booth. When the waitress came over, all of them asked for water or tea, with nothing to eat. Brittany made the introductions. The woman was Tabitha Sheriton, and the man Thomas Hooper.

“Okay,” Glenn said, “Let the pitch begin.” He was smiling when he said it.

Brittany laughed lightly, though the other two didn’t even crack a smile.

“Mr. Murphy...” Brittany started, but Glenn interrupted her.

“Make it Glenn.”

“Okay. Glenn it is. As I said yesterday evening, the group I’m involved with, all with good college educations in modern agricultural practices, plus a couple very experienced in small scale farming, want to start up an organic farm. Primarily because it is better for the environment, as a showcase to encourage more ventures like ours, and to provide more organic product to those that prefer it. Both plant and... I guess animal.”

“Sounds simple enough. My uncle has leased the land the last few seasons. They will be up for renewal this fall. You haven’t said how much land you need, and if you wanted to use existing structures. I don’t see why you can’t pick up one or more of the leases for your project.”

“We need at least three hundred acres, with buildings. But... Well... You see,” said Thomas, “We don’t anticipate turning a profit for several years.”

“I see. That does change things, doesn’t it?” Glenn said.

“It is a very worthy cause,” said Tabitha, rather insistently. “And we could use the entire three sections. You would need to bring the buildings up to spec.”

“How long have you been trying to get this project going?”

“Three years,” Brittany said.

“You mentioned investors. They wouldn’t be able to pay the lease fees and building improvements?”

Tabitha immediately shook her head. “No. They will provide some equipment and such, seed, and other things for using the site for a test bed for their products in development. Some pro-green advertising, which some of them need desperately. Profits are secondary to them right now. Exposure in the field of greening the planet, and testing are their priorities. Profit is for future consideration.”

Brittany looked a little embarrassed at her friend’s comments. “We do have several grants lined up, but they will only pay for certain things. The lease payment isn’t one of them. We might be able to fix up the buildings.”

“What will happen to any permanent improvements to the property if the operation folds?”

Tabitha looked sour. “Not much we could do. But it’s not likely we’d fail. We’re all very good. And committed. We’re hoping to get some of the corporate mentality turned around from greed to doing the right things”

“I see,” Glenn said. He was going to need to think about this. He was all for green, but a person still had to make a living. It was sounding not only like they wanted to use all the land, but wanted him to improve it. At his expense. And there was Tabitha’s attitude. It was grating.

“I need to think about this,” he told the three. “Probably need to get more details.”

Tabitha looked angry, Thomas rather neutral, and Brittany disappointed.

“Okay.” She wrote her telephone number on a napkin and handed it to

Glenn. “Call me when you’ve had a chance to think it over.”

Tabitha and Thomas were already heading for the door of the Steak & Shake. Brittany slid out of the booth from beside Glenn. “Please, really do consider it. I know Tabitha can be a bit... harsh... but she really believes in this project. Her family has some land. They wouldn’t even consider it.”

“I will consider it,” Glenn replied. Brittany turned around and left, her slumped shoulders showing her dejection. He shrugged his shoulders and finished his sandwich and fries.

While he was driving back to the farm he was listening to the news on Sirius radio. It was pretty much all bad, the weather news especially. It was pouring down rain when he got to the farm house. Glenn had a hard time finding a place that didn’t have a drip from the leaking roof coming down.

He put on a rain coat and just wandered around the various buildings on the property, checking for roof leaks. He found plenty of them. Dejected, Glenn went back to the house as it was getting dark. He found a new place to roll out his sleeping pad and bag and crawled in, wondering what the next day would bring. He needed to make a decision quickly. He either needed to go back to work in a normal job, try to fix up the farm and get some help running it, continue to lease it out, or be super generous and let the students use it.

“I’m not that generous,” Glenn muttered as he fell asleep.

After a cold breakfast the next morning, Glenn called the number Brittany had written down on the napkin the day before. It was only courtesy to let her down in person, so Glenn made arrangements to meet her at the Steak & Shake again that afternoon.

With nothing better to do, Glenn went in to Cape Girardeau early and went down to the river view. The Mississippi was running high, due to two months of nearly steady rains. He watched the river flow, and the tugboats and barges going past. He'd never gone down to the river much when he was in St. Louis.

The rain started again and Glenn went back to the Talisman. He drove around town aimlessly, just checking it out. It looked like a nice enough town, not like some river towns. It was still pouring when he got to the Steak & Shake, plus he was very early for the meeting, so he sat in the Talisman and listened to a Sirius news channel.

"Just more of the same," he muttered and found an oldies rock and roll station. "This disaster and that disaster, this flood and that drought, this war and that war, this group hates that group, and everybody hates the US, contaminated food, changing climate, interest rates up and housing down. What's the world coming to?" Glenn asked himself.

Suddenly Glenn sat up a little straighter. "Contaminated food... shortages of food, bad weather... And I like to eat," he muttered. "And I need a permanent home... And something to do."

He saw Brittany arrive and go into the restaurant. Glenn got out of the car and followed her in. When she saw him, she headed for a booth. Glenn joined her.

Brittany didn't look hopeful when Glenn started to speak. "I wanted to tell you face to face that I wasn't going to go for the deal." Brittany's face fell further.

"Not really much to say..."

Glenn cut Brittany off. "But I am having second thoughts. I want to hear more about exactly what you plan to do. And how much it would cost me.

They both ordered bowls of chili when the waitress came over.

Brittany's face brightened a little, but not much. "It's much as we told you yesterday. An organic farm to test out the best of various crops, refine procedures to maintain the organic label, that sort of thing."

"Tabitha seemed reluctant to include farm animals. Would you do organically raised meat, too?"

"Tabitha is a vegetarian, though not a Vegan. I think she would like to be, but... Well, that's her business. But, yes, we would want to try to raise organic meat animals."

"Why the hard core refusal to consider making a profit?"

Brittany sighed. "Several of us don't want the pressures to make the operation a large commercial success. We want to be a trend setter. Learn to do it better, more efficiently, and cheaply, to provide a showcase where people can come and learn."

"Well, wouldn't it be a better showcase if it was profitable?"

"I suppose so," Brittany mused, "But we have so many in the group opposed..."

"I see," Glenn said. Something suddenly came to him. The farm operation, and especially the ranch side of it, had been very self-sufficient when Titus' family first started it in the 1880's. "Are there plans for biodiesel production? And how about methane and alcohol?"

"A couple of the guys are into biodiesel, but we don't have funding to pursue that line of research. And we don't want to spread ourselves too thin. Taking on too much is a sure way to fail."

“I can’t argue that,” Glenn admitted. “Were you planning on greenhouses?”

“Yes. We have funding for a small one with which to do research.”

“Thomas mentioned three hundred acres. Tabitha said you needed it all. I don’t see the need for all three sections.”

Brittany sighed. “Tabitha wants us to try and get an experimental hemp growing permit. We need acreage for that.”

“Why hemp?” Glenn said, but then quickly added, “Never mind. Better if I look it up on the internet on my own.”

Brittany looked a little annoyed. “I wouldn’t lie to you about any of it!”

“I know. It’s not that. I just do better researching on my own. I’d have a million questions and I’m sure you have something to do today besides talk to me.”

“I’ll take as long as needed, if there is a possibility we’ll get to use the land.”

“I’m beginning to lean toward it,” Glenn said. “But don’t get your hopes up too much. There are going to be some stipulations that you and the group might not like.”

“Oh,” Brittany said, calming back down after hearing Glenn’s initial words. “If they are reasonable...”

Glenn grinned. “I think they’d be reasonable. You might even. I’m not sure all your group will.”

“I can only take the proposal to them and let the majority decide.”

“It will take me a couple or three days to do some research and think this over. I’ll let you know in three days.”

Brittany nodded. It was still better than nothing. She was sure that Glenn was right about one thing. Several in the group weren’t going to like Glenn setting conditions. It didn’t sit real well with her. “But beggars can’t be choosers,” she said to herself as she finished her chili.

Glenn had his laptop with him, but found it easier to go to the county library to do his research. The telephone line for the farm, with DSL, hadn’t been turned on yet. He e-mailed himself many articles and complete web pages to study when off line. He found a WiFi spot in town and downloaded his e-mail and went back to the farm to read up on several things.

He was ready for the meeting on Friday. Glenn gave Brittany his proposal and sat back to let her read it. She would look happy one moment and unhappy the next as she read. Glenn couldn’t get a real feel for what she was thinking when she set the papers down.

“I really like some of these ideas,” she finally said, looking earnestly at Glenn. “They go further even than some of ours. But we’d lose our grants if we did some of them. Even if we didn’t, we don’t have enough money to even start on some of these projects.”

“How much are the grants?”

“One is for \$25,000, one for \$35,000, and a small one for \$10,000.”

“\$70,000 total,” mused Glenn. “Okay. I can cover that if you lose them. And I’d be footing the bill for everything I’ve suggested that you weren’t planning on doing.”

“Do you realize how much that would be?” Brittany exclaimed.

“I do. I think. My Uncle wanted both the farm and ranch parts of the property to be successfully passed down the family line. I’m willing to risk my retirement, and my family’s legacy, on the chance to see that come to pass, and the chance for some pretty good profits, relatively early. I had something of an epiphany the other day, while listening to the news. I want to be sure I’ll have food available when I get old. The way things are going in this old world, that could be a problem.”

“I suppose so,” Brittany said, somewhat absently. She was thinking of all the good things her group could still do with the property, despite the things that Glenn wanted done.

“I’ll take this to our next meeting. That’s this Sunday. I’ll get back to you on Monday. Is that okay?”

Glenn nodded. He went back to the farm and found the phone company waiting on him. He was doing more research on the internet by the end of the day.

Simpler Times – Chapter 2

Thomas and Tabitha were with Brittany Monday afternoon when she arrived at the Steak & Shake to meet with Glenn. None of the three looked very happy.

Again they didn’t order anything except tea and water. Glenn ordered a BLT and looked at the three expectantly as he waited for his order.

After long moments of silence Brittany finally spoke. “We can’t do it. There are too many provisions that don’t have anything to do with our project.”

“I see,” Glenn said. “Okay.”

“That’s it?” Tabitha asked. “Just ‘Okay’?” She was definitely angry, Glenn decided.

“What else is there to say? You don’t want to do it. I’ll just do what I want to do. It’ll be harder, and a little more expensive, but it is all still doable. Organic food is a big business now. I’m sure I can find other people interested in it to help me.”

“That’s not really fair,” Thomas said.

“This is our project!” Tabitha said. “You can’t take it away from us and use it for your own selfish ends!”

“I thought you’d be pleased,” Glenn lied. “Your project being expanded and taken to new levels. Isn’t the fact that it will be done more important than who does it?”

“You’re just twisting words!” Tabitha cried and scrambled out of the booth. Thomas followed, without saying anything more.

“You did that deliberately!” Brittany said, accusingly.

“I don’t like her high and mighty attitude,” Glenn said slowly. “It was a rotten thing to do. Tell her I said I’m sorry. But I do stand by what I said. You guys are on the right track. I do want it to succeed. I don’t see anything wrong with incorporating other ideas and trying to make a profit at the same time.”

Brittany sighed. “I’ll tell her, though you should do it yourself. It was close... the vote... Several people really liked some of your ideas and the fact that you are willing to foot the bill. I didn’t know you were that wealthy.”

“I’m not,” Glenn said. “I’m risking my entire retirement fund, plus quite a bit more. I’m selling my house in St. Louis and will be using that money, too. And I’ll borrow against the farm and ranch as it gains value. I believe in this. Greening the planet is a noble cause and has its place. But I think it should be integrated into existing ways of life.”

Brittany sighed again. “I guess I can’t really argue that. Some of us, like Tabitha, just take this so personally.”

“I take what I’m going to do personally, too.”

“I guess you would. I wish we could work this out.”

“Give it another shot,” Glenn said. “Take the proposal back. Talk it over more. One thing I might not have made clear is that the profits will be shared. Whatever group entity you set up will get twenty-five percent of the profits.”

“Oh. That wasn’t really clear. But I don’t know if it will make a difference. It really is a matter of principle. I’ll talk to them again.”

They set another meeting date and time and Brittany left. Glenn left as well, and went looking for a regional phone book. The local office of the telephone company had one. He took it and went back to the farm to make a few calls. “This is going to work, one way or the other.”

Two days later a salvage crew showed up to start dismantling all the buildings on the farm and ranch. Glenn had made a deal to sell the highly sought after old lumber, particularly that in the barn. The company would do the dismantling and clean up, and pay Glenn for the wood. They already had a market for it.

With the house coming down last, Glenn had time to find a used travel trailer and get it delivered to the farm. He would live in it until the new

house was built the next summer. The other buildings would have priority.

When the crew was done, Glenn basically had virgin land. He'd even had the old, unreliable well and septic systems removed, as well as the concrete slab for the old house. Only the power and telephone lines were transferred to the trailer. He had water delivered and sewage pumped out of the trailer holding tank.

He had a general idea of what he wanted the farm and ranch compound to be like, but wanted to wait until he knew if he would be working with Brittany's group, or another one, before he finalized any construction plans.

Glenn had given it two weeks between the meetings. He sighed when he saw Thomas and Tabitha with Brittany when they came into the Steak & Shake. Tabitha looked stony. Thomas actually looked a little pleasant. Brittany was smiling and Glenn began to believe she bore good news.

"Well?" he asked when the others had taken their seats and more orders for water and tea were given.

"There was a shift in the new voting," Brittany said. "The majority agreed to your terms."

"Excellent!" Glenn said.

"It was only by one vote," Tabitha informed Glenn coldly.

"That's democracy at work for you," Glenn replied. "Okay, then. When can everyone come out to the place and tell me what they need in the way of structures, equipment, and etc.?"

"Structures?" Thomas asked. "Aren't we going to be using the barns?"

Glenn shook his head. "I razed everything. We're starting fresh. You can get exactly what you need."

"Such a waste," Tabitha muttered.

"Had a timber recycler come in and take everything useable," Glenn said in a normal tone of voice. "It's already headed for a new home."

Tabitha just frowned.

Before that conversation could go any further, Brittany spoke up.

"Everybody has different schedules. It might take a week or two to get everyone's input."

"That's fine," Glenn replied. "I'll be available whenever anyone can get loose." He gave Brittany his cell phone number. "I take it everyone knows how to get there?"

"Well, no. But the ones that don't can go out with those that do," Thomas said.

"I want to have everyone's needs down on paper before we lay out the place. Anything we can dual use or even triple use, I want to do."

"So we're going to be limited on what we can ask for." That from Tabitha.

"You can ask for anything," Glenn said, his voice taking on a bit of chill. "It'll be up to the group as a whole to verify actual need for each person's requests."

"You're going to let the group decide?" Thomas asked, his surprise evident.

"Oh, I maintain veto power, but yes. You've all been planning this for

some time. I imagine the group as a whole knows approximately what each person plans and needs.”

Tabitha looked startled, but said nothing.

“As soon as we have the basics, we’ll finalize a plan and you can take it to your grant people and see what they will still do. I need to budget things and I need to know how that money will be spent.”

Ever angry, it seemed, Tabitha said, “That’s not your money to do anything with. The group will decide how to spend it.”

“Actually,” Thomas said, “The individual grantees will do that, since they are individual grants for their special projects.”

“The group will be giving advice and help, but yes, it will be up to the individuals or teams that applied for the grants to spend the money within the parameters of the grant,” Brittany said.

Tabitha looked annoyed that her friends had contradicted her, but she said nothing else.

“Well, have them let me know as soon as possible. And if additional outside funds can be used to add to or improve what the grant actually pays for.”

“That I can answer now,” Brittany said. “The grant money has to be used for specific things in all three cases, but there is not a limit on how much additional funding can be used.”

“That’s good,” replied Glenn. “Okay. If there is nothing else, I need to get going. I’ve got a ton of work to do now that I know which group I’ll be working with.”

Brittany moved out of the booth and then Glenn did as well. Unlike the

other meetings, Glenn was leaving and the others seemed to be staying. “To talk it over,” Glenn thought with a small smile.

Glenn was eager to get on with his research. He was coming up with some very interesting things on his internet searches. One never knew quite what would pop up, with even some of the simplest word choices. But he was learning quite a bit more than he set out to learn, and that was good. Plus, it was interesting, to boot.

It was nearly a week before anyone called to come out to the property and submit their list of what they would need for the project. Then there was a flood, with two or three coming out together, one group after another. He began to get a clear idea of what they wanted, and how it would mesh with what he wanted.

Except for the fact that he wanted to profit from it, there really wasn't that much difference between what the group wanted and what he wanted. It was going to be expensive. It wasn't that he wouldn't be able to do it. But it would take all he had. Glenn smiled. “Should have some good eats, though.”

When he was sure the last person that was involved with the group had been out to see him, Glenn went back to St. Louis to meet with a former client of his. An architect for whom he had handled the regional advertising. With his notes and a general drawing of the property, Glenn described the plan he had in mind.

“A bit out of my field,” Clay Montgomery said. “But I think I can handle it.” He grinned at Glenn. “Get a little of my own back from the rates you charged me.”

Glenn laughed. “Add a line item for that. “Payback fee.”

“I may just do that. Give me two weeks for a preliminary set of

drawings.”

Glenn shook hands with Clay. “Okay. Thanks. I really appreciate this.”

Clay waved his hand negligently and Glenn left.

Two weeks later, with plans in hand, Glenn went to his bank. They were not at all interested in financing a farm operation, so he went shopping for a new bank. With the thought that one of the banks in the Cape might be more used to agricultural loans, he tried there first.

Sure enough, the second bank he talked to was more than willing to deal with him. Glenn closed his account in St. Louis and transferred all his funds to the bank in Cape Girardeau. They were just a little unsure about the unconventional structures he was planning, but Glenn put them onto several websites and asked them to consider the earth sheltered construction he wanted.

