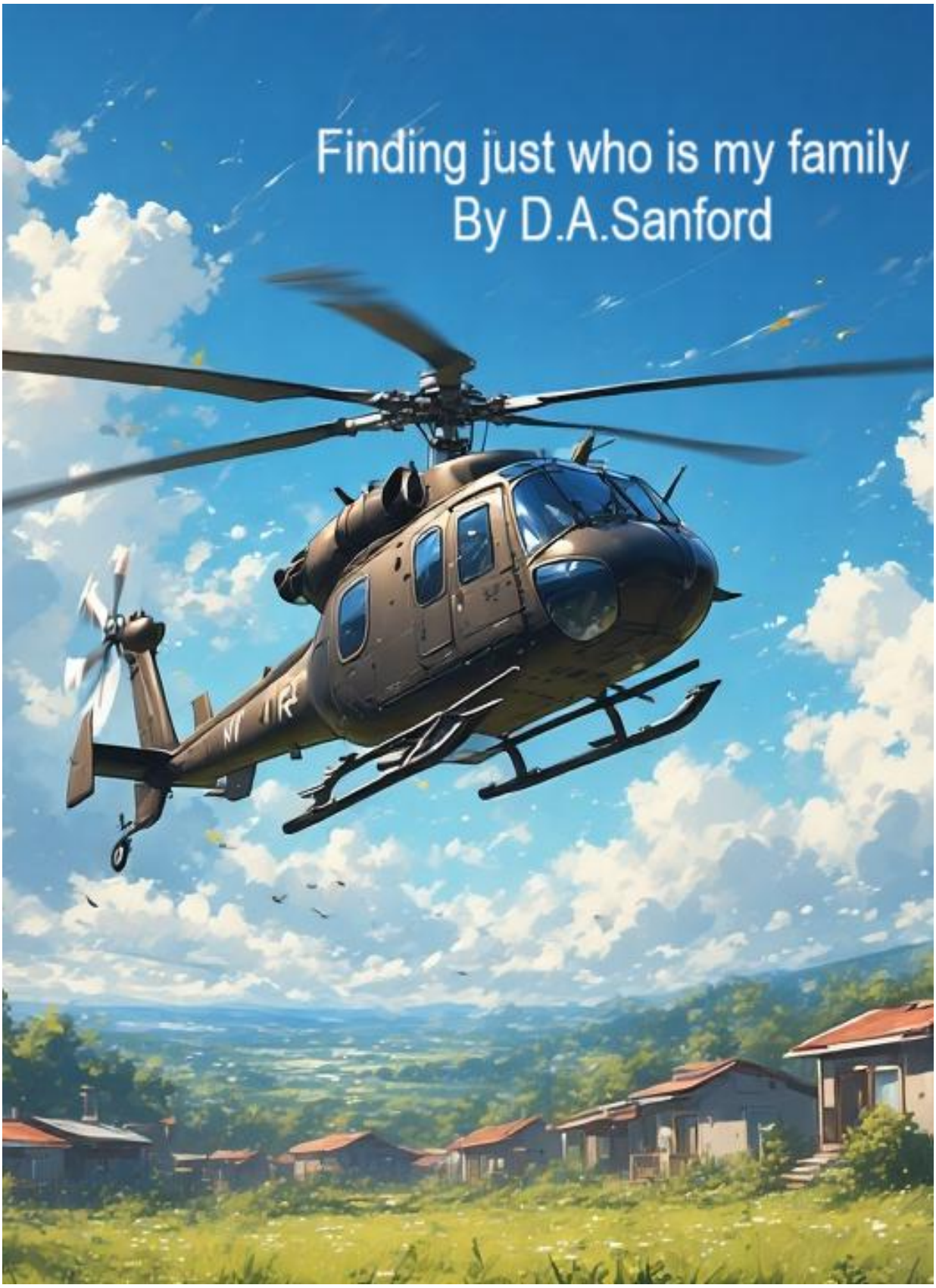
Finding just who is my family
By D.A.Sanford

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Readers be advised

Warning: Contains adult content due to graphic descriptions of any or all of the following:

Battles, Language, Sexual

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Governments are crazy

It had become apparent that this society has reached the tipping point. The animosity between the two opposing factions has reached the point of no return. It was going to be an all out global war. I tried to get my family to follow me into an area that I had bought recently.

Seeing the buildup of tension. The news makers, I call them such because they no longer report the news, they invent it and then whip people into a frenzy. The ratings are all that counts. They make the news.