Assuming he would get the money, Glenn began to order long lead time items. He also got a local dirt contractor out to do some rough landscaping on the property, to suit the building layout he was planning.

Glenn called Brittany and told her the plans were in the works. If she wanted to set up a meeting with the group, he’d show everyone the plans. She immediately agreed. Two days later Glenn met with the group at a restaurant in town that had a small banquet room.

It was a spirited meeting. Mostly due to the fact that each member of the group had what they needed; plus much more. Even Tabitha didn’t look as stony as she had when she first started looking over the plans.

“This is wonderful!” Brittany said, her eyes shining brightly. “We never expected something this large and comprehensive. Thank you.”

Glenn shrugged, wondering what a big hug from Brittany would feel

like. “Just don’t forget that I’m in this for the profits.”

“Believe me,” Tabitha said, frowning again, “We won’t. Now, I think we should vote on approving or rejecting these plans as they stand, and then discuss changes.”

Glenn smiled slightly. “This isn’t a democracy. My money and future are on the line here. I will gladly accept suggestions and consider them, but the final decisions are mine, not the group’s.”

Now wait a minute!” Tabitha almost yelled. “We never agreed to that!”

“Calm down, Tab,” Brittany said. “I guess it wasn’t really said quite the way Glenn put it just now, but I do think most of us understood that he would have direct control of the operation, except for the grant money.” Several of the other group members were nodding in agreement with Brittany.

“Grant money!” Tabitha snorted. “You know that two of the grants were pulled when they found out we had access to private funding.”

“I know. I know. But we still have the big one. And everything we asked for is being provided. More than we asked for.”

“And all he cares about is his profits,” Tabitha said as Brittany gave Glenn a quick look and led Tabitha off to one side to continue to talk to her.

Glenn didn’t know what Brittany said to Tabitha, but Tabitha stayed quiet the rest of the meeting, only occasionally looking daggers at Glenn.

Tabitha was the first to leave, and Brittany the last.

“I want to thank you again,” Brittany said. She gestured at the plans and

diagrams on the tables. “We really didn’t expect this. And I’m sorry about Tabitha. I really don’t know what her problem is, but I’ll try to get her to be a bit more civil.”

“One person isn’t going to spoil this,” Glenn replied. “Getting this done is my future.”

“I understand,” Brittany replied. With that she left.

Glenn gathered up his papers and headed back to his trailer.

The bank called the following day and Glenn went in to sign the loan papers he’d taken out on the farm and ranch. He called the earth shelter building outfit he selected from his internet research and put in an order. He faxed over drawings of the earth sheltered buildings he wanted built. He would have an estimate in a few days of the ones he wanted to start building first. The barn and the greenhouse support building.

He hired a labor temp to help him stake out the areas for the buildings and other construction projects on the plans. It took him and Jeremy two days to get it all done. “Wow!” Jeremy said as they were finishing up. “Going to be a big place. How many hands you going to need?”

“Several,” Glenn replied. “You interested?”

“If it’s full time,” Jeremy replied. “My girlfriend and I are barely making it doing temp jobs.”

“What skills does each of you have?”

“Well, we both do labor jobs. Helen doesn’t like inside work. She took welding in trade school and I took machining. Neither one of us has found work in our specialty.”

“Can’t guarantee all that much specialty work, but I need simple labor

for now. Could put you both on after the temp service time is over.”

“I’ll talk to Helen.”

“Are you tied to town or could you move out here if I got you a trailer?”

“Actually, we’re living in my Dad’s fifth-wheel. We could bring it out. I’m just not sure Helen will want to, but I’ll ask her.”

“Okay.”

That evening Glenn called the three students involved in animal science and asked them to come out the following morning. All were agreeable.

Jeremy and Helen showed up promptly at eight, as did the three students. Between them they got the pastures and other animal spaces marked off for the fencing contractor to come in and start putting up the fences. Except the fencing guy fell and broke his leg the day before he was supposed to start. The parts showed up, but he didn’t.

Glenn decided it was a sign. He climbed into the Talisman and headed for St. Louis again, giving Jeremy and Helen the day off. Glenn had an equipment list of items he was planning on purchasing for the farm, just not this soon. But things needed to progress smoothly for everything to get done on the timetable he had laid out.

Instead of dedicated machines for every task that needed to be done on the farm and the ranch, Glenn had decided to get utility equipment that, with appropriate attachments, could do multiple tasks, with less money tied up overall. He’d read about their use in a fictional story he’d read on the internet and liked the idea.

He’d researched brands on the internet and decided on two brands of tool carriers that he thought would do most of the farm and ranch jobs. One company was Bobcat. They had several machines that would work,

but Glenn opted for the Bobcat A300 skid steer/all wheel steer model and the Bobcat Toolcat 5600T Utility vehicle. A pair of each, plus a good assortment of attachments, Glenn thought, would handle all the small to medium sized jobs on the place.

For medium to large tasks, Glenn opted for Mercedes Benz Unimog U500 utility trucks. They were becoming more available, as were service and parts, through the American distributor, Freightliner. And there were plenty of attachments for them to cover most of what Glenn planned for the operation. That included the open field farming. Unimogs worked well as tractors.

He went ahead and placed the order at Bobcat for one A300 and one Toolcat 5600T. He wouldn't need the others until the following year. He also asked for delivery of several attachments with the two machines, including a posthole digger.

Likewise, at the Freightliner dealer, he bought the one well equipped U500 they had in stock and ordered a second. The other four would be purchased as the demand for them came up.

Glenn got back to his trailer late that night, with assurances that the three pieces of equipment and attendant attachments would be delivered the following afternoon from the two dealers.

The morning of the delivery, Glenn went in to town and bought several shovels and a couple of tampers, along with a set of fence tools. The trucks with the equipment showed up just after two that afternoon. It took the rest of the afternoon for the delivery drivers to familiarize Glenn, Jeremy, and Helen with operating everything. Helen fell in love with the Toolcat and claimed it as her own.

With the weekend coming up, and the availability of several of the group members to contribute their labor, Glenn put Jeremy and Helen to digging post holes and laying out posts for insertion by the larger crew

the next day. The A300 with auger and the Toolcat hauling the posts in the rear bed was an ideal team.

Glenn went in to get the Unimog licensed and insured. With that done, he stopped at a petroleum wholesaler and ordered double wall fuel tanks for the farm, along with a load of fuel. A transfer tank with pump, mounted on the bed of the Unimog, would provide fuel until the tanks were installed.

Things went well that weekend. It wasn't just the animal science people that came to help. People in several of the other disciplines showed up, too. Everyone was excited that they were actually working toward their project goals.

Glenn had wanted something visible on the property to show progress. The fencing worked. So did the equipment, particularly the Bobcats. People were looking for reasons to use them.

One of the attachments that had been in stock at the dealer for the Bobcats was a roto-tiller. The plant science people decided to start a basic garden, just because. Taking turns with the machine, after Jeremy showed them how, three of them tilled up a large space while two others went in for seed.

Glenn gave them money for the seeds, which wasn't much, but also enough to get some basic gardening tools. The garden was in by the end of Sunday, as was most of the fencing.

The following week additional progress was made, though much of it wasn't visible the way the garden and fencing was. While there were several irrigation wells on the three sections of property that were in good shape, Glenn had early on pulled the house well. It was very old and the old steel mesh point was leaking sand. That was on top of not producing much water.

A new six inch well was drilled near where the farm buildings would go, and a four inch well was installed for the new house. Both wells had basic solar powered pumps with a battery box installed for the construction phase. Permanent pumps and tanking systems would be installed later.

Both pumps could feed the huge Invisible Structures Rainstore3® water storage installation, as did the controlled runoff from all the buildings and grassy areas of the farm compound. The water could be used for irrigation as stored. In the unlikely event it was needed for human consumption it would be treated.

In addition to the new fresh water supply, sewage disposal was addressed. A large septic tank was installed for the house and an over engineered leach field put in for it. A similar system was placed to serve the farm and ranch buildings.

Whenever Jeremy and Helen weren't helping with those installations, Glenn had them planting set after set of blackberries. And not the thornless kind, to the two's slight misery. Neither one of them could see any pattern to the planting, but planted the sets where Glenn told them he wanted them.

That weekend several of the students came out again, to finish the fencing, and to lay out the planting grid for an orchard. The tree spade for the Bobcats had come in and the planting holes were dug for both a large permanent fruit and nut orchard, as well as a smaller experimental orchard that the plant science tree specialist would be handling.

The earth shelter building contractor showed up the following Monday with two crews to start the construction of the greenhouse support building and the barn. Glenn got the dirt contractor out again to begin stockpiling earth for the earth sheltering, creating a small lake in the process, near the irrigation well nearest the building site. There were county inspection people on the property several different days to make

sure everything was permitted properly and going in to code.

The permitting process was keeping Glenn fairly busy. With the non-traditional construction, he had to get variances from the county to get the buildings built the way he wanted. The bank having been willing to lend the money had helped.

There was a steady stream of students from the group coming out to work in the garden and orchard, as the trees were put in, and to just check on the progress. Glenn had delivered a small open plan mobile home for them to use to clean up in, and have a place for lunches and what not. It was plumbed to the house well and septic systems, as were Glenn's trailer and Jeremy and Helen's fifth wheel.

With the new building in place Glenn and Jeremy and Helen were spared the constant traipsing in and out of their dwellings by the students needing to go to the bathroom.

The second Unimog, second A300, and second Toolcat were delivered. Those of the group that would be dealing with field crops were sent on a farm equipment hunt, with it in mind that the Unimogs would be the tractor. It was too late to get started with all the various crops the students would be working with, but they planted those that were okay to plant late spring.

Glenn installed a sophisticated weather reporting system in the group's mobile home for the students to use in recording weather data.

The greenhouse support building was finished shortly after the greenhouse components arrived. The steel frames and poly-carbonate panels went up quickly in the twelve moderate sized, and four large greenhouses Glenn had purchased. When the greenhouses were furnished, another weekend party put the four that were for the project into operation, much to the delight of the plant science people.

When Glenn had the students begin planting in his commercial greenhouses, Tabitha threw something of a fit. Brittany got her out of Glenn's way before she could make more of a scene than she already had.

It was only later that Tabitha heard that Glenn was having the students keep track of the work they did on his behalf. He would be paying them a wage for the work. When Brittany told Tabitha that she calmed down and managed to be civil to Glenn the rest of the time she was at the farm that weekend.

The next project the second building crew started, while the first crew was still working on the barn, was a long, south facing string of thirty-two feet wide by thirty-two feet long by sixteen feet high inside dimension rooms. They too, were earth sheltered, with a the south facing vertical wall two walls of concrete filled in between with a wall of thick insulation and earth.

Each room had a sixteen foot wide garage door in the south wall, next to a set of metal double entrance doors. There were several windows in the south wall, and a standard metal door and window allowing exit out the north side. There were six light tube skylights in each ceiling. Each room also had metal double entrance doors connecting to the rooms on either side. With twenty of the rooms the structure was almost seven hundred feet long. On top of the roof earth berming was poured a concrete slab with a four foot high perimeter wall.

Glenn got many questions about the rooms. Not a one of the group had requested anything like them. They weren't really suitable for the work that many of the group would be doing. Glenn would only smile and say, "Time will tell. Right now they are just spares."

The other question he began to hear was, "When will you start on our building?"

“Next.” It satisfied them. He’d been true to his word from the beginning.

And it was the next building project started when the string of rooms was completed. The barn was coming along nicely and, if kept on schedule, would be completed before winter.

The building housing the group’s workrooms, too, was earth sheltered, but it would be difficult to tell if one didn’t know. The walls and roof were built the same way the greenhouse support building was, and the south wall of the spare rooms structure. Walls of poured concrete, with a thick spray on layer of foam insulation on the inside of the outer wall and then the rest of the space between the insulation and inner wall filled with compacted earth. The outer wall would be brick façade. The flat roof, again like the spare room building and greenhouse building was thick concrete, topped with earth, a layer of foam board, and another layer of concrete. There was a four foot perimeter wall around it the roof line, too.

It was actually a very similar shape to the greenhouse complex. A central building with several wings. Greenhouses in the one case and rooms with windows in the other. It was two-story, with a veranda around the entire building at ground level and a balcony around the second story. What the members of the group didn’t realize, until the second story was started, was that the building would include housing as well as the first floor working spaces.

The housing consisted of bunk rooms which would share kitchen privileges and separate men’s and women’s locker rooms, individual bedrooms with bath; efficiency/studio apartments; and one-bedroom apartments. All the rooms and work areas were wired for digital and analog electronics, including high-speed internet access, and satellite TV.

When the barn was finished, the crew that had been working on it began helping with the new structure. Animal science students were turned

loose to begin acquiring their animals, plus those that Glenn wanted.

Glenn brought in the plumbers and electricians to do their job, and then the interior finishers. The barn was finished, and then the work and housing building. The group had what they needed, and Glenn had the beginnings of his working farm.

Simpler Times - Chapter 3

Those in the group, which was growing due to the funding that Glenn was providing, that were willing to work for Glenn were allowed to live at the farm rent free, in the housing units. They were also given a share of the food the farm was starting to produce.

Jeremy and Helen moved into one of the one bedroom units of the housing and work building and gave Jeremy's father back his fifth-wheel travel trailer.

Through the original students in the group, Glenn made contact with recent graduates that had business degrees. He found one willing to work with him in marketing the products the farm and ranch were producing, and would produce in the future.

At the moment the products included some very high quality greenhouse raised organic salad makings and a few vegetables, grown in the greenhouses. The future would bring higher yields, a wider variety, and organic meats. The animals were coming in as Glenn, on the advice of the animal science students, bought stock.

The farm would raise chickens for eggs and for meat; milk cows for milk and other dairy products; Black Angus cattle for meat and leather; American Bison for meat and leather; Ostrich for meat, feathers, and leather; swine for meat and leather; sheep for meat and wool, goats for

meat and milk, rabbits for low fat meat and pelts; tilapia, trout, and catfish for food, worms for fish food and chicken food.

Additional animals would be Barb horses for riding and light harness work, and Clydesdales for medium and heavy harness. There was kennel in the barn for those that wanted to have their own dog on the property.

As winter settled in, so did the tenants of the farm. No construction was planned, though finishing and equipping the work areas continued, using the grant money the group had. Though the group had lost two grants due to the private funding, it picked up another large grant because of it.

With outgo slowing, and some income beginning, Glenn finalized some of the additional plans he had for the place and began ordering more long lead items for spring delivery for the projects he had in mind.

Glenn stayed out of the students work areas unless specifically invited, but he spent much of the winter in the other areas of the farm, learning what he could, from the hands-on things he was doing, as well as the reading and research he did every night on the internet.

With not that much for them to do, Glenn equipped one of the 'spare' rooms as a welding and machine shop for them. They would do what was needed around the farm for their base wintertime salary, but could take on outside jobs if they wanted for extra income. Glenn financed their purchase and conversion of an old '70's model Chevy one-ton dually truck to a diesel powered welder's truck so they could do off site jobs.

Quite a bit of equipment began showing up as winter waned. The other two Bobcats arrived, as did two more of the Unimog U500's. The rest of the attachments for the Bobcats and Unimogs also arrived, including the field farming equipment. Six ROKON bikes converted to Hatz diesel engines were completed and delivered. They were primarily for use on the ranch property handling the herds.

Also delivered was the biodiesel production equipment, including an oil press. Ever since the tank farm had been put in, one of the students interested in alternative fuels had been going around town collecting waste oil from restaurants with deep fat fryers. As soon as the equipment was set up in one of the 'spare' rooms, the farm would be on its way to energy independence.

Another component of the planned energy independence also arrived in the form of a truck load of RWE Schott photo-voltaic panels with several Xantrex/Trace inverter systems. Another truck brought the Surette deep cycle batteries for the systems. As soon as the weather broke, the electricians would begin the installations for each building.

Glenn decided to call the supplier that was supposed to be getting a set of generators for the farm. He hadn't heard from him in a while. Sure enough, there was a hold up. It was going to be another three weeks before they could be shipped. There wasn't anything Glenn could do about it. He'd just have to wait.

But he wasn't idle while he waited for the generator. He got with Jeremy and Helen and put them on two projects. The first was to make a set of stills for the production of fuel alcohol. The second was to build a pair of methane generators to produce the fuel to run the stills and the biodiesel production.

Even Tabitha was calm and cool as her plant growth experiments went well in her workroom and one of the greenhouses. She had even taken advantage of the residency possibilities, though she paid a nominal sum rather than do any work for Glenn. Brittany, too, was living at the farm, working with three other people on her project. She helped in the greenhouses, for the most part, for the privilege of living at the farm.

The operation, despite the equipment that Glenn had, was very labor intensive. Fortunately, there were plenty of students needing affordable

room and board. Glenn had plenty of students willing to lend a hand in return for residency at the farm.

Many of them had an interest in several of the aspects of Glenn's approach to a self-sustaining farm and ranch operation. It wasn't just the plant and animal research going on, that brought students out, but also the earth sheltering construction and off grid goal of the farm.

Though Glenn had not planned on a wind powered addition to the battery charging, two of the students whose interests lay in alternative power asked him to consider adding that option so they could study it further. He agreed and ordered an Air-X 400 watt, 48 volt dc unit and an Excel 48 volt dc, 7.5 kilowatt unit with the necessary materials needed to install and hook up the units to the solar power system that was going in rapidly.

Work was started on additional structures for the farm and ranch operation. In anticipation of the herds growing, weather shelters were constructed in several places on the section of ground set aside for grazing. Hay shelters were also constructed, as the farm would produce hay to carry the grazing animals for at least two years, plus enough to sell every year.

Silos were erected to hold the farm's field crops. This was to allow the best profit for field crops, the crop being held until the best price could be obtained. In addition they acted as storage for grain fed animals, as did the concrete lined pits that held silage.

The four Unimogs, with three point hitches attached, with the recently delivered farm equipment, were used to get the fields planted. One of the crops was hemp. The group had managed to get a special use permit from the BATFE and Department of Agriculture to grow it for experimental use. There was enough acreage permitted to allow a significant amount of it to be processed for biodiesel. But the farm also planted other oil producing crops to ensure an adequate supply of

biodiesel for the entire operation.

The methane produced from plant and animal waste was providing enough gas to run the burners for the stills and for the biodiesel equipment. The alcohol was sold to a petroleum wholesaler for blending in gasoline. The farm kept its alcohol tanks full, only selling down one tank to half full at a time.

The students also planted several specialty crops for their research. The third full section of land was dedicated to cash crops for Glenn. The greenhouses, both the commercial production ones for Glenn, and those for the experiments for the group were going full bore.

Besides the breeding stock the ranch operation had acquired the previous fall, enough stock had been acquired for finishing over the winter to allow harvesting that spring. With the help of the marketing students, Glenn had made deals with restaurants in St. Louis, the Cape, and Memphis, to provide them with not only beef, chicken, and fish; but lamb, mutton, goat, rabbit, bison, and ostrich, as well. That was in addition to the organic vegetables and salad components. It would be another two years before the fruit and nut trees in the orchard began to bear commercially.

Two of the commercial green houses were dedicated to semi-tropical and tropical plants, including small trees. Much of the production of organic lemons, limes, bananas, kiwi, cocoa, spices, herbs, and coffee was used at the farm. What excess there was went to organic shops in St. Louis and Memphis. So did the farm produced eggs, milk, cheeses, and other specialty animal products. They were produced in two of the 'spare' rooms, now equipped to handle the processing of the farm's products. Students did do some of the work, but the butchering and meat cutting was done by a butcher that Glenn had hired.

Work started on two additional large earth sheltered barns and the main

earth sheltered house. The generators finally arrived and were wired into farm's electrical system. The solar panels on each building were able to handle 100% of the normal draw during daylight hours and still put a charge to the batteries. The wind turbines added some battery charging capacity.

When electrical draws went over the norms, commercial power picked up the slack and recharged the batteries. If commercial power wasn't available, the generator set kicked in. One generator would kick in if the solar panels and batteries weren't handling the load. The one generator could handle the normal load, without the solar input. A second genset would kick in if higher than normal usage was needed, and the batteries were discharged. There was a third genset that would come on line if either of the first two was down for service. A fourth identical genset was available for use to replace one of the other three if one of them needed a rebuild.

The new house and barns were finished before fall and Glenn moved into the house. He sold the trailer.

The last two of the six Unimog U500's came in and were available to help with the field crop harvest that fall. Between the small amount of hemp that was produced, the canola oil, and used deep fryer oil, the farm was able to produce all the fuel it needed, with enough left over to keep the tanks full and still sell off some excess.

Though the operation was often the butt of jokes because of the use of the Unimogs instead of conventional tractors, things were going well on the production farm. It was the same for the experimental crops those in the group were raising. Even the garden did exceptionally well. The farm was fulfilling all its contracts with the organic food distributors that served St. Louis and Memphis.

All-in-all, Glenn was quite pleased. He'd gone through the letter of credit he'd received from the bank with the property and operation for

collateral, as well as half of his retirement funds. He still had half of the retirement and all of the money his uncle had left him. The farm and ranch was now bringing in significant income and Glenn began to invest again in his future retirement.

He went about it a bit differently than he had in the past, due, in part, to many of the things he'd learned on the internet. He transferred the remainder of his retirement paper assets to Treasury Bill investments, and began putting the new money into gold and silver as a hedge for the future.

It was going so well, that Glenn was becoming overwhelmed. He had quite a bit of help from the students on running the farm, but decided an experienced farm manager would be a good idea. It had been his original thought anyway. It was still a good idea. He put out the word and began to take resumes that fall for a manager to take over the next spring.

He talked to many applicants, including a couple of students that would be graduating with degrees in farm management, but had no working experience other than their work on their family farms. One had also worked at Glenn's the past spring and summer.

Becoming one to really hedge his bets, Glenn decided to hire both an experienced farm manager and a green assistant manager. Glenn figured that between them, with his oversight, the farm and ranch could be run with the best of the old ideas and the best of the new.

He started the process to get two additional small earth sheltered homes built to house the manager and his family, and the assistant manager, who was currently single, but had a live-in boyfriend. For the meantime Glenn had two identical three bedroom manufactured housing units brought in and installed.

Fredrick Grebbs wasn't too happy about working with not only an inexperienced assistant, but a female one, at that. But he agreed. And

Alison McGrady was a difficult person not to like. Glenn thought it would work okay.

He had many talks with the two of them during the winter, getting across his short term goals and the long term goals he had in mind, and his thoughts on how to achieve them. It wasn't long before Fred and Alison established a stable working relationship. Glenn was satisfied that things would go well.

He eased off his own labors at the farm and ranch and left the day to day running to Fred and Alison. Things did go well. That spring, despite bad weather, the crops went in on schedule. The greenhouses were producing well, and the herds were now large enough to begin some real harvesting. That included the bison and ostrich operations. They were not only doing better than Glenn expected, but the demand was higher, too.

The farm got good prices on the grains they'd stored and held for that very reason, keeping back enough for feed for the animals for two years and seed for two year's plantings.

But Glenn was still restless and couldn't explain why. He'd done what he wanted, to the best of his ability. He had food for the future. But suddenly he felt vulnerable. As vulnerable as he had before he got the farm. Why?

He began to access the steps he'd taken to get to where he was. Why had he decided to buy gold and silver as his retirement? That had been a sudden decision. It was as a hedge. Much like the farm itself. A hedge for bad times. Suddenly Glenn muttered to himself, "Holy cow! I'm a survivalist!"

Glenn began to go back and check some of the internet sources he'd used in planning the various elements of the farm. Sure enough, a few of them were actual survival sites, while many of his searches had pulled

up survival related sites based on the words he used in the Yahoo search engine.

He began to research the survival movement just as he had organic farming. He found it a fascinating subject, starting with Civil Defense in the 40's and WW II through the Cold War into the FEMA era. Then the actual Survivalist Movement with its roots in the late 50's through the modern start in the 70's and the media-made maniacal Survivalist, to the current movement that no longer used the word Survivalist.

It seemed he was a prepper. But in only two ways. Food and fuel. And even when it came to fuel, only the farm was relatively self-sufficient. The Talisman took gasoline, which they couldn't make. And it would be extremely difficult to convert it to straight alcohol use. Better to get a new vehicle. "No," Glenn muttered, "Not new. Something not too vulnerable to EMP, whatever that entails, and with a diesel engine so I can use the biodiesel."

Glenn made that his next project. A diesel powered, EMP resistant vehicle. He did more research on the internet and the St. Louis newspapers. Then he went looking in St. Louis. In the end, he found a used 2000 ¾ ton four-wheel-drive Chevy Suburban with a blown engine. Just what he needed.

He ordered a crated GM 6.5L non-electronic diesel engine to replace the blown gasoline engine. To keep it as EMP resistant as possible, Glen opted for an old style generator rather than an alternator to supply the starting batteries and the deep discharge battery that was installed to run 12 volt equipment and the 110 volt inverter.

A St. Louis diesel mechanic would do the engine swap for him. Glenn looked at many different front and rear bumpers on the internet and in Off-road show rooms, but went with shop build models made by Jeremy and Helen. He did buy a commercial heavy-duty roof rack for the Suburban and mounted some pioneer tools and two spare tires on it. That

gave him four spare tires with one each on the front bumper and rear bumper.

Though the Suburban had a forty-gallon fuel tank, it was for gasoline. Not only was that tank changed out, along with its associated fuel lines, to a forty-five gallon model, but a second tank was added. A fifty-six gallon in-frame tank.

He wasn't planning to go rock scaling with the Suburban, it wasn't really suited for it, but he liked some of the features on the vehicles that did. So an on-board welder alternator was added, as was an air pump. A second power steering pump was added to drive the front mount hydraulic winch, and the receiver mount hydraulic winch for use from the rear of the Suburban.

Getting the Suburban up and running kept Glenn occupied for a couple of months, though he did continue his research on prepping. Okay. He had food covered. Water, too. And transportation, especially when you considered the horses in addition to the Suburban. Oh. And shelter. His whole house was better shelter than most people's basements.

But his further research had him concerned about hanging onto everything, if things got really bad. He didn't see much that he could do if the government decided to take over his place. But what about brigands if there was a collapse of government. A place like his would be a prime target.

Glenn wasn't much for firearms. Never had been. But the possibilities he was reading about in preparedness sites, especially the various forums, were giving him second thoughts. Glenn's attempts to bring up the subject with several of the residents of the farm met with some hostility. So, as Fred and Alison ran things, Glenn began to research in depth an armory for the farm.

There were plenty of opinions on what was best, for a variety of

scenarios. Glenn was becoming one that liked to cover all the bases. He picked up a variety of firearms, several of each, one or two at a time over several months. He kept the weapons acquisitions a secret.

He took a local hunting class, and a couple of other weapons handling classes in St. Louis, and then got a concealed weapon carry permit. Glenn went armed from then on, everywhere it was legal to do so.

Preparing for the worst became something of a hobby, since he now had a reliable income stream, and time on his hands. Glenn began to watch the news with a new eye, considering almost every news and weather story as to how it might affect him and his future.

One of the first things he did was to switch his gold and silver holdings from dealer storage vaults to his own vault in the house. The second thing was to double his buying program of the precious metals. It was no longer just his hedged retirement fund, along with the farm and ranch, it was a hedge against disaster. He also converted his T-bills to gold and silver.

As he accumulated the firearms, Glenn began to wonder what would happen if he did lose the farm and ranch, anyway. He began to plan a small retreat some distance away from the farm and ranch. There was plenty of land available, with the market the way it was. Glenn thought about setting up a second farm. A much smaller one. But he decided the place would be a simple hole-up retreat. A place to stay and recoup if he ever needed to do so.

It was relatively simple, and not all that expensive, to acquire a small piece of property several miles from the farm and ranch. It was hilly and of very little use for farming. Nor was it prime real estate for development. It was ideal for what Glenn wanted. He wanted as few people as possible to know about it.

Glenn decided to make it a one-man project. Everything was going well

at the Farm. They could spare one of the Unimogs. For the first stage of the project, Glenn had the backhoe attachment mounted on the back of one of the U500's. Glenn disappeared for three days with it.

He had his camping gear and camped out at the site for those days. It took him two full days to dig out the area where the retreat shelter would be. When he went back to the farm he had the backhoe dismounted and a dump bed mounted on the truck and the pallet forks mounted to the front lift arms. An equipment trailer was attached and Glenn headed for St. Louis.

The truck wouldn't make it up to the site with the trailer. The truck alone had barely made it. Glenn securely blocked the trailer and unhooked it. He began to unload the trailer with the forks on the front of the Unimog, taking each pallet up and placing it where he needed it.

With the materials he needed in place, Glenn went back to the farm. One of the A300's was loaded onto the trailer, along with several attachments and Glenn again disappeared for several days. After unloading and transferring the A300 and attachments to the building site, Glenn unhooked the trailer and went to the nearby gravel pit.

He made several trips to and from the local gravel pit to haul in aggregate with which to make concrete using the Portland cement he'd picked up in St. Louis. After moving the sand and gravel, Glenn took the Unimog into Cape Girardeau. It didn't take long to buy and install a five-hundred-gallon plastic water tank on the bed of the Unimog. Glenn also bought a pump and hoses with which to transfer the water. The farm store agreed to let Glenn fill it for a small fee.

Glenn took the load of water back to the building site. It was back breaking work mixing and pouring the concrete Glenn made up in the Bobcat cement mixer for the footings and floor of the shelter, using the trucked in water, aggregate, and cement.

He took a break when the floor was finished and just relaxed for several days while the concrete set up enough to add the walls. Glenn had thought the concrete work was bad. Laying the cinder blocks in the hole in the ground was worse. But he worked steadily, mixing up small batches of mortar as he worked around the perimeter of the building, laying the H-form blocks among the vertical rebar and adding horizontal rebar every course of blocks.

After a few rows were laid, Glenn mixed up another batch of concrete and filled the blocks. It took a solid week to complete the walls and columns that would support the roof. Glenn backfilled against the walls, after bringing the waterproof barrier up the outside walls that he had put down before he poured the footings and floor. He took another break then, taking the equipment back to the farm for security.

Glenn checked on the operation of the farm and ranch. Everything was going well. So, after two weeks of rest, Glenn took the Unimog again, with a flat bed mounted on it and the forks installed, and headed into St. Louis again to pick up the components he needed to make the roof supports for the concrete roof. It took him another week to place the timbers using an extension boom on one of the forks of the Unimog, and apply the cross timbers and galvanized metal.

When the rebar was in place above the metal he went after the A300 and cement mixer again. The roof pour took two days of steady work, with Glenn only taking twenty or thirty minute cat naps between pours, the same way he had when he'd poured the floor, to keep a good bond at the joints of the pours of the concrete.

He rested for a couple of days and then began the finish work. That consisted of laying a thirty-inch diameter galvanized culvert from the hole he'd framed in one wall of the shelter to a point forty feet away that would be used as an emergency exit/entrance.

Glenn also finished the regular entrance and the interior of the shelter. It

took a couple of trips with the Unimog to move the stuff he'd bought to equip and supply the shelter. When everything was inside and secure, he went to a wrecking yard in St. Louis and bought five wrecked Cadillacs.

He paid to have the front seats cut out, large holes cut into the floor pans of all five cars, and their wheels removed. Glenn hauled them to the site and placed one over the main entrance/exit and one over the emergency exit/entrance. One of the cars was set over the buried water tank. The other two he placed randomly and added a few old appliances and other junk here and there.

Glenn broadcast grass and flower seed over the areas he had disturbed. In a few months the place would look like a wilderness dumping ground. Satisfied he had a secure place to which he could bug out if he needed, Glenn smiled and headed home, ready to take on the next project he'd been thinking about during the idle hours of the retreat building.

Simpler Times - Chapter 4

After all the hard work he'd done that summer, Glenn was in the best shape of his life. He intended to stay that way. The local hospital was good, but he had quite a few people working and living on site at the farm now. Accidents can happen. So can disasters.

He caught Brittany leaving her research greenhouse one afternoon. "Brittany, can I talk to you for a minute?"

"I'm just on my way back to the workroom to log some data into the computer." She held up a clipboard. "Can it wait just a little while?"

"Sure," replied Glenn. "Whenever it is convenient for you."

"About six? At the workroom?"

“I’ll be there. Thanks.”

Brittany smiled a distracted smile and hurried away.

That summer was a scorcher. Glenn whiled away the hours checking on the various working groups, asking if everything was going well and if any of them needed anything. It was somewhat amusing that what he got asked for the most was a swimming pool. The work was going well, with everything that Glenn had furnished.

It was only four o’clock when Glenn finished his ‘rounds’, as he thought of the trip. He went back to the house and studied the large drawing of the farm and ranch facilities on the wall of his study. He began to smile. A pool would work into what he already had in mind. “It’ll be even better,” Glenn muttered to himself.

He made several calls and then went to meet Brittany. He knocked and entered the workroom when Brittany called, “Come in.”

She was still working at the computer. “Just a few more minutes,” Brittany said over her shoulder.

Glenn found a place to sit down and waited patiently. It was almost 6:30 when Brittany turned around and noticed Glenn. She colored slightly. “Oh! Glenn! I’m sorry. I forgot all about our meeting.”

Glenn waved a hand. “No problem. Our meeting was at your convenience.”

“So,” she asked, “What did you want to talk about?”

“I was hoping you could provide me with some contacts with nursing or pre-med students. I’m thinking about putting in a small clinic, for just in case events. I’m a little worried about someone getting hurt out here and

suing me. I want to provide some immediate first-aid care.

“I know the ambulance service and hospital are good, but we’re a ways out... And... well... just because.”

“I think it’s a good idea.” Brittany waved an arm toward the first-aid kit and fire extinguisher hanging on the wall of the work room. “Of course we have those, but something more in depth would be nice. And I think I know someone that would relish the chance to set up an aid station out here. He’s involved with the nursing program at the college.”

“What’s his name?”

“Harry O’Malley. He’s a Paramedic. He takes the pre-med and nursing students on ambulance runs on a regular basis to get them some real world training. We’ve dated a couple of times, but he’s a little too intense...”

Brittany pulled her organizer close. “I’ve got his number in here.”

Glenn took a pen and a notebook from the breast pocket of his shirt.

“Here it is.” Brittany gave Glenn the number and he wrote it down.

“Thanks, Brittany,” Glenn said as he stood. “Everything going all right with the work? You have everything you need?”

“Everything is great,” she replied. “You’ve really done us, and the community, a service by setting this place up the way you have.”

Glenn smiled as they walked out of the work room. “How’s Tabitha handling the fact that the place is making money?”

Brittany smiled in return. “She’s coping. She’s actually rather proud of some of the compliments she’s received on her work with organic

vegetables. She's also pleased with how green you've made the place. It was far more than she expected."

"Good. I'm glad to hear it. Thanks again for your help. I'll see you later."

Brittany watched Glenn walk away, rather jauntily, a curious expression on her face. She thought, after the first couple of meetings with him that he was interested in her, but he hadn't really shown it since then. "He's not that much older than I am. Oh, well," she sighed, and turned toward the stairs leading to the second floor.

Tabitha was approaching. "Brittany, hi! You finished for the day?"

"Yep. What's up? Some of us were going to get a Mancala tournament started. You in?"

Brittany shook her head. "No. I need to do some research after I get a bite to eat."

"Well, if you change your mind, we'll be in Augustus' room."

Brittany went to the common kitchen and made herself a sandwich. She'd taken a real liking to the ostrich burgers the butcher was making. It didn't take long to grill the patty and she was soon eating it on a whole wheat bun one of the dietetics had made from the organic wheat grown on the farm.