Knowing what was inevitable, there is an innate instinct for self preservation in most. No matter how friendly your town seems, given the right, or should I say, the dire circumstances, most civilized people will become feral.

They want what you have and are willing to kill you for it. This is not being pessimistic, it is just a cold hard fact that hunger, for most, makes all of societies morals fall by the wayside. Never to reemerge.

The forest area I wanted actually was not owned by anyone private. It was under the control of the county. The land management official wanted the money to fortify the family compound so he accepted my generous offer for the one hundred acres.

There is an old logging road that allowed me to access the middle area. I have flown over the area many times and it still looks like it has not been touched. It needs to look as if nothing is there.

I took a page from a country overseas, during the air raids of the last world war, where they had whole complexes under false canopies that, from the air, looked like countryside. At the beginning of the logging road, there is a movable gate that looks like it is part of the forest. All this so only I knew what was happening on the hundred acres.

My refuge has been made from a large number of modular rooms which were assembled in the small area that I cleared. Around the perimeter of the house lot is an eight foot tall chain link fence with razor wire topping it. I want this place to be protected. Buried under the house, is a two floor shelter where I have all the staples for a prolonged period of time until the war is settled. It goes without saying that I can defend this place.

My family has been invited but I have not disclosed the location. Much to my dismay, all of them called me obsessed and declined. They called me foolish when I described that I had enough stock for a few years stay for the thirty people I invited. To the person I was told

“You’re crazy to think that things will go that far. A waste of money.”

A waste of money? I could see that it was going to happen soon. The rhetoric, the insane posturing at the brink told me that within a week, it was going down. I was going, if alone I don’t care, I’m going.

I sit here and look at what I need to take with me. There is very little I need that I don’t have in those stores that are there. I know that I will not be back or a few years so I need a final look through. This is going to be a new life so why drag baggage. Those childhood trophies are out.

As I am deciding, I hear a knock at my door. It is my neighbor. She and I have had a good neighborly relation. Plenty of talks over the fence so to speak. She is my age, a little over forty. Average looks but pleasant to look at and more important pleasant to talk with. She an I have had lively discussions over the present situation.

“Don, I hate to bother you but I am seriously worried. I have to admit that you are right. This is going to be no place to be in a short time. No one is backing down. I wanted to tell you that I am going to hit the road and hope to get away from the fighting.”

She looks like she knows it is a futile gesture. I now feel that I need to do this.

“You have been good to me. I can see that you are scared. Marie, I won’t say where but how would you like to take a helicopter ride tonight? You can take one bag. Where I am flying to, it will be relatively safe but it is fortified and well stocked. Food, clothes and weapons. If you are willing, we take my car and I will fly you there. Most important, do not tell anyone and no obligations other than courtesy.”

Marie is besides herself and I have her sit. “What are you saying? Are you telling me that you have a safe haven? I know you, when you want to kid me you are always smiling but I see a very serious look on you. I will tell you that I will go with you and don’t care what rules you impose as long as I can be safe.”

“It is now five pm, be here at six. I will leave at six whether you are here or not. I’ll fill you in once we are driving to the private airport.”

She looks both panicked and relieved. She dashes out and within ten minutes she is in my house with a bag. Marie told me that she was going to leave after she talked with me, so she was packed. She does ask if we want to take her food.

“Leave it for the scavengers.” Is all I say.

I have my one bag already. No sense to wait. We go through to the connected garage and load my car. Turning off the garage light, I pull out and the door closes

automatically. We are off. I pity my relatives. The news is saying that talks have broken down. I turn the radio off and fill her in.

“Okay, here is what is happening. I own a helicopter designed to carry up to 10 passengers. I have had it prepped a few days ago. Once a week, as a cover, I would fly for a few hours at this time, land and then refuel. Without disclosing the location, I offered to take in my close relatives. They all said that I was crazy. None of them know of the helicopter. I have made a retreat piece by piece. It is an hour’s flight into nowhere.”

“I asked thirty relatives to join me, thirty declined but only after I had stocked it with enough to live well for a few years. It is not hard to figure that the two of us will not be on starvation rations.”

I stop talking because we are at the airport. It is still light out but it will not be more than an hour before sunset. There is no one around as I pull up to my helicopter. We quickly load aboard. With a few last instructions, I have Marie sit in the copilot’s seat. I sit and we are off.

There was the usual chatter on the radio about airspace now being restricted but I fly at tree top level under the radar. Don’t think the FAA will be listening to complaints of low level aircraft..