She was the only one in the kitchen to start, but others began to filter in and Brittany finished up and cleaned up, then went back to her work room, feeling just a bit unsettled.

Glenn called Harry O'Malley and left a message on his machine when Harry didn't pick up. Glenn got on the computer and began researching medical equipment.

It was two days before Harry called Glenn. They set up a meeting at the Farm for that following Saturday afternoon. When he showed up and shook Glenn's hand, Glenn could tell what Brittany meant. Harry was a very intense person. Also tall, dark, and very good looking.

"No wonder she dated him," Glenn thought to himself.

"Harry, what I need is some advice on setting up and equipping a clinic here on the Farm, in case of accidents."

"Sure. No problem. Something like a stationary ambulance?"

"A little beyond that," Glenn said, "though that is a good thought. Something that would allow you or a doctor to do your stuff, excluding major surgery and elective procedures."

Harry's eyes widened. "You want a real clinic, then?"

Glenn nodded. "Say a trauma room, couple of general treatment rooms, four to eight bed recovery ward, nursing station, some offices, supply room, and whatever else might be needed.

"Wow! I can help, be glad to, actually, but you really need to talk to someone with more clinic experience than me."

"Okay. I'll do that. But it's okay if I call you for some advice later?"

"Sure thing. Hey. I heard that Brittany Jones-Shaeffer was working out here. Any chance I can talk to her?"

"Don't know if she's here or not. Go over to building five. Someone there can direct you to her work room or apartment."

"Okay. Thanks. Call me any time." Harry was gone.

Glenn got out his St. Louis yellow pages and did some research and then planned a trip to the city to do a little hands-on research.

He visited two dozen clinics in and around St. Louis and then went to see his architect friend. “Can you design me a small, comprehensive, clinic, with an exercise room and attached pool facility?”

“Branching out a little, I see,” Clay said. “I’ll need to bring in a consultant on this, but sure, I can do it.”

“As soon as you have the basic dimensions, let me know so I can start the preliminary work.”

“Okay. Man, I’ve got to come down and take a look at this place of yours. What else you planning to add?”

Glenn grinned. “Don’t know right now, but you’ll probably be second or third to find out.” Glenn shook Clay’s hand and left, headed back to the farm in his Talisman.

He began the ordering process for those things he knew would go in the clinic, exercise room, and pool, which would have a greenhouse enclosure.

It was late fall before Clay got back to Glenn, other than to say he was working on the project. Glenn stored the things he bought for the project in the still unused second barn. As soon as spring broke, Glenn broke ground on the project. It took all spring and well into the summer, but finally the health building, as Glenn called it, was complete.

There was the well equipped clinic; exercise room; the large, greenhouse enclosed pool; and two locker rooms, men’s and women’s, to serve the exercise room and pool. The pool and exercise room were instant hits and received much use.

Glenn was well pleased with the minimal amount of wood the outside wood furnaces were burning during the winter, but he decided he wanted a better supply. Right now he had to buy a few cords to carry the farm through, over and above the amount of free wood he got having worked deals with tree trimmers and the electrical company for their take downs, and various businesses to get their discarded single use wood pallets.

Glenn bought two more hill farms and began to harvest the wood from them, replanting with ash so he would eventually have fully coppicing wood lots, either one of which would provide more than enough wood for the farm.

Spring time rolled around, as it usually did in March. All the students that had left for the winter were now back, ready to start on the spring work. Glenn decided it would be a good time to go camping.

The long range forecast was calling for some rain, but Glenn had good equipment and didn't mind camping out in poorer weather. He had second thoughts about it when he saw the news the night before he planned on leaving.

Things were heating up in Eastern Europe. Russia had just had a communist coup and troops were advancing toward the Belarus and Ukraine borders. Germany immediately went on alert and called for UN action.

China immediately recognized the Communist government and offered assistance if any of Russia's neighbors tried to interfere. Both communist governments warned the UN leadership not to interfere.

The US protested the coup and refused to recognize the new government. Like Germany, the US went to a higher state of alert. France called for a cooling off period. Communication with Poland was cut off, apparently by the current régime, though there were reports of

fighting all over Poland. The Southern Republics, too, went silent.

There was nothing but rhetoric for three days, and then the new Communist Government of Russia called for a new Warsaw pact. Poland would be a charter member. There was still nothing from Poland directly. Similar announcements were made from Moscow about the Ukraine and Belarus.

When the government in Moscow declared that the new United Germany would come into the new Warsaw pact, intact, Germany launched a pre-emptive strike at the Russian forces advancing now through Poland, Belarus, and the Ukraine.

Brutally enacted coups, undoubtedly orchestrated by the Russian communists, brought new communist governments to Slovakia and the Czech Republics.

France declared its neutrality. The British government joined Germany in declaring war against Russia.

China immediately declared war on Britain and Germany, and began an invasion of Taiwan.

North Korea invaded South Korea. Three nuclear devices were detonated in Japan. Immediate speculation was that it was North Korea. Others blamed China, since they were already staging amphibious assault exercises on their coast of the Sea of Japan.

Two days later, on March 27th, 2008, after it was announced by the President that a nuclear device had taken out a US ballistic missile submarine on station off Japan, the US Congress, in joint session, declared war on Russia, China, and their allies.

Television cameras showed near pandemonium in the meeting chamber when the vote was read. Everyone was running toward the exits. The

President and Vice-President were being whisked off in different directions behind the podium by Secret Service agents.

“This is it,” Glenn muttered, sitting on his sofa in his earth sheltered home, watching the big screen TV go blank. He got up in a hurry and ran over to the intercom station mounted in the wall near the kitchen.

Glenn hit the master override and began to speak. “Attention, everyone, attention! Take shelter in the basements of your building! Take shelter in the basement of your building! We may be under attack with nuclear weapons. Everyone take shelter immediately!”

Releasing the intercom switch, Glenn picked up a radio microphone, keyed it, and said, “All units! All units! Return to the Farm and take shelter! Return to the Farm and take shelter! We are under attack with nuclear weapons! We are under attack! Take shelter!” Dropping the microphone, Glenn headed outside to make sure everyone was getting into shelter.

He was vastly disappointed to see people standing around, looking at the sky in all directions. He’d planned some drills for various scenarios, but had just never got around to running them, knowing that many of the students would probably object to the situation, as they realized that Glenn was, in fact, one of the dreaded Survivalists.

That didn’t matter now. “Come on! Come on!” he yelled, waving them over to the work and residence building. “Down in the basement. Everyone. Please!”

He was having no luck at all getting people to head for the shelter areas he had built into the basement of every structure. Only when a streak of contrail suddenly appeared over head, and moments later the sky lit up to their south, in the direction of Cape Girardeau, did people begin to respond.

The ground shock, when it reached them, knocked almost everyone down. There were cries of 'earthquake' and 'The Big One' as Glenn continued to plead with people to take shelter. The blast wave, nothing more than a quick, hard wind, and then reversal, seemed to shake some of the students out of their daze.

Some started toward the building entrance and then more followed. Glenn grabbed one of them and said, "Keep everyone moving!" and then he ran for one of the barns to get those workers to head for shelter.

Fortunately at least a couple of people had realized what was happening and were bringing in the animals from the pastures, riding two of the Hatz converted ROKON bikes, to get them into the shelter of the barns.

Glenn helped where he could as several more people began to do the same thing. When the animals were secured, he hustled everyone toward the shelters in the basements of the barns. He checked every building, going at a run from one to the other, calling out for people to head for the basement of their building.

Finally he ran back to his house and into the basement. He went to the intercom panel and called each building shelter in turn and asked whoever had taken charge to get him a census and check for missing people.

Glenn waited anxiously until he heard back from each of the building shelters. Everyone was accounted for and in one of the shelters. After checking the CD V-717 radiation survey meter for signs of fallout, Glenn made the rounds of the buildings again, this time using the 30" diameter culverts that connected the building basements with each other.

Only Fredrick and Alison had been informed of the presence of the tunnels and the shelters. Glenn had insisted that they take some FEMA sponsored training in disaster preparedness. Fredrick had done so reluctantly, Alison eagerly. It seemed that only Glenn, besides Fredrick

and Alison had any sort of training for the situation.

Glenn decided to place Fredrick and Alison in separate shelters, as shelter managers. Fredrick would be in the animal barn shelter with responsibility for it and the shelter in the 'spares' rooms basement. Glenn sent Alison to the work and residential shelter. She would manage it and the shelter under the greenhouse support building.

When Glenn ran across the name on the census sheet of Harry O'Malley, he found him and asked him to take charge of the clinic shelter. Curious, Glenn asked him, "What brought you out here today?"

"Remember, you asked me to take stock of the supplies of the clinic from time to time?"

Glenn nodded.

"It's my day off. I was here doing that. And trying to see Brittany. I think she's been avoiding me." He paused for a moment and then asked Glenn, "Thanks for having the shelter, but I think I may have to leave. I have a responsibility to the community. What do you think?"

"You have a responsibility to yourself first," Glenn said somberly. "You won't be much good out there if you come down with radiation sickness. Your skills will be invaluable in the aftermath of this. I can't fathom why they would have hit the Cape, but one of the countries did. You may wind up being the only medical professional in a very large area."

"I don't know. It just seems like I'm letting people down."

"I won't try to make you stay, if you want to leave to try to help."

"I tried to get my car started to leave as soon as it happened, but it wouldn't start. A bunch of the others tried their vehicles, too. Not a one started."

Glenn considered the risk/benefits of offering to let Harry take one of the diesel ROKON's. He was sure they would run.

"If you insist on leaving," Glenn said, "you can take one of the ROKON's, until you get other transportation. Do you think your ambulance will run?"

Harry turned white when Glenn asked that question. "Geez!" he said, "I never even thought about that. I don't know what I could do if it didn't. And it probably won't."

"You're more than welcome here, but if you want to go, let Fredrick know and have him call me to release one of the ROKON's." Glenn said and walked away, his fingers crossed that Harry would decide to stay. Glenn really thought it would be best, but wouldn't try to make Harry stay. Much better if he stayed on his own.

When Glenn checked with Fredrick half an hour later, Harry had not asked for one of the bikes. Glenn breathed a sigh of relief. But other problems cropped up almost immediately. Other people had had time to think about things and wanted to leave, despite the sudden arrival of fallout.

Glenn announced that the radiation had jumped up to 50R and some of those wanting to leave changed their mind. But not all. Brittany and Tabitha were with a group that approached Glenn as he was leaving the clinic shelter.

"You have to let us out of here," Tabitha said. She looked like she had been crying, but was now dry eyed.

"Yes!" cried another. "I want to go home!"

Glenn hardened his heart, after a glance at Brittany. "Okay. I'm not

keeping anyone here. Anyone that wants to can leave. But you'll have to find transportation on your own. I'll not risk the farm equipment that still runs, nor the horses."

"Why not?" Tabitha asked angrily. "The horses are doomed, just like we are. We just want to go out and be free for a few minutes. I don't want to die in hole in the ground."

"We're not doomed!" Glenn said. "We're in good shelter and have all the necessities. Barring some kind of ridiculously bad luck, we should come out of this with shining colors."

"Shining colors!" Tabitha almost screamed. "How can you say that? Haven't you read, or at least seen, *On the Beach*? The crazy politicians and war mongers have doomed us all."

"Quit saying that," Glenn said, forcefully. "We are not doomed! There wasn't a lick of truth in that story. It was an anti-war story and paid no attention to the facts of the matter when it comes to nuclear war."

"I've been trying to tell her to have hope," Brittany said quietly, stepping up to Tabitha to lay an arm around her shoulders.

Tabitha shook Brittany's arm off roughly. "There is no hope. Don't you understand? We're all going to die! Every living thing on Earth will die!" She looked defiantly at Glenn. "Better to die now than later. You that try to survive will just envy those of us that died first, because you will suffer greatly until you do die. And this is all because of people like you!"

Coldly Glenn said, "You will note that I am not trying to stop you from going outside. I won't allow you to take any of the Farm or Ranch equipment or animals. You will die if you do go out, from the radiation."

"Please, Glenn," Brittany pleaded, as Tabitha headed for the entrance of

the shelter. “Don’t let her go out there!”

“It’s her choice,” Glenn replied, watching Tabitha and several more also headed for the shelter door. “Their choice.” He walked over to where the CD V-717 was mounted on the wall of the clinic shelter. “Look. It’s already up over 100R now and the fallout has barely started. We’re close enough to the blast to probably have fallout radiation as high as 1000R or more. A few hours out in that and they really will be dead. I for one will not be envying them that death.”

“But can’t you stop her, somehow?”

“I could. But I believe in people’s right to self-determination, even if it is based on erroneous information and the person is too obstinate to even listen to reason and an explanation of known facts.”

When it came down to it, of the group that started out, only Tabitha and two others, both women, went outside.

“Isn’t there anything you can do? Will do?” Brittany pleaded.

Glenn frowned, but said, “If she stays around the buildings you can talk to her over the intercom. Try to persuade her to come back inside and decontaminate.”

Brittany followed Glenn over to an out of the way corner of the shelter and Glenn showed her how to bring back the mechanic’s crawler that he would use first to go to the main farm house.

When they were in the house shelter, Glenn went over to a control panel sitting on a desk. “You’ve seen the security cameras around. I can control them from here.” He flipped through several camera views until they saw Tabitha and the other two on the monitor.

All three were sitting cross-legged on the grass near the center of the

compound of buildings. The fallout was coming down like snow. They were already coated with the gray dust. Glenn flipped a switch and pointed to a microphone sitting on the desk.

Brittany began to talk and Glenn busied himself elsewhere. Quite some time later Brittany called Glenn over. "Janis and Olive are coming back in."

Quickly Glenn said, "Have them come to the house. I don't want them contaminating the other shelters." He looked at Brittany. "You'll need to help me. They are going to have to strip and shower off as they come in."

Brittany nodded. She turned back to the monitor and the mike. "I'll be back to talk to you some more, Tab. Janis, you and Olive come over to the house. We'll decontaminate you here."

Glenn got out two of the lightweight Tyvek jumpsuits he had for such a situation and showed Brittany how to work the decontamination shower off the air-lock entry to the shelter. He stayed handy, but let Brittany get the two women stripped and showered and into the jump suits.

Glenn took both women to the clinic shelter for Harry to monitor, and rejoined Brittany. It was another hour of on-again off-again talking before Tabitha too stood up and headed for the house. Brittany decontaminated her and got her dressed in another of the jump suits.

Glenn let Brittany take the muttering Tabitha through the tunnel to the clinic shelter. Glenn just shook his head at Tabitha's repeated mumbling, "I should be dead. I should be dead. I should be dead."

Glenn did a thorough cleaning of the decontamination room, handling the women's discarded clothing with long tongs. He shoved them out of the room through an access port that opened into a lead lined concrete holding container. Once the radiation had died down they would be

further decontaminated and then washed.

Brittany came back to the house shelter and told Glenn, “Harry had given all three of them something to help get them to sleep.” She paused, looking at Glenn as he looked back at her, a neutral look on his face. “What’s going to happen to them? I don’t know much about radiation effects on humans.”

“They will get radiation sickness,” Glenn replied. “Bad cases of it. A lot depends on how much of the fallout they inhaled. Very much and they’re goners. With Tabitha staying out as long as she did, she’ll be much worse. Her dosage may very well be fatal, even in the short run. All three have very high risk of cancers and other damage. If they do live, they’ll probably be sterile.”

“Oh, Lord! Why wouldn’t they listen?” Brittany started crying and stepped toward Glenn. He took her in his arms and led her cry herself out.

Finally Brittany stepped back and wiped her eyes with the sides of her hands. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t worry about it,” replied Glenn. “I think I’d better take over to Harry the information I have on radiation sickness. He may not know much about it.”

“He said he’d only had a little training about it. I’m sure he would appreciate some help.”

Glenn went over to a large bookcase and ran his fingers across several books and binders on the shelves. “Here it is. Radiation sickness.” He pulled the three-ring binder from the shelf. “Stuff I’ve downloaded from the Internet.”

Brittany followed him over to the clinic shelter and stayed to study the

information with Harry. Glenn checked on the other shelters and then went back to the house shelter when he was satisfied everyone was situated for the long days to come before they could leave the shelters.

He made sure that Fredrick understood that those going up into the barn proper to tend to the animals had to be suited up and limit their time of exposure. Each one would have to wear a dosimeter whenever they were out of the shelter.

Glenn told Alison the same thing about working in the greenhouses. Limited time and keep records of exposures for everyone. Like the barns, it would be at least three days before anyone had to risk exposure to take care of anything.

Tabitha, Janis, and Opal all suffered the miseries of the first symptoms of radiation sickness. The nausea and vomiting, general fatigue, losing hair a few days later. To Glenn's surprise, Janis suffered more than Tabitha, though all were very ill. Tabitha either had a bit more resistance to radiation, or Janis had inhaled significantly more of the radioactive dust than Tabitha or Opal. Perhaps both situations existed.

Glenn made the rounds of the shelters every day. People seemed to be adapting to the situation fairly well. There were no fights of any consequence. People were keeping themselves distracted with various activities. The fact that the shelters were large and well ventilated helped tremendously. People were able to exercise regularly. They would not have been able to do that without the excellent ventilation.

The ability to move between the shelters was helpful, too. One concrete room looks much like another, but there were enough differences, along with the different people, that quite a bit of switching around took place. Fredrick and Alison kept an eye on it and kept it to manageable levels, but it did happen.

As soon as the radiation levels in the earth sheltered buildings was low

enough, people began spending time in them, but always slept in the shelters.

A month into the shelter stay Janis died as a result of her radiation sickness. Despite efforts to avoid it, a mild flu swept through the shelters. Janis caught it and died almost immediately. Harry was keeping Olive and Tabitha alive, but just barely.

They began to do their first outside decontamination of the greenhouses when the radiation dropped below 2R. Everyone able took a turn. There was some significant loss due to the radiation, but no total, catastrophic losses.

Gradually the other buildings were washed down, and then the spaces between the buildings. The ROKON's, Bobcats, Glenn's Suburban, and much to his surprise, the Talisman, all started right up when they were tried on May 12th.

Four of the Unimogs had been in the equipment barn, being readied for the spring ground work when the war began. They all started. The two sitting out didn't. Glenn had been careful to have spare parts for all of the equipment, and the two Unimogs with EMP fried computers were soon running again with new computers installed.

A couple of older model cars owned by the students at the farm ran all right. If they could find a competent mechanic, several of the others might be made to run, but no one currently at the farm had the skills, much less the parts that probably would be required.

The fields that would be growing food crops, despite the late start, had the top few inches of earth removed. The soil contaminated with fallout was stockpiled in windrows for future use, though not even Glenn could think of what it might be used for. The oil producing crops fields were decontaminated and planted after the food crops were in.

Next the pastures were stripped of their top layer and reseeded. The animals would live off stored grain, silage, and hay until the pastures could recover. It took the farm hands all summer to accomplish their tasks.

The rest of the students weren't idle. It became obvious that the greenhouses would be vital to their continued food supplies and they were treated with TLC.

Everyone that wanted to had a chance to go into Cape Girardeau to check on families, friends, and their possessions if they had any. Glenn would only take the Suburban to the moderately damaged outskirts of the city. The area around the actual detonation was too hot to approach.

Those that went the earliest saw a few people scrounging in the debris, but they were few and far between. None seemed inclined to talk to Glenn or the students. After a while they saw no one and had covered all the city they could, without running up their accumulated dosages.

Very few people recovered anything. None found any family or friends that had survived.

After the inspections in Cape Girardeau, Glenn kept busy. Jeremy and Helen could both drive big trucks and he started taking them out onto Interstate 55 to recover everything they could from abandoned transport trucks, using the Suburban. It took a while to find two trucks that would run, but then they transferred trailer after trailer to the farm.

The Suburban had a trailer attached and they loaded it up when they couldn't move a trailer that had things they wanted. That kept them busy all summer and into the fall.

Fall came early, and the harvest from the open fields was marginal. What wasn't eaten, as with the greenhouse products, was pressure canned and put into storage. Glenn had several pressure canners, literally

thousands of jars, and lids aplenty.

The students were young and eager to learn. Several of them picked up the canning easily and supervised the steady activity of canning the produce from the greenhouses year round. Canning wasn't the only method of food preservation for which Glenn had made arrangements. He also had several commercial dehydrators in storage. They were taken out and some of the produce was dried.

Not all the animals had fit into the barns. As those with high radiation doses died, they were butchered and the meat processed. The butcher trimmed out the meat well away from the bones, and discarded the organs, to avoid the possibility of getting any radioactive portions of the animal.

Much of the meat was dried and some was canned. They lost perhaps forty percent total of their beef herd to radiation sickness. The breeders had been taken to the barns and came out just fine. Many of the steers were put in the other animal barn, along with other, smaller stock. The two barns just wouldn't hold all of the steers and the other animals. Why some of the outside herd survived was attributed to the fact that those animals were the ones that spent much of their time inside the weather shelters in the pastures during the worst of the fallout and ate mostly from the hay ricks, instead of grazing.

Winter was hard on the heels of fall. They began to harvest the oil crops in early November, as the snow began to fall. Opal began to show some signs of recovery, but Tabitha continued to lie at death's door.

Gradually radio communications came back. Short range radios like the FRS/GMRS radios and two meter Amateur radios had worked shortly after the war, but were limited in the distance they could talk, even more so than before the war.

The lower frequencies were now usable and Glenn spent much of the

winter listening to Amateurs from around the world discussing their fates, and the fate of the world. Glenn kept the rest of the farm residents apprised of what he was hearing, often times having a shortwave and Amateur radio night of listening in lieu of watching the many DVD's that had been stocked by Glenn.

One night in late February, as a blizzard raged outside, those in the farm buildings were listening to the radio traffic from Glenn's Amateur Radio and shortwave receiver. Suddenly a signal much louder than the ones they'd been listening to came on the air.

"Hello. Can anyone hear me? Hello. Can anyone on the Mississippi River hear me?"

The frequency fell silent for a moment, but then one of the stations that had been on the air initially responded. "I've got you, dude. Where on the Mississippi are you trying to reach?"

"Anyone between Cairo and Memphis. We're in trouble here. We're almost out of food and haven't been able to find any. Is there anyone on the river that can help?"

"I don't know, man. Food is a precious commodity. What you got to trade?" This from another person the group had not heard from before.

"Coal. Lots of coal."

Glenn's ears perked up. They burned wood in their outdoor furnaces, but they were made to burn coal or wood. He keyed the microphone. "How much food do you need, and how much coal do you have?"

"My kids are starving and the adults are worse. We're on a tugboat with sixteen barges of coal. It was just loaded in Ohio before the war. It was supposed to go to the Florida power plants. We found it and have been living on the boat, drifting down the Ohio. We just hit the Mississippi at

Cairo. I'd give the whole batch to anyone that can feed us for a week. We just want to get to the Gulf. We have family there."

"Any chance you can bring it up to Cape Girardeau?"

"Hey, buddy!" broke in the one that had commented about the food. "I got dibs on this deal. Back off. How much food you need, mister? How many people for a week?"

"There are twenty-two of us. Two babies. Four adolescents, five teenagers and eleven adults. We desperately need milk for the babies."

"I ain't got no milk, but I got four cases of Spam that I'll trade for that coal. Forty-eight cans. That's more than two apiece for the week. Bound to be someone that can use that coal if I get it."

"That's all?" You could hear the dejection in his voice. "And we need something for the babies. They're little. They can't eat solid food. Can't anyone help with the babies?"

"We can," Glenn said, keying the mike again. "We have milk. And we'll give you more than Spam. Enough for a month for all of you if you'll bring that coal to Cape Girardeau."

"I told you to back off!" came the annoyed voice. "This here is the River Rat and don't nobody cut into his deals. Mister, you just bring that old tug on down here to Memphis and you'll get yourself plenty of that Spam. I'll throw in another case."

"Well never make it to Memphis without some of us dying. You, there, with the milk. We'll be there tomorrow evening. Have something showing on the shore where we can pull in."

"Actually," Glenn replied, looking at the large scale map of the area pinned to one wall, I need you to take the Headwater Diversion Channel

off to the west in that bend just south of town. You should be able to go all the way to the Interstate 55 bridges in it. Can you do that?”

“Hang on a minute.” There was silence for some time, but the same voice came back on and said, “Yeah. Someone on board knows where it is. We’ll be there.”

“Okay. Tomorrow then. Have your appetites ready. Murphy Farm signing off.”

Fredrick flicked the intercom button in the common room of the residence and work building. “You know, don’t you, that there is a blizzard out there?”

“A Unimog with a snow blower will make it. I need some volunteers to get the food ready, and someone to go with me in the morning.”

There was no shortage of volunteers for either job. Glenn and Thomas left the next morning at 6:00 AM with the blizzard moderated somewhat. It was still windy and snow was falling, but it wasn’t as bad as the night before. There was a two foot accumulation of snow, with drifts up to eight to ten feet high. The Unimog had no difficulty clearing a path for itself toward the Interstate 55 bridges that crossed the Headwater Diversion Channel.

Late that afternoon Glenn saw the barges and tug boat approaching the bridges as he drove the Unimog, snow blower still going, on the dirt road that led from the county road almost to the Channel. He pulled off the road and ran almost up to the river, reversed and cleared more area of the two feet of snow covering it.

Glenn and Thomas got down out of the Unimog and watched as the barges were maneuvered against the bank of the channel, just clear of the bridge supports of the northbound I-55 lanes. There were several tents set up on top of the coal on one of the barges connected to the tug

boat.

Several men swarmed out of the tug onto the barges to tie them off to the bank. They worked the heavy cables around trunks of half a dozen trees. One man jumped down to the ground in front of Glenn and Thomas.

“I take it you’re from Murphy Ranch? You have the food?”

Thomas went back to the Unimog to start transferring the boxes of provisions as Glenn held out his hand toward the man. “Yes. To both questions. I’m Glenn Murphy.”

“Seth Gromacher.” He shook Glenn’s hand and then turned back toward the barges and waved.

It was only then that Glenn noticed five people stand up from where they were laying on the snow covered coal in the approaching darkness, rifles in their hands. Several other people began to approach, walking the edges of the barges.

Glenn, a burning feeling in his stomach, slowly walked over to the truck and took a box of the supplies from it and took it over to the small crowd gathering. A few of them went back with Thomas to the truck to help with the rest of the boxes.

Tense, Glenn, standing out of the way with Seth, asked, “What are you going to do now?”

“Guess we’ll all get back on the tug. It’s crowded, but we can make it. Head on down the river to the Gulf. We have people there. I sure am glad you were on the radio last night. We really are starving. We never should have brought the coal with us. It really slowed us down. If we’d just made a run with the tug, we’d have been there by now. I don’t know what you plan on doing with all this, but you’re welcome to it.”

Glenn nodded, the tenseness beginning to ease. “We can use it.” He frowned slightly. “Though I’m not sure how we are going to get it from here to where we need it.”

Seth laughed. “Not to be rude or anything, I’m glad it’s your problem and not mine.” A couple of men approached.

“We got it. It’s at least a month for all of us,” one of the men said.

Seth shook hands with Glenn again. “Thanks. You ever get to the Gulf you look us up.”

“We will.”

Two men had been working on unhooking the tug from the barges. It was only a couple of more minutes before everyone from the tug was back on it and the tug was backing away from the barges. It was tight maneuvering, but the pilot turned the tug around and headed back down the Channel toward the river.

Thomas walked over to Glenn. “We got it. Now what do we do with it?” He laughed.

Glenn smiled in return. “We’ll figure something. Let’s get going before the snow gets worse.” With that they got back into the Unimog and Glenn headed them for the Farm, not needing to use the snow blower again until they were halfway there.

It was after midnight when Glenn pulled the Unimog into the farm compound. He said goodnight to Thomas and went to the farm house, and then into the basement shelter. Going to a cabinet built into the wall, he tripped a hidden latch and swung the cabinet away from the wall. There was an opening into a small room built onto the outside of the basement wall.

Glenn flipped a light switch. It illuminated the room full of weapons, ammunition, and related equipment. He took a PTR-91 from a rack holding several identical rifles. He took a loaded 30-round magazine from a stack on a shelf and inserted it into the magazine well of the PTR-91.

Slinging the rifle over his shoulder, Glenn picked up one of several cordura musette shoulder bags and put six of the 30-round magazine into it, and then slung it over his other shoulder. Glenn turned out the light, left the room and secured it again.

When he went to bed Glenn's nightstand had the musette bag on it, and the PTR-91 leaning against it.

Simpler Times - Chapter 5

Glenn instituted firearms lessons the next day, amid many objections. He did not make it mandatory, but strongly encouraged everyone to consider it. He made the announcement at a meeting he called, held in the common room of the residence and work building.

Tabitha was the first to leap to her feet and protest the presence of firearms. "We don't need them! We are a peaceful group!" She was still pale and unable to contribute much to the running of the farm. Her anger put a little color in her cheeks.

"Thomas and I made a grave error yesterday when we took the food to those on the tug boat. They had at least six people armed with rifles watching us. They could have easily killed us, taken the food and the truck, and been on their way. My pistol would not have made much difference at all if they had decided to attack us."

"You took a gun to the meeting?" yelled Tabitha as others muttered

softly. “No one authorized that! I didn’t even know we had any guns here. I would have protested if I’d known.”

“I’ve been carrying a pistol daily since early on,” Glenn said. “I realized yesterday it wasn’t enough.”

“Where are you going to find guns now?” asked one of the students.

“I’d thought about this from the beginning and made preparations. I didn’t do anything earlier about it since it just didn’t seem necessary. Yesterday, being under the muzzles of half a dozen rifles changed my mind. I want as many people as possible trained in firearms handling. Many of you heard River Rat on the radio warning us not to interfere. He could be a danger to us and our life here.”

Again it was Tabitha that spoke up. “There won’t be any trouble if we don’t start it. If you had just given that family the food without trying to get something for it, that guy would never have said anything. From what you said the family would have given up the coal without any problems to them.”

“I am not going to make anyone take the firearms training that doesn’t want to take it, but the training will take place. All of those interested see me after this meeting.”

“I protest!” Tabitha said. “We should vote on this!”

“This is not a democracy,” Glenn said, his voice rising just a bit. “This is my place and my rules go. All of you are guests here, except for my direct employees. Anyone is welcome to leave if they don’t like the way I’m running things.”

“You can’t do that!” someone else called out. “This is the only really safe place there is around here. Everyone else is just barely making out.”

Glenn saw Tabitha struggling to get to her feet again, but Brittany was talking to her urgently and keeping her in her chair. Quickly Glenn said, “The meeting is over. Those that want the training, see me at my house in a few minutes. Those that want to leave, if there are any, get packed and let me know. I’ll have someone issue the food and you can leave.”

Before Tabitha or anyone else could complain, Glenn was out the door. He went over to his house, looking around the Farm building compound with a jaundiced eye. There had been some thought of defense when he laid out the building plan, but it was suddenly obvious that much more could be done.

A full dozen people showed up at the house a few minutes later, including Jeremy; Helen; Fredrick, his wife, and oldest son; Alison; and six students. Four male and two female. Neither Tabitha nor Brittany showed up, which didn’t surprise Glenn.

Fredrick, his wife Janine, and his oldest son Fred, Jr. were each carrying a long arm, and all three also wore a gun belt with a holstered handgun. “We all shoot,” Fredrick told Glenn. “Janine and I have Ruger SP101’s in .357 magnum, Fred has a Ruger Mark III .22 LR.”

He hoisted the scoped bolt action rifle he was carrying. “Got a Ruger M77 Hawkeye in .30-’06. Janine has a Marlin .410 lever action shotgun, and Fred a Ruger 10/22.”

“You any good with the .30-’06? Glen asked.

“Out to three hundred yards,” Fredrick replied. “After that my groups start to open up.”

“How do you feel about being a sniper?”

“I can handle it if I have to.”

Glenn nodded and turned to the others. “Anyone else have their own weapons?” The rest shook their heads.

“Okay. We’ll keep this simple.” Glenn went through the basics of firearms safety, as he’d been taught not so long ago. Then each person had a chance to fire the various firearms types that Glenn had provided for the Farm. Rifles, shotguns, and handguns.

Glenn was disappointed when everyone picked their preferred long gun and side arm. No two people made the same selection of both. But he decided it was best for each to have what they were comfortable with, rather than dictate commonality across the board. It wasn’t too bad, anyway. Glenn had limited his purchases for the Farm to only a few options, so there was some inherent commonality.

It was cold and clear when Glenn led the group to a safe area to shoot. They waded through the snow to place several targets at different ranges so everyone could get in some practice.

Again Glenn went over the safety aspects of firearms and then led the way in firing his PTR-91 and the Para Ordinance P-14 he carried. The others practiced with their choices until it began to get dark in the early afternoon, and the wind and snow began again.

Over the next few days there was much tension at the Farm, as those opposed to gun ownership, silently for the most part, protested the open carrying of firearms by those that had been trained in their use.

Glenn was happily surprised when several other students came to him over that time and asked to be trained and issued weapons. He gladly cooperated, bringing the total of armed people at the Farm to twenty-three. All were instructed to keep their sidearm with them all the time and to keep their chosen long arm handy, with plenty of reloads, and have it with them when they were working outside.

The actions taken were done none too soon. Winter was still in full swing when a group of horsemen swarmed among the buildings and then to the pastures, shooting wildly, trying to run off some of the stock feeding from one of the hayricks.

Three of the students working with the stock were armed. They began to return fire and ran off the would-be rustlers, killing two and running off the rest. They were sure at least two of the six that got away were wounded.

When Glenn got to the pasture there was a small group of people standing around the two dead men. Their horses had been rounded up and stood nearby, under the control of one of the students.

Brittany and Tabitha ran up. Tabitha, breathing heavily from the lingering effects of radiation sickness, saw the corpses and hurriedly turned away. "Couldn't you have shot to scare them? Why did you have to kill anyone?"

A very angry Thomas showed Tabitha the blood running from his upper left arm. "See this? Huh? This is why. They didn't care about shooting to scare anyone. They were trying to kill me!"

That shut Tabitha up. Two of the other students led Thomas away, to the clinic, so Harry could treat the wound.

"Okay," Glenn said, looking along the track the rustlers had made getting away. I need volunteers to go after them."

"They're gone. It's too dangerous. Leave them be and they'll probably leave us alone now." Tabitha was insistent again.

"And they may not," Brittany said. She was looking at Glenn and nodded, showing her support.

Fredrick, Jeremy, and three of the male students agreed to go with Glenn. It took a few minutes to get horses saddled up, but they were on their way as soon as possible. It was no great chore to follow the tracks in the snow. Glenn decided the students had been correct when they said they'd wounded more of the rustlers. He was seeing a spot of blood on the snow from time to time.

The rustlers were none too smart. They'd stopped barely a mile from the Farm to tend to their wounded. Glenn and the others were on them before they realized it. More gunfire rang out. The rustlers' horses got away from them and the men were left standing in a group with no concealment, much less cover. It was over in moments, all six of the rustlers lying on the snow covered ground, staining it red.

Glenn quickly checked on his group. Fredrick was hit in the thigh, and Barry, one of the students, had a crease just above his left ear and was feeling much the worse for wear. Glenn sent the rest back with Fredrick and Barry. He stayed behind to round up the rustlers' horses and gather up their other belongings.

With their weapons and other goods loaded on the rustlers' horses, Glenn head back to the Farm. One of the horses had been shot in the second firefight and was having trouble. He called the Farm on the FRS radio he always carried and asked for Jennifer, a pre-vet student, to meet him at the barn.