She gets serious. “Why do you live in that house when it is very obvious that you are not strapped for cash?”

“It is very simple. I liked the area and the people. The people that flaunt their wealth as being better than someone else are always afraid that someone will be better off. They are never disappointed. There is always someone with more to display. I had good people that treated me for me. Look at it this way, my relatives thought I was crazy for building what I built. A waste of money they said but each had beach front houses that are so close together that you could hang the toilet paper roll between each house. Those are just empty lots. Lost in that fire. We are about there. Look down. Do you see any lights? That is why I spent my wealth on the property and the build. You need to strap in. We are about there.”

It is almost dark so I hit the lights and land. Immediately I kill all lights and go into the passenger area. There in the locked cabinet was flack jackets and side arms. I insist that we both wear them.

“Just precaution. It should be clear but this is just in case. You will need to cover me as I tow this under that camouflaged roof.”

No one was there. Both the landing area and house were clear. It was quiet until we had the shit scared out of us. My cell rang. It was my relatives saying that the fighting had started. They wanted me to pick them up. I hung up within seconds without saying anything as they were asking if I could hear them. I threw it down and crushed it with my foot. No way to track its location.

I truly did not like doing that but now that fighting has started, I needed to be cold. There is no way that I would jeopardize being shot down or being followed. I flew here with the helicopter lights off and also the location transponder turned off.

After going over the layout of the house, I sat down with Marie and told her about the fighting starting

“It has started. From this point on, the both of us will be carrying side arms. The people will flee but they will become scavengers. They will kill to take what you have. It should be safe here for now but people may start to come into these woods. Only the county land officer knows that I bought this land. There are only two types of humans alive now. Those who are hunters and those who are hunted.”

This shocks her but I can see that she understands this fact.

Now for the full tour. I tell her that there was enough rooms for those I invited, two per room. Four full bathrooms. Large kitchen and eating area. Communications room, shortwave with a ham setup. The two lower levels can be sealed off and used as a shelter in case of forest fires or war related explosions.

She is really beside herself. I can tell that she is in overload. I show her to the bedroom side.

“You pick a room and I will then pick one away from yours. For your comfort.”

We go to bed. Tomorrow will be a big day. There are things that need to be done to disguise the remaining presence of this place being here. That I have covered.

In the morning, I wake to the smell of cooking. Marie has found the stores and it smells like pancakes and coffee. She says that she has found the flour and dry yeast. She tells me that she will be making bread.

“What we need to do today, is make sure that we get familiar with the outside of the fence. If we follow the same path all the time, it can be spotted. The biggest thing that is left over from my prep list, is that large white sign of a propane tank. I thought I would paint it leaf green.”

Marie interrupts me, “Leaf green in the winter? A blind man would spot that. What if we made a long tray that would act like a roof for it. Then plant it with vegetables but not in an ordered manner. From above it would look like just vegetation. Camouflage that we can eat. This being spring, we should do it right now. Do you happen to have seed packets?”

“The seeds are in our stores. I did stock potatoes in the cold cellar. We can cut the eyes and plant those ground level. I have five gallon buckets that we could use for those.”

I have stockpiled lumber in the woods so it did not take all that long to build it. What took the longest was the dirt we needed to fill it. I have a bobcat tractor so I was able to get soil from the woods but the bucket would not go high enough . Bucket by bucket, it took a few days.

After planting, I covered the soil with some hay. Looking at it, I have to say that it blends in. When the seeds broke through the hay, it looks like just a bunch of random plants. We carefully thinned it out. Over the summer, we had fresh vegetables but I get ahead of myself.

I was not as secretive as I thought

We got settled into a routine. Always on guard but also relaxed, I knew that I was being as secretive as I could. Having the modules delivered, all those materials that I could not bring in myself and such. It was ignorant of me to believe that I was totally isolated.

It was a week after we got here when I saw a couple with their three children just standing at the gate. The man was calling out to us.

“We are unarmed. Can we please talk?”

The man was the one that hauled in the rooms for me. I did not even need to ask what did he want. I knew, they wanted what we have, a safe place. Unlike what I had expected, an assault, they were peacefully standing there. Very nervous as to their reception but I could see desperation in the parent’s eyes.

I look at Marie and she nods.

“I’m going to open the gate but the children must enter first. Then you two. First I need all of you to step back away from the fence door. I will let each of you in one by one. All will be patted down. The boy first and I will pat him down. Then the two girls, Marie will frisk them. She will then do the same for your female. You will be the last,”

They comply and there are no weapons on them. Not even a knife. That is a good sign.