Brittany was with Jennifer when Glenn arrived. As soon as Jennifer looked at the horse she told Glenn, "There's nothing I can do with that kind of wound. Best to put her out of her misery."

Glenn sighed. "Okay. I'll take her over to the butcher's shop."

Jennifer looked shocked. "We aren't going to eat her!"

Glenn shook his head. "Not the humans. But we can't waste anything.

She'll be fresh food for the dogs. If you'll check out mine, and the other horses, and unload them I'd appreciate it. I'll be back for the belongings."

Jennifer nodded. "Let me unsaddle her first." She unsaddled the wounded mare and gave her a couple of comforting pats. "Okay," she told Glenn. She took the other reins from Glenn and he led the limping mare off.

It took Glenn several trips to get the rustlers' things moved to the house so he could go through them thoroughly. But that would have to wait. He went to the clinic to check on Fredrick and Barry.

Barry was in one of the two four-bed wards, nursing a serious headache. He said he'd be okay when Glenn talked to him. "Harry gave me something to knock the pain down. It just hasn't kicked in yet."

Harry was still working on Fredrick, though Janine told Glenn that Harry had said there shouldn't be too much of a problem. The bullet had missed arteries and bone. Glenn nodded, uncomfortable with the glaring Tabitha looking daggers at him.

Glenn headed for the equipment barn. He hooked up the Bobcat backhoe attachment to one of the Toolcats and headed for the pasture. It seemed everyone was avoiding him at the moment. He didn't bother to get any help, but managed to load the first two dead rustlers onto the bed of the Toolcat, and then headed for the site of the second battle.

When he got there he used the backhoe to dig a deep trench. He stripped and rolled each of the bodies into it. He gathered up everything from the first two killed and set the items in the cab of the Toolcat. He added their bodies to the others, and then used the backhoe to fill in the trench.

When Glenn got back to the Farm he let one of the students take over the Toolcat to dismount the backhoe. Glenn took the rustlers' belongings

and added them to the pile on his living room floor.

Fortunately he'd put down a sheet of plastic before he put down any of the clothing. The clothing was a mess with blood. He started a load of it in the clothes washer and went back to living room. Glenn hadn't really paid much attention to the weapons he'd gathered up. He began to catalogue them for the armory.

Between the six men there were three 1911 models with a total of thirteen magazines; three double action .357 magnum revolvers of different makes with two speed loaders for one of them; one Glock 17 and one Glock 19 with two fifteen round magazines, six nineteen round magazines, and four thirty-three round magazines; one Walther PPK in .380 ACP with three magazines; one Beretta Tomcat in .32 ACP with a spare magazine; one Beretta Bobcat in .25 ACP with a spare magazine.

Much to Glenn's amazement, there were also three Ruger single action revolvers in .45 Colt with various barrel lengths. He decided that they probably belonged to the same man that had carried the Marlin 1895 Cowboy lever action rifle in .45/70 and a Stoeger 12 gauge Coach double barrel shotgun. One set of clothes had been very western in appearance.

The other long arms included four Bushmaster AR-15 clones in various forms, an FN/FAL, and two Remington 870 shotguns, both 12 gauge. There were thirty AR-15 magazines, mostly thirty-round, and seven FAL magazines, all twenty rounders. There was very little long gun ammunition left.

The cowboy, as Glenn was thinking of him, had an empty leather bandoleer for the .45/70 and the fifty-round bandoleer for twelve gauge only had four rounds left. The left and right buscadero gun belts for two of the Ruger single actions still had twenty-five .45 Colt cartridges in each, though the revolvers had all had six expended shells in them. The right hand gun belt carried a Cold Steel Laredo bowie knife on the off

side.

There were several variations of combat harnesses, no two alike. He cleaned the blood off as best he could and transferred the weapons, accessories, and accoutrements to the armory. He put the rest of the clothes in the laundry room for cleaning later.

It was getting dark when Glenn went back to the animal barn. Thomas had been one of those that had cared for the animals when Glenn brought them in. He showed Glenn the saddles and other things the horses had been carrying. Glenn wasn't a great horseman, but could tell the saddles and accoutrements were excellent quality. Jennifer walked over while Glenn and Thomas were looking at the equipment. "Those guys had good horses. We going to keep them?"

Glenn nodded. "Spoils of war," he said, picking up a pair of leather saddle bags. A little food and camping supplies. Another set of leather saddle bags contained much the same, plus five twenty-round boxes of .45/70, and two fifty-round boxes of .45 Colt. "Must have been the cowboy's," Glenn muttered.

He went over everything, leaving the tack with Jennifer, and carrying the rest, with Thomas' help, to the house. He'd go through it later. Now he needed some rest, for the physical fatigue, as well as the mental.

Glenn was up early the next morning. He dressed warmly, as the temperature was dropping again, and a light snow was falling. Adding The Walther PPK and its two spare magazines to an inside pocket, Glenn put on his coat. He slung the PTR over one shoulder and the musette bag with magazines over the other. He picked up a set of leather saddle bags he'd packed with a few things after he'd had breakfast. He reached down and picked up a loaded Kifaru Navigator back pack.

Jennifer was in the animal barn, tending to the morning duties when Glenn entered. She took note of his armament, but said nothing. She

offered her help when he saddled his favorite horse, Blue Nose, but Glenn declined. He looped a bag of grain over the saddle horn and then mounted up, turned Blue toward the door of the barn, but stopped to tell Jennifer, "I'm going out to find out where those rustlers came from. If you would, tell Fredrick not to worry about me unless I'm gone more than three days. This is just a scouting trip."

Jennifer nodded. "Okay. I will. But they aren't going to like it. You shouldn't be going alone."

Again he said, "It's just a scouting trip." With that, Glenn rode out into the falling snow. The trail the rustlers' horses had left coming to the Farm was still quite clear. Glenn had no trouble following it on Blue. He made good time during the morning. He did stop to let Blue water in a highway road ditch that held water.

He dismounted and got a drink of water himself, from his canteen. He also took out a couple pieces of jerky from his saddlebags. He walked along the trail, as it slowly filled with snow, leading Blue for several minutes. Then he remounted and urged Blue up the trail. He had a few ideas about where the group might have come from, but only backtracking them would tell the story.

The snow ended just as Glenn brought Blue to a stop at a good place to camp on the trail. He unsaddled the horse and set up camp. Glenn gave Blue a bait of grain and then he let Blue drink a little water from his hand as he poured water into it from his canteen. It took only a few minutes to heat and then eat his supper. Glenn went to bed without lighting a fire or turning on the tent lamp he had.

He was up again early the next morning and had eaten and struck the camp before the sun was up. Blue was saddled and loaded by the time that Glenn could make good sense of the trail again. He headed out, maintaining a steady progress until noon. He had told Jennifer he'd be back in three days. He couldn't go much further or he wouldn't make it

back in time. Of course he could radio the Farm when he got close to it again.

After a quick lunch break, Glenn climbed aboard Blue again and kept going. Twenty minutes later he heard the sounds of wood being cut with an axe. He stopped and tied up Blue and then traveled forward on foot.

Glenn was not surprised by what he saw when he edged around the trees where the trail made a turn. He'd run across a very unfriendly group of people when he was checking out the additional property for the retreat and firewood plots. This was their site, though he hadn't seen it originally, just the entrance road.

There were two small cabins and six travel trailers of various sizes, mostly on the small side. There were three people out splitting wood that was stacked near one of the cabins. All were armed. Two more people were butchering a deer on the far side of the small clearing. He watched for a long time. Everyone he saw was female or male under the age of fifteen. He'd found out what he wanted to know. Glenn eased back and headed for Blue, taking extreme care not to make any noise.

He watched his back trail carefully, but was relatively sure he had not been detected, much less followed. Glenn made it back to the Farm in plenty of time to avoid Fredrick sending out a search team for him.

Amid some grumbling, Glenn set up a twenty-four hour watch. After a day of thinking about things he asked to meet with Fredrick, Alison, Thomas, Brittany, and Harry. They got together in the clinic ward where Fredrick was still recuperating.

When everyone was settled, Glenn sighed and began. "I backtracked our rustlers and found what I believe to be their home base." He held up his hands when people started to ask questions. "In good time. Let me finish, first."

“When I got there all I saw were women and children. A couple of teen boys. Maybe fourteen or fifteen. They, as well as the women, were armed with a long arm of some type and kept them very handy.

“Based on the fact that there are two small cabins and a few travel trailers, and the fact that they tried to rustle our cattle, I think they must be low on food. They were butchering a small deer, so should be all right for a few days.

“But we need to do something. If they get desperate enough, they might try something again. We might not be so lucky the next time.”

Fredrick hurumphed.

“I don’t think any of us could just go there and kill them all...” Most of those in the room gasped in surprise.

“Exactly,” Glenn continued. “Even burning them out to get them to leave is not a real possibility to us. What I’m thinking is that we approach them, with a peace offering, and try to negotiate a peace with them.

“I can fully understand if they are at first reluctant, seeing we decimated their small population, even though it was justified. They might not see it that way. If they attack us, we’ll be justified in wiping out everyone that does. That means we’d be saddled with some small children. I don’t think any of us could just murder them, or leave them behind to predators or starvation. What do you all think?”

There was silence for a long time. “Can’t we just bring them here if they can’t make it on their own?” asked Brittany, rather tentatively.

Thomas and Fredrick both immediately said, “No.”

“It’s down on my list, too,” Glenn said. “Perhaps... In the future... If

they prove themselves non-antagonistic, we might consider it. As it is now, they might do a lot of damage to the Farm and even kill several people in revenge for their men's deaths."

Slowly Alison lifted her hand and then began to speak. "I think Glenn has the right idea. Offer them peace and some help, but let them know any form of revenge will be met with force."

Fredrick and Harry were nodding. Thomas looked at Brittany for a moment, then faced Glenn and said. "I support that, too."

"Brittany?" asked Glenn.

"Can we wait and try to come up with something else?"

Glenn nodded. "I want to wait a couple of days, anyway. If any of you can come up with a more workable plan, I really want to hear it. This is a basically no win situation. I want it to turn out the best possible, within the limitations that already exist."

No one came up with a better idea, so two days later, Glenn, accompanied by Thomas in the cab of a Unimog, headed for the other compound. The truck held a whole dressed beef, and several boxes of vegetables and fruits, along with some basics like flour and salt.

Four additional people rode in the back of the truck with the food. Everyone was well armed. It was snowing again, but the Unimog, with its snow blower going, had no trouble following what was left of the trail.

Glenn stopped at the same place he'd left Blue on the other trip and let Thomas and the others out. They spread out in the woods and paced Glenn as he drove the Unimog at a very slow speed the rest of the way to the rustlers' compound.

He'd just made the slight turn that brought him to the compound when one of the teen boys stepped out from the woods, with a Ruger 10/22 raised to eye level. "Hold it there! There's no trespassing here! What do you want?"

"We brought you some food."

"Food?" the boy said. He looked toward the cabins. One hand still holding the Ruger on Glenn, the boy lifted a walky-talky to his lips and said, "They say they have food."

The radio squawked, but Glenn couldn't understand what was said. The boy put the radio back in his pocket and said, "Somebody is coming out to check. You just keep your hands where I can see them. Just like in the movies."

Glenn made no moves, and hoped none of his team would either. It was only a couple of moments when one of the women he had seen the other time came out of one of the cabins, a shotgun in her hands.

"What do you want here?" she asked when she got up beside the boy.

"Just what I told him. We have some food for you."

"Why?"

"Because I had you under surveillance the other day. No men around, women and children doing all the work. Just a couple of small cabins and a few camp trailers. No room to have large stocks of food. How'd you survive the radiation?"

"None of your business. But we did. And our men are just out hunting. They should be back any day now."

"No, they're not hunting. And they won't be coming back," Glenn said

softly, his hands gripping the steering wheel tightly. He wanted to reach for his pistol, but didn't.

"How do you know?" asked the boy, sounding angry.

The woman looked at Glenn for long moments. "He knows," she finally said. "They didn't go hunting, did they? You're from the old ranch. Got it all fixed up now."

Glenn nodded.

"They tried something." It wasn't a question. "What?"

"Tried to rustle some cattle."

"My Dad wouldn't rustle no cattle," the boy cried, taking a step forward and sighting in on Glenn's face with the Ruger.

"Easy boy," the woman said. She put her hand up and pressed the Ruger down to point at the ground. As the boy started to cry, the woman looked up at Glenn again. "What do you have for us?" She let the shotgun she was carrying hang down at her side.

"Enough to get you through for a while."

"We don't take charity," the boy said through his tears.

"Yes we do," said the woman. "You go back to the house and tell Angela and Sophie to come out and help me."

The boy walked slowly toward the first cabin, his rifle nearly dragging the ground. Glenn got out of the truck and walked around to the back of it, the woman following. He looked over at the woods and said, "A couple of you come out and help us with the food."

The woman started when Jeremy and Helen stepped out of the forest, slinging their rifles. She looked over at Glenn again. “We would have been gunned down if we’d tried anything. Right?”

Glenn nodded. “Yes. With regret. Just like we regret having to kill the rustlers. It’s a shame we survivors can’t get along together. It would make it a lot easier on all parties.”

Jeremy opened the door of the box bed of the Unimog. “Oh, my!” said the woman. Angela and Sophie had come around the side of the truck and had similar reactions.

It took three trips to get everything to one of the cabins. Several other women came out to help when they saw the largesse. When Glenn started to get back into the cab of the Unimog, the woman that had come out first walked over and said, “Thank you. I’m sorry about what our men did. They thought they were helping us. Some of us... we tried to talk them into trying to trade for some food...”

“We’ll take just about anything useable in trade,” Glenn said. “Keep it in mind.” He started the truck.

“The horses... guns...”

“Spoils of war,” Glenn said coldly. He put the Unimog in gear and turned it around.

When he was around the bend in the road he stopped and let the others get into the truck, Thomas joining him in the cab again.

“Let them know everything is all right,” Glenn told Thomas.

Thomas picked up the microphone of the radio mounted in the Unimog and called for Brittany. She answered immediately.

“Everything is fine,” Thomas said. “They accepted the food with no problem.”

Brittany acknowledged the fact and said, “I’ll let the others know. Some of them are sitting on the edges of their chairs.”

When they got back to the Farm and Glenn had parked the truck, Brittany walked over to him and said, “I told Timothy he could come off watch.”

She was a bit taken aback when Glenn almost barked, “No. We need to keep a watch for some time to come. They know what happened to their men folk. They might still try something.”

“Oh. I’m sorry... I thought... I’m sorry.” Brittany was near tears.

Glenn shook his head. “I’m the one that should be sorry. You had no way of knowing what I was thinking. Don’t worry about it.”

After Glenn found Timothy and put him back on guard duty, he gathered up Alison, Thomas, and Harry. With Brittany, they went to Fredrick’s room in the clinic. Glenn and Thomas reported what had happened.

“How did they seem?” Fredrick asked.

“I think the adults suspected what the men were going to do. I think the women were just told that the men were going hunting.”

Alison asked, “Did they ask for the rustlers’ things back?”

“Yes. I told them we were keeping everything. She seemed to accept it.”

“Perhaps we should reconsider that,” Brittany said, rather tentatively.

Glenn and Fredrick were both shaking their heads.

“If they had something we really wanted, I’d consider trading them back the horses. But no weapons. They were still armed. I’m not going to give them a better means of attacking us. I’m still worried that they might try, especially if they get others to help.”

Glenn’s next words caught everyone by surprise. He hesitated a moment and then added, “Actually, I’d like to get them to move here.”

“After the group attacked us?” Fredrick was incredulous.

“I believe the woman. I don’t think those left condoned the actions. Having them as allies would be better than if they stayed an opposing force. Also, I’m worried about them. It is going to be doubly tough on them now. They just don’t seem to have many resources. If brigands begin to show up, and I’m thinking they will, I doubt that small group would survive any kind of dedicated attack.”

Brittany perked up a bit. “You think they would go for it? I like the idea.”

“I don’t know,” admitted Glenn. “I was thinking that you, with Alison, perhaps, could go talk to them. With an armed escort, of course.”

“Do you think that will be necessary? We are going on a peace mission, sort of.”

“We’ll stay out of sight, but I’m not going to let them hold you hostage. At the first sign of foul play, we’ll react immediately. It should take them by surprise.

“I don’t think they’ll agree right away, but from the feel of it, there is another bad storm coming. That might change their mind. They were cutting wood today when we got there. I doubt they have that much of a

supply. You can tell them the advantages of staying here. All they have to do to reap the benefits of being here, is to do their share of work, or provide some skill, or help in other ways.”

“I’ll go,” Brittany said. “She looked at Alison. “Alison?”

Alison nodded. “Sure. It was a small compound. Can’t be that many of them. And there are children involved. I think it will be the best way to handle the situation.”

Glenn looked at Fredrick. “Okay. I’ll go along with it,” Fredrick said. Thomas and Harry agreed, as well.

“Okay. It’s settled. Tomorrow okay?” Glenn asked Brittany and Alison.

Both nodded and the small group broke up, going their separate ways. All but Fredrick met up the next morning, along with four others.

“Harry,” Glenn said while the Unimog was warming up, “I want you to give Brittany and Alison some tips on how to spot contagious illnesses that might be in the group.”

“Geez, Glenn! There is no way to tell at a glance, unless someone is weak and showing flu-like symptoms. Coughing their head off, things like that. I just can’t be more specific.”

Glenn smiled. “You did just fine.” He looked at Brittany and Alison. “Hear that? Keep your eyes and ears open for illness, as well as trouble.” He handed both of the women FRS handheld radios. “Any problems, and you yell for help. Or if you need to, just key the mike three times, pause, and three times again.”

Brittany and Alison took the radios and nodded.

“You two ride in back with the others. I want Thomas up front as

shotgun, again.”

Glenn saw Tabitha standing in the background, a frown on her face, but he ignored her as the team climbed into the back of the Unimog. He and Thomas climbed into the cab and Glenn put the truck in gear. Harry and a couple of the others waved. Thomas waved back.

The road was still fairly clear and Glenn only used the snow blower a couple of times to clear the way through drifts. Again he stopped well before he got to the compound and let everyone out.

Glenn walked with Alison and Brittany along the track, as Thomas, Jeremy, Helen, and two other firearm friendly students faded into the woods and flanked them. Glenn joined those in the forest just before the last turn and let Brittany and Alison go on alone. Alison was carrying a holstered pistol. Brittany was unarmed.

“Hello the house!” Alison called, cupping her hands around her mouth.

The door of one of the cabin opened slightly. “What do you want?”

“To talk to you! We’re from the Murphy Ranch!”

A woman stepped onto the porch of the cabin. “Okay. Come ahead. Don’t try anything. We have a dozen guns on you.”

Glenn heard and tensed, wondering if they were doing the right thing. But nothing happened as Brittany and Alison walked up to the cabin and then went inside.

After an hour of silence, Glenn began to get worried. He had not suggested a check in time, and was wishing he had. Fortunately, a few minutes later the door of the cabin opened and Brittany and Alison stepped out. Another minute and they were around the bend and Glenn was there to see how the meeting went.

“How’d it go?” he immediately asked.

“So-so,” Alison replied. Some definitely want to come, some definitely don’t want to come, and some aren’t sure.”

“All we could do was lay out the possibilities for them. They’ll let us know,” Brittany added.

“Well, are the ones that want to come, going to?” Glenn asked.

Alison shook her head. “No. It would disadvantage the others too much. They are barely making it right now. They took a quick vote and agreed to stay together. They’d either decide to all come to the Farm, or stay where they are.”

“I think we’ll eventually get some of them,” Brittany said slowly, as the others in the woods joined them at the rear of the truck. “They won’t be able to manage much longer on their own. They just have to work too hard to make it. Everyone, even the older teens, look exhausted. I’m not sure what might have happened if we hadn’t delivered the food. No one is sick, yet, that I could tell. But it is only a matter of time, I’m sure.”

“Did they say how many people are here?” Thomas asked.

“Nine women, three teens, four youths, and three babies. I think,” Alison immediately said.

“That’s the way I figured it, too,” Brittany said.

“That would really add to the Farm’s population!” Jeremy said.

“We’re operating at reduced output now, because we can’t use all we can make. I was expecting to have more trading going on by this time.” Glenn shook his head. “I also figured we would have increased our

population quite a bit by now, too.”

“Isn’t the fewer the better?” asked Helen. “More for everyone that way.”

“Have to consider the future population. We need a broad gene pool to make sure future generations can survive. We can’t do it all alone here, but the more diversified we are, the better.”

“Wow!” Jeremy said softly. “I wasn’t thinking that far ahead.”

“We have to,” Glenn said solemnly. “We have a responsibility to the human race.

“There’s nothing we can do about things right now,” he continued.
“Let’s go home.”

Glenn was right about the storm affecting the decision of the rustlers’ families. Three days after the snow had stopped two women appeared on the perimeter of the Farm property. The student on guard sounded the alarm. Glenn, a hobbling Fredric, Alison, and Thomas approached them.

The two women were armed with rifles, but Glenn quickly decided not to disarm them. He needed them to begin trusting those at the farm. They would be more comfortable if they kept their arms, just as many at the farm did.

“We voted. If the invitation is still open, we’d like to move here.”

“Get Harry,” Glenn instructed Thomas. He put his arm under one shoulder of the woman that had spoken. She appeared about to fall down. Alison helped support the other woman as they made their way toward the clinic building, Fredrick hopping along, wanting to help, but unable to, due to his wound.

By the end of the following day everyone and everything useful was moved from the rustlers' compound to the Farm. The women and children settled in quickly, amazed at the luxuriousness of the place, compared to their own. Only the eldest teen, whose name was George Timmons, aged fifteen, was causing any problems.

His mother, Carol, the leader of the group, tried to talk him into being less troublesome. It was Glenn that finally got George to become part of the Farm. Glenn added him to the watch keeping roster after only a couple of days of rowdy behavior. Having the responsibility of the entire Farm in his hands transformed him from a boy of fifteen, to a man of fifteen. Rather than the Ruger 10/22 he brought with him, he was issued one of the Farm's Steyr AUG's, with six spare magazines, to carry while on watch, along with the customary radio.

Simpler Times - Chapter 6

Carol and the group fell into the daily routine without much problem. The group brought some needed skills to the Farm.

Two of the women were experienced nurses and were able to lighten the load on Harry. Three were teachers and were keeping the children educated in home school courses. Fred, much to his dismay, was now included in the classes. The other four were basically home makers. They took on much of the food preparations for the community kitchen.

Glenn, Fredrick, and Alison kept a close eye on the situation. There did not seem to be any animosity towards those at the Farm, for the fate of their men. Glenn began to relax as spring rolled around.

It was an earlier spring than Glenn expected. Perhaps Nuclear Winter wasn't all it was cracked up to be. After the field crops were in Glenn went on several exploration missions.

He was looking for anything the Farm could use, for one thing, but specifically for a couple of dump trailers and a front end loader that would run, with which they could begin hauling the coal from the Diversion Channel south of the city. The two semi tractors they'd used right after the war were in good shape. All they needed were the trailers and the loader. Glenn didn't want to tie up the Unimogs with the hauling, though they would have worked.

Glenn and Jeremy finally found what they need. Since there were no longer any DOT rules, they put together two sets of three belly dump trailers each for the coal haul. A Caterpillar front end loader was finally located that would run. At the same construction equipment site, an old Kenworth truck set up as a maintenance vehicle was also started and, after filling the transfer fuel tank with biodiesel, it was moved to the barge site.

Jeremy, showing a great deal of skill for his age, built a dirt ramp to the height of the edge of the barges using the front-end loader. Once he had access to the tops of the barges, he ramped each of them so he could get into the barge hold to begin transferring the coal, one large front-end bucket at a time, to the trailers.

Once enough coal had been taken out of a given barge, Jeremy bucketed in earth to replace the coal ramp, so the last bit of coal could be removed from each barge. He and Helen worked on the coal haul any time they weren't busy with something more critical.

Survivors of the war began to move around more than they had right after the war. More and more of the survivors found Amateur Radio equipment and began to get on the air, in their search for other survivors.

Those at the Farm began to keep a 24/7 radio watch, with a dozen different frequencies being monitored. They finally heard from Seth Gromacher. He and his group had made it to the Gulf of Mexico with

only a slight brush with River Rat. They had driven the attack using small powerboats off with their superior firepower.

To a bit of Glenn's dismay, Seth again profusely thanked those at the Farm for the generous supply of food they had provided those on the tugboat. The farm began to get requests for food by several of the relatively close survivor groups. Glenn made it very clear that only he or Fredrick could negotiate a trade. And there had to be a trade. Glenn insisted on it, though he was very flexible as to what constituted adequate trade goods, since they had most of what they needed already.

But trade they did, becoming the primary source of food in the area for those that did not have the means to produce it themselves. Or didn't want to. Some of the exchanges between Glenn and the leaders of other groups became heated when Glenn refused to just give away the food 'since they had so much.'

It was much the same with those that wanted to take up residence at the Farm. Glenn knew they still had quite a bit of accommodations left, but he became very selective in who he would let stay. Never any groups of more than five, and there were only two groups that he let stay that summer.

The rest of the new residents were individuals, either alone, or leaving a group. And they had to possess skills the Farm could use. Though he didn't exclude women in the selection process, being male got a bit more weight. The Farm had been eighty percent women when the war started. The percentage was even higher when the Farm took in the rustlers' family members.

Familiarity, if not outright skill, with firearms was another positive factor in gaining residency at the Farm. While Glenn had no intention of forming his own army, he wanted better protection for the Farm. Everyone willing was given firearms training by one of the new members of the Farm, former US Marine Captain Christine P.

Monteque.

After a short interview with Glenn, Fredrick, and Alison, Christine was gladly accepted into the Farm family. She was also immediately put in charge of the defense of the Farm, and made a member of Glenn's close advisors. There was an outcry of protest, led again by Tabitha, weak as she was.

It made little difference. The weapons training took place, and improvements to the defensive posture of the Farm were made. The buildings themselves were more or less immune to gunfire, but Glenn would prefer to keep any attackers at some distance from them.

One of the first things Christine did was to have those capable of sewing sew up sand bags. They were filled and placed on the roof perimeter walls, leaving gaps for firing points. That provided for better protected firing, as well as improving the lines of fire, rather than firing from windows or around corners of buildings if it ever became necessary.

Glenn was hoping it wouldn't, but from the radio reports they were hearing, raiding was becoming more commonplace. Many of those that had prepared by stocking food and such, but had not made preparations for long term sources of food, were beginning to run out of supplies. They were getting desperate.

With much of the radio traffic taking place between Murphy Farm and people willing to trade for food, especially those traveling the Mississippi, Glenn was fatalistic about the Farm coming under attack. It was essentially a matter of when, not if, it would occur.

Trip wire warning devices created by Christine were placed in the woods surrounding the Farm. A constant watch was kept on the easy approaches to the Farm, too.

It seemed a waste of time as the summer passed and nothing untoward

happened. Christine told Glenn that their preparations probably had kept them from being attacked at least twice.

“I did a little recon when that group with the reefer load of fish showed up. I’m as sure as I can be that they had no intention of trading that fish for beef and fresh vegetables.” Christine was giving a summary to Glenn and the advisors, plus Tabitha.

Tabitha had sparked another controversy. She and a handful of others started requesting the disbanding of the defense of the Farm to put more people to ‘constructive’ work Tabitha said, “You could just be saying that to hang onto your job.”

“I could be,” Christine said calmly, “But I’m not. That wasn’t the only incident. The three guys that showed up out of nowhere weren’t alone. There were six more hiding out in the woods. I found their camp after they left. Just like the other group, they planned to get much more than they did, plus their gold back.

“Having dealt with the three leaders, I’m also relatively certain they weren’t just shopping for groceries. They would have taken some of the women if they could have. I’m sure of it.”

“What do you think of this River Rat character?” Fredrick asked.

“It’s just some fourteen year old talking big on his Daddy’s radio,” Tabitha said with a weak wave of her hand.

“Christine?” Glenn asked.

“From what I’ve been able to pick up from the people we are getting here off the river, he’s real. I do think he is young, as Tabitha said. Though more likely eighteen or nineteen. But that doesn’t mean much if he has a strong personality, with leadership abilities. If he’s ex-military, he could be a real danger to us. Even more so if he’s slightly... off.”

“Off?” Brittany asked.

“Turned into a nutcase. A megalomaniac. Some of the river people are saying that’s the case. People and small groups are disappearing without a trace down around Memphis.” Christine looked at Tabitha, and then back at Glenn. “He’s a real danger. I think it’s only a matter of time before he has enough followers to come up here. From what I heard about your coal deal, he’s already bearing a grudge.”

“Okay, Christine. We keep the defenses up, at least until hard winter hits. I doubt there’ll be much danger then.” Glenn said, standing up and moving his chair back from the table they were all sitting around.

“The danger will be less, though not eliminated,” Christine cautioned Glenn, getting up herself.

Thomas, Alison, Harry, and Fredrick all got up to leave, too. Tabitha put her hand on Brittany’s arm to signal her to stay behind. She was talking earnestly to Brittany when the others left the room. It did no good. Brittany was adamant that she wouldn’t buck Glenn over the defense of the Farm. She’d been very uncomfortable around the three that Christine had said might have tried to kidnap women.

The farm did a great deal of trading that summer. Some of it from the locals, but much of it was to river traders who bought it with the expectation of reselling it along the river. Many of those trading with the Farm were trading scavenged goods. He allowed some fairly unequal trades, but he put his foot down on outright charity. People had to work at least a few hours around the farm to get something in return.

Glenn was surprised at how much gold and silver coin was turning up. And gasoline. It seemed that some river people had located several barges of gasoline, much as Seth had found the coal. But it was now over a year old and was marginal in many engines. But Glenn took it, at

greatly reduced value due to its age, in several large trades.

He'd stockpiled some gasoline, but most of the farm equipment was diesel, supplied by the biodiesel the Farm produced. But he had stockpiled large quantities of Pri-G, just in case. He could treat the gasoline from the barges, use some of it, and trade some of it.

As usually seems to happen, when things are going well, lookout. Don't drop your guard. Glenn and Christine didn't. They were ready when River Rat led a twenty-five man strong attack on the Farm. Red flares from the tripwires flashed into the sky in several places around the Farm. The sentry on duty tripped the Farm emergency alarm and armed residents scrambled to the roofs of the buildings.

The River Rat gang was heavily armed, but so were the residents of the Farm. Christine's training during the summer paid off. As the attackers left the cover of the trees, the defenders on the roofs poured fire down onto them. Half of River Rat's men were killed or wounded during that charge. As they tried to retreat, more were killed.

A select group of specially trained residents followed Christine in the direction she was sure the leader of the attack, perhaps River Rat himself, had taken. While the others on the roofs kept a sharp eye for another attack, none came.

It was almost an hour before Christine led her small group back to the Farm compound. They had one man with them. Glenn got a good look at him when Christine brought him into the clinic building for treatment. Glenn had been there checking on the three attackers that had been wounded.

Christine had been right. If this was River Rat, anyway. And it was, Glenn found out.

"Glenn," Christine said, "Meet River Rat."

“Pardon me if I don’t shake hands, big shot,” said River right, turning slightly to show his bound hands.

“I want his wounds tended, before I take him out and shoot him.”

“What’s your real name?” Glenn asked, disregarding Christine’s statement.

“Doesn’t matter. I’ve been River Rat since I was a kid.”

“You’re still a kid,” Glenn replied.

“I ain’t no kid!” River Rat almost yelled. “I almost took you down. Biggest between St. Louis and Memphis, and I almost had it!”

“Not even close,” Christine replied. “Move it. Harry is ready for you.”

Christine stood right with River Rat while Harry tended to two minor wounds.

“Okay,” he said, rather jauntily. “What now?”

“Like I said. I take you out and shoot you,” Christine said coldly.

Glenn started to intervene, but when River Rat jerked back in alarm, he decided to let Christine handle the matter.

“Wait a minute!” River Rat exclaimed. “You can’t do that! Just shoot me.”

“Why not?” asked Christine, holding his arm a bit more firmly.

“You... You... You... just can’t! It’s not right! You can’t just shoot prisoners. You have to take care of them. Feed them. And... stuff.”

“Says who?” asked Christine.

“That convention thing. It’s the law.”

“Geneva Convention, you mean?”

“Yeah! Yeah! That’s the one. You have to do what it says.”

“That applies to a country’s armed forces. You weren’t going to go by it if you’d won. We’re under no obligation to honor it.”

Glenn thought River Rat was going to cry. He looked even younger than he did initially.

Christine shot Glenn a quick glance when he said, “Of course you get a trial, first.”

“A trial?” River Rat asked, and then said, “Yeah! A trial.”

“Sure,” Christine said. “A trial. And then I take you out and hang you.”

“I’ve been to trial before, man. It takes years. I’ll get a lawyer, and...”

“You sure you don’t want me to just take him out and shoot him?”
Christina asked Glenn.

Glenn shook his head. “No. We’ll try them all tomorrow.”

“Now, wait a minute!” protested River Rat.

Christine began to lead River Right away. “Take what you can,” she told him.

Glenn turned to Harry. “How’d we make out? Anything serious?”

“Nothing serious,” Harry replied. “Got a couple with sand burns from close rounds hitting the sandbags. Three with bullet creases. One with a through-and-through. Missed everything. They were all lucky. And the defenses worked well.”

“Yeah. We owe a lot to Christine.”

“Don’t sell yourself short. If you hadn’t had the foresight to obtain enough arms, we never would have been able to hold them off.”

“Still don’t think everyone agrees with that.”

“Don’t let Tabitha get to you, Glenn. She’s a minority of one.”

“Some things. Other things, a lot of the people here agree with her.”

“Well, perhaps so, but when it comes down to it I think people know how and why they survived the war and the winter after it. Without you, and this place, most of these people would be dead. And many, many people that are getting their supplies here would be in dire straits without you.”

“That’s true. This place has turned into much more than I initially planned. And that’s good. But there are a great many more headaches than I planned, too.”

“Better thee than me,” Harry said with a laugh and a slap on Glenn’s back. “I have to clean up things. I’ll talk to you later.”

“Okay,” Glenn replied and headed toward his house. Christine came hurrying up before he got there. “Got them under lock and key with a guard. Tabitha wants to talk to them.”

“Oh, Great! Just what we need!” Glenn shook his head. “Okay. Let her.

But make sure they can't take her hostage."

"Why?"

Glenn gave Christine a hard look.

"Never mind," she said quickly. "They won't get their grubby little hands on her."

With a sigh, Glenn entered the house, Christine headed back to the barn where the prisoners were, and Tabitha was waiting.

He skipped supper, and went to bed early. He was exhausted both physically and mentally.

It was with some reluctance that Glenn got up the next morning. He fixed himself some breakfast, and then headed for the equipment barn to help with the beginning harvest. There was a crowd already gathered, much to his surprise.

Then he saw Tabitha, bundled up despite the fact that the weather was quite mild. She had a little color in her cheeks, but was otherwise pale as she addressed the group. Glenn heard nothing of what she was saying, as she stopped when she saw him.

Someone else saw him and asked, "What time is the trial, Glenn?"

"Trial? Oh. The trial." He hesitated only a moment. "One o'clock." He noticed that Tabitha seemed happy about it.

Fredrick was approaching, a scowl on his face. "What's the hold up?" he said in the forceful voice he had. People began to scramble to start working. Then he too saw Tabitha and muttered, "Should have known."

"There will be a trial of the attackers at one, Fredrick," Glenn told him

when he stopped next to Glenn. “Would you see to getting things set up by then? In the common area of the residence and work building.”

“A trial? You’re giving those murdering savages a trial? They deserved to be taken out and shot!”

Glenn sighed. “I was of a mind to just do that, but this is still America. I want to make sure we don’t forget that.”

Fredrick looked a little sheepish. “You have a point. Okay. I’ll see to setting things up. After we get the troops in the fields.”

“Of course,” Glenn replied with a smile. “I’ll get to work, too.” He put the trial out of his mind while he drove one of the Unimogs with a pull type combine to harvest canola for biodiesel production. But the lunch break came around and Glenn reluctantly left the Unimog and combine behind at the equipment barn. He skipped lunch and just lay down for a few minutes to rest before he had to deal with the trial.

But eventually he had to get up and go over to the residence and work building. Fredrick was waiting for him. “All set up,” Fredrick said. “We’re just waiting for you.”

“Who’s the judge?” Glenn asked.

“What do you mean, ‘Who’s the judge?’ You are. Crimeny. Who’d you think would be?”

“I don’t know. You. Or Harry. Brittany maybe.”

“Even Tabitha expected you to be judge.”

“Really. Now that’s a surprise.”

“Not really,” quietly replied Fredrick. “Now, come on. Everyone is

ready.”

With a sigh, Glenn followed Fredrick into the building and then to the large first floor common area. It was standing room only. Most of the Farm residents seemed to be there. Fredrick pointed out the desk at one end of the room. “There’s your bench. When you get there I’ll call the court to attention.”

Glenn nearly jumped when Fredrick said firmly, “All rise. Acting Judge Glenn Murphy presiding.”

Quickly Glenn took his seat behind the desk and said, “Be seated.” His eyes were drawn to Tabitha. She was sitting beside River Rat and the four members of his gang that had been captured. All wore obvious bandages. They were sitting behind one of the long lunch tables from the common dining room. There were three guards sitting right behind the five gang members, whose hands were tied behind them.

When he glanced to his right, there was Christine, sitting alone behind a similar table.

It suddenly dawned on Glenn that this was a real trial. Apparently Christine was the prosecutor and Tabitha was representing the defendants. He felt rather detached as Fredrick stepped forward. “Court is in session.”

Tabitha immediately stood up. “Your Honor, I request that the prisoners bonds be removed. There are three guards. It is degrading for the prisoners to be tied up like animals.”

“Object, Your Honor,” Christine said, rising. “The prisoners have shown little regard for civilized behavior. There is a good chance they will attempt to escape.”

“Escape?” Tabitha asked. “With everyone here, including armed guards?”

They want their chance to be heard.”

Both women looked at Glenn.

“Untie them.”

Tabitha beamed, and Christine just sat down calmly, with a neutral expression on her face. The guards untied the prisoners’ hands.

“Okay,” said Glenn as the prisoners rubbed their wrists. “I suppose we should start with the charges against the accused. Captain Montequé.”

“Object to the use of Captain in referring to Ms Montequé. She is no longer in the service.”

“Very well,” Glenn said. “Ms Montequé?”

“The prisoners are charged with attempted murder, Your Honor. One count for each resident of the Farm at the time of the attack.”

Christine sat down and Glenn looked at Tabitha. “How do you plead?”

Tabitha only half rose from her chair. “Not Guilty.”

There were murmurs from the crowd.

“Keep it quiet, please,” Glenn said. “Ms. Montequé, you may present your case.”

“A point of procedure, Your Honor,” Tabitha immediately said.

“Yes Tab... er... Ms Sheriton. What is it.”

“A jury, Your Honor. We need to select a jury.”

“A jury. Of course.” Glenn paused for a moment. “The gallery will be the jury. By counted voice vote.”

For a moment Tabitha looked angry and surprised, but suddenly she smiled. “The defense accepts that.” She leaned over and whispered something to River Rat. He smiled.

“Ms Montequé, please proceed,” Glenn said.

Christine only called a few people in turn. First the sentry that had been on duty and sounded the alarm, those of the Farm that had been injured, and then the rest of the armed defenders of the Farm. Each essentially gave the same statement. River Rat’s gang had attacked the Farm and tried to take it over. Tabitha chose not to question any of them.

“That it, Ms Montequé?” Glenn asked.

“The prosecution rests, Your Honor.”

Ms. Sheriton, present your defense.”

“Thank you, Your Honor. Defense calls Tommy Reid.”

Tommy looked surprised. He was the sentry that had sounded the alarm.

“Mr. Reid. You say you sounded the alarm. Why?”

“Trip flares in the woods. A bunch of them.”

“So you sounded the alarm before the alleged attack?”

“Alleged?” Tommy was incredulous.

“Just answer the question, Mr. Reid.”

“Well, yes. But...”

“The yes is sufficient, Mr. Reid. Now, upon Mr. Rat’s approach, did you call out a greeting?”

“Greeting? No! They were attacking! I shot at them.”

“Before asking what they wanted?”

“It was obvious wh...”

“Please just answer the question. Did you ask them what they wanted, at any time?”

“No.”

“So, even if they were a peaceful group wanting to trade with the Farm, you sounded the alarm and opened fire before they could so state. Is that correct?”

“They didn’t...”

“Your Honor, please instruct the witness to answer the questions as asked.”

“But, Glenn...” Tommy protested, looking over at him.

“Answer the questions as asked. Don’t venture opinions.”

Tommy nodded and looked back at Tabitha, “The way you said it, yes.”

“Very good. Your witness.”

Christine stood and asked, “Did the group give any indication they were

coming to make a trade?”

“No.”

“That’s all,” Christine said and sat back down.

Tabitha immediately rose and said, “Defense calls Melissa Johnston.”

Melissa was one of the Farm residents injured in the attack.

“Now, Miss Johnston, tell us in your own words what happened when you heard the alarm sound.”

“I was in one of the greenhouses, picking peas, when I heard the alarm. I grabbed my rifle and ran to the perimeter wall on the roof of the greenhouse support building. I began to fire at...”

“You fired before you were fired upon?”

“Uh... Well... Sure. They were shooting at us, so I shot back.”

“But no one shot at you until you shot at them. Is that correct?”

“Well, technically, yes, but...”

“Just answer the question. Remember the admonishment that Mr. Reid received. No opinions.”

“Then Yes.”

“That’s all,” Tabitha said. “Your witness.”

Christine stood and asked, “Was a battle taking place when you reached your firing point?”

“Yes.”

“That’s all,” Christine said.

It went much the same with the other witnesses that Tabitha called. And then she called River Rat to testify, much to everyone’s amazement.

“Now, Mr. Rat,” Tabitha said. “Please tell the court why you were approaching the Farm yesterday.”

“We was here to try to trade for some of that coal the Farm beat us out off last winter.”

There was a murmur through the crowd.

“What happened when you came through the forest?”

“A bunch of trip flares went off and then we were at the edge of the woods and an alarm was sounding and people were shooting at us. We didn’t have a chance.”

“So you would not have fired if you hadn’t been fired upon?”

“Nope. We just wanted to trade.”

“I see. Why didn’t you speak up and state that when you were approaching?”

“Didn’t have a chance. Your guys were trigger happy and just started shooting. Well, I tell you. Where I’m from you don’t take that lying down. You fight back. That’s what we did. But only because you fired first.”

“That’s all. Thank you Mr. Rat.” Tabitha looked over at Christine.

“Your witness.”

Christine stood up. “Mr. Rat. Did you at any time call out that you were just here to trade?”

“Didn’t have a chance.”

“I see. When you were fired upon, did you attempt to retreat and take cover, in order to make your wishes known?”

“Not likely! You wanna fight the Rat, you get a fight in return.”

“Did you come here to take over the Farm, Mr. Rat?”

“Nope. Just to trade. Just like the lady said.” River Rat pointed to Tabitha.

“I see. No more questions.”

“I don’t think there is any need to cloister the jury,” Glenn said. “Form a line and state your opinion of innocent or guilty of the charges.”

There was a bit of a ruckus as people formed the line. The prisoners’ guards were careful to make sure the prisoners knew they couldn’t do anything.

And then the voting began. The very first vote was from one of Tabitha’s friends. “Innocent.”

Many in the crowd couldn’t believe it. About half. For it seemed that for every ‘Guilty’, there came an ‘Innocent’.

Glenn, Christine, and Tabitha were all keeping a tally, as was Fredrick. When the last person voted, each of the four quickly totaled their lists. All the numbers agreed. The guilty count had it by four votes.

“Your Honor,” Tabitha said, “The vote must be unanimous, therefore...”

“No, Ms Sheriton. Simple majority rules in this case.”

Much to Glenn’s surprise, Tabitha didn’t ask for a revote. She actually looked satisfied and sat there with her arms crossed. River Rat was talking quietly, but urgently to her, but she ignored him.

“Okay people! People! Settle down,” Glenn called. Fredrick began to move forward help get everyone back to a seat or standing area.

“The defendants are hereby found guilty,” Glenn said firmly. “The sentence is...”

“Point of order, Your Honor!” Tabitha said loudly, rising from her seat.

“What is it Ms Sheriton?”

“We should have a sentencing hearing to choose the sentence the same way we decided guilt. I think a week...”

Glenn cut her off. “No, Ms Sheriton. Right now.”

Tabitha looked surprised and River Rat began to look scared. And desperate.

“Make you suggestion for sentence, Ms Montequé.” Glenn voice was firm.

“Death. By hanging or firing squad, defendant’s choice.”

“Ms Sheriton?”

“We can rehabilitate these people,” Tabitha stood and said. “Despite the guilty verdict, there is still doubt as to intention. There should be

leniency. The sentence should be two years of probation while working on the Farm.”

There was an outcry from the crowd as Tabitha continued. “I ask for another voice vote for the sentence.”

“Very well,” Glenn said. “Line up again.” He looked at Tabitha. “Simple majority vote. If there is a tie, I will break it.”

The vote went almost identically to the guilty verdict, except it was even closer. A tie. “All agreed?” Glenn said, as he, Christine, Tabitha, and Fredrick compared their counts. Again the counts agreed.

Everyone went back to their seat or standing point, looking intently at Glenn. Before he could speak, River Rat, and the members of his gang made their move. River Rat had Tabitha in a choke hold before anyone could move. The other four tipped their chairs back into the guards’ laps and wrestled them for their handguns.

The guards were simply students that had been willing to take firearms training. None were professional law enforcement or had any real hand to hand combat training. The prisoners quickly had their guns from them.

The prisoners began to back toward the nearest entrance, with River Rat still holding Tabitha up before him. The choke hold had her unconscious. No one could state later who shot first, but gunshots rang out, including the three prisoners with their liberated handguns. Glenn, Christine, Fredrick, and at least six others were firing at the prisoners. The prisoners with the handguns dropped quickly, the unarmed gang member was also killed.

Only River Rat, with Tabitha as his shield, remained alive. “I’ll kill her! I swear I will! Snap her neck like a stick, I will!”

There were nine guns on the pair. No one seemed ready to fire, for fear of hitting Tabitha. Not even Christine would take the shot. River Rat began to move closer to the door. Glenn saw his chance and fired. The .45 ACP hollow point bullet entered River Rat's right eye. He dropped immediately, Tabitha on top of him.

"Harry!" called Glenn. "See about Tabitha." He was holding his gun on the now fully exposed head of River Rat. River Rat wasn't going anywhere, nor was he going to hurt anyone again. He was dead. Glenn holstered his gun and looked around.

"Oh no!" he cried, half under his breath. Brittany, along with six other people were down, blood flowing from the wounds inflicted by the gang in their escape attempt. The two nurses from the rustlers' compound were seeing to the injured, though one of them looked to be sporting a crease on one arm.

It was an hour before everything was calm again. The clinic was quiet now. Tabitha was sitting by Brittany's bed, quietly crying. Glenn wondered if the tears were for Brittany or herself. She had been chastised and condemned for her actions by many of the other students.

Besides River Rat and his four gang members, who had died in the brief gun battle, three Farm members had also died. Five others sported minor to moderate wounds. Harry walked over to where Glenn was watching Brittany. She was asleep. Glenn was afraid of what he might say to Tabitha if he went over, so he was standing where he was.

"She should be okay in a few weeks," Harry told Glenn. "We got the bullet out with no complications, and we have antibiotics and pain killers. Baring something totally unexpected she'll be back to her old self in just a few weeks."

Glenn nodded. He left Harry to his duties and went to find Fredrick. He'd already started the students digging a mass grave for the gang,

beside the other trench they'd dug for the gang members killed in the initial battle. There would be individual graves for the Farm dead. The rest of the living had been put back to work to keep their minds off things for the moment.

Glenn felt the same way. He climbed back into the Unimog with the combine and went back to work. He worked until dark, and then parked his machine and went to the farm house to get supper. He really wasn't hungry, but he'd skipped lunch, so he made himself eat something. After debating for some time, Glenn went over to the clinic. Thankfully Tabitha was gone. In her place was Captain Montequé.

"How is she doing?" Glenn softly asked.

"Resting peacefully. I just stopped for a moment to see how she was doing." Christine got up and Glenn sat down. Christine quietly left the room as Glenn sat and watched Brittany sleep. She stirred once, and groaned. Glenn carefully adjusted the blanket back over her shoulders and under her chin, and then sat back down.

Harry came in a few minutes later and put his hand on Glenn's shoulder. After a few moments he squeezed the shoulder, and then left.

It was near midnight when Glenn finally got up and left. He slept fitfully, but was up at his normal time the next morning. He checked on Brittany. She was awake. Glenn thought she was very pale.

"Hi," he said, taking the chair by her bed.

"Hi."

"How are you doing? Harry said you were going to be all right."

"Some pain, but they're giving me something for it." She was silent for a long moment. "Glenn... What are you going to do about Tabitha?"

“I don’t want to talk about Tabitha,” Glenn replied softly.

“But someone has to. She wouldn’t say anything to me. And the others... They were saying terrible things about her. I know what she did probably wasn’t a good idea, but she has such strong convictions... She thought she was doing the right thing.”

Glenn sighed and leaned back in the chair. “Oh, I guess there was an element of her beliefs involved. But I also think there was a strong element of simply being against something I am for. We just don’t have the resources to handle this kind of criminal activity. Any criminal activity.”

“That’s for another discussion,” Brittany replied. “Right now I’m worried about Tabitha.”

“I’ll see that she’s okay,” Glenn said.

One of the nurses came in with a tray of food for Brittany. “I’ll let you have your breakfast. And I will take care of that other matter, too,” Glenn said, standing.

Brittany smiled a weak smile at him and tried to scoot back in the bed so she could take the tray in her lap. But it hurt and she cried out a little. Glenn hurried away. He couldn’t stand to hear her in pain and not be able to help. The nurse would tend to Brittany. Glenn went looking for Harry.

He was in the office of the clinic, going over some paperwork. “Harry?”

“Sure, Glenn. What is it?” Harry turned his chair around to face Glenn.

“I want you to check on Tabitha and...”

Harry made a face.

“I need you to do this, Harry. You have a good bedside manner and I doubt she would even talk to me. Brittany wants to know she is doing okay. Apparently some of the others are giving her a hard time about yesterday.”

“With good reason,” Harry said. “But it will affect Brittany’s recuperation if she doesn’t know Tabitha is all right. And I must say, that choke hold really put a strain on her system, on top of the lingering effects of the radiation sickness. I’ll check on her and let you know.”

“Thanks, Harry.”

Glenn went next to Fredrick, Alison, and Christine to ask them to help minimize the pressure on Tabitha for her actions. All three had similar sour looks on their faces, but knew enough about group dynamics to know that they needed to get Tabitha back into the group.

It took nearly a month before the harsh words and looks faded away and Tabitha began to feel comfortable enough to resume her already limited activities. Glenn had to give her one thing. She was doting on Brittany while Brittany was in the clinic.

The summer and fall had been cooperative. The field crop harvests were excellent, and the constant production from the greenhouses allowed those on the Farm to continue to trade food out and still put up more than enough for their own use during the winter and next season. It was well that they did. It was a brutal winter for them, though it started rather late.

Simpler Times - Epilog

That winter flu went through the Farm with a vengeance. Almost everyone got sick. The few that didn't tended to those that did, and kept up on the daily required farm work. Only five people died, despite the severity of the illness. That included Tabitha. Her radiation damaged immune system was not up to throwing off the illness.

The Farm picked up a few addition people however. Several families that had been making it on their own fought through the storms and asked for residency at the Farm. All brought reasonable skills, but it was just too hard to survive on their own.

The winter lasted well into the time spring should have come. The greenhouses continued to produce, but there were serious doubts about whether or not it would be prudent to use their seed stock for the field crops, if it was likely they wouldn't survive until harvest.

It was finally decided to put in small crops and hope for the best, while holding enough seed to plant the next summer should they not be able to recover seed from this crop. Even with another long fall, the field crops were marginal. The stocks of food and biodiesel were good, so almost all the production was put into seed storage for the following year.

All the initial breeding stock had been carefully chosen. The fact that they had started with such good stock was showing up. The well cared for animals were staying healthy and breeding well. The Farm was at the upper limit of how many animals they could support. It was decided to keep the levels up, as meat on the hoof, just in case there were problems.

But that winter, and the following spring and summer seemed to be the last of the war caused weather changes. It became milder over a period of years, until the growing season was about what it was before the war.

Brittany recovered and Glenn asked her to marry him not long after Tabitha died. She accepted and they were married that spring. So were

Christine and Harry.

There was talk of a new state government, and even federal government. River traffic grew, and one of the first major road repairs and replacements was an all weather road from the Farm to the river around Cape Girardeau.

While it could never be said that things returned to normal, a new normal came into existence, leaving behind much of the bad from the old normal. It would be a few generations, but human kind would go back to the moon, to start exploring and expanding again.

End *****

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