“I know why you are here. Weren’t you the one that delivered the modules?”

He answers that he was. “The fighting is starting to get intense. More and more countries are fighting and it is not just on one continent. Everyone is invading each other. I feared for my family. I took a chance that maybe you weren’t here. There is no other place that I could think of. Would you please at least let my wife and children stay? I’ll leave if necessary.”

I need to take charge. Firm but generous to a point.

“I am in charge here and Marie is my second. You did not walk here. Where is your vehicle? I hope you did not leave it on the road.”

He tells me that he found the hidden gate and opened it, drove in and closed it. The car is parked just after it. They walked here from there. I tell him that we will go and bring it up here.

“Marie, fix something for them to eat while I walk with him to bring up the car. You are to keep your side arm on you at all times. Talk to the wife then when we get back, you and I will compare what we know.”

She and I had talked about just this situation. How we are approached is how we react but, depending of gut feelings, they live or die but living they can stay. Hostile will just die. They will not be allowed to carry for a while.

As we are walking, he tells me that his name is Josh. They packed everything they could into the back of his work van. They planned that if they could not stay, they would need survival items. He told me that they did have two side arms and a hunting rifle in the van.

When we came near, I had him give me the keys. I needed to verify that there isn’t something hazardous to my life in there. Upon looking there were the firearms he stated but the remainder were items needed to live. I have him drive up after I put the weapons out of his reach. I have him tell me about why he thought I would allow him to stay here.

“With the number of rooms you had delivered and the remote area, I figured that you were making a safe spot to ride this out. I tried doing the same but there was not enough time. My modules will not be ready until next month.”

He has a forced sad chuckle. Too little too late. I am starting to get a decent feeling that they will be no trouble and well we do have the room. I’m going to talk with Marie but I think, for now, we will let them stay. There will be rules that they will need to live with.

I have him park in the wooded area that I created if the need to have driven here rather than the helicopter arose. I have here a few of those four seated work ATV’s. We will use those when needed.

After we return, we four adults talk while I let their children watch something on DVD. I like the cartoons as well as other videos that even children like to watch.

“Let’s start here. I know you but Josh, introduce your wife for now.”

He tells me that her name is Sharon. The children are Bobby, Barbra and Gwen.

“You have been truthful, so far, so we will let you stay if you can abide by our rules. Our relationship is not open. Yours will be also if we allow anyone else in. Courtesy, keep your area clean and clean up any mess you make. Lastly, hostility is met with hostility. You came here open handed, other surely will not. This compound will be defended by all four of us. Anyone hostile will be killed, not driven off. Can you abide with these rules? One extra thing, everyone works. Those children will have chores.”

We are told that those rules are acceptable.

Now for the hard news. I explain that this was going to be sanctuary for some of my relatives. I told them that they all refused but when it started, they called be when we first arrived here.

“I broke the phone but it still worries me. They may know where or have a suspicion as to where this is. Even under normal conditions, they were opulent and yes greedy. I liked them because they did not bother me for my views.”

I hesitate and swallow as I tell them, “That gate is locked and must be kept locked at all times. If they show up they will be demanding and yes hostile. Any that show up here, I will say that they fall into the category of people that will not be allowed to leave. They will not be allowed to stay so they will not be allowed to live.“

That struck home. If I was willing to state that those who I invited to come here now would not be allowed to live if they showed up here says a lot to them. Marie does say that she knows of a few of her relatives that are the same.

Josh is thinking and then he tells us that he spoke to some of the delivery people that came here and they said that they would like this place for theirs if the shit went down. That tells me that those are an immediate threat.

I tell them that the platform to get onto the tank garden needs to be manned. I go through a door and come back with an ammo box then a few AK47’s. The ammo box had the preloaded drums.

“Hostility is fatally met. Their fatality not ours. I now feel as if someone is watching us from above.”

I hand Josh one and a drum. A specific one that was on the top. He installed the drum then set it down.

“Josh, let me see that AK.” He hands it to me and I point it at the ceiling, then pull the trigger. Nothing. I pull the drum and show him.

“That was your last test. This drum has dummy rounds in it. If you had aimed it at us and pulled the trigger, you would have been dead but you put it down. You and yours can stay. I hand him the AK and tell him to choose a drum but look at the rounds before you load it.”

Sharon shivers then says that they need to talk to their children about gun safety. They are not my kids so I call them out. I grab the assault rifle and have all come outside. I aim at a small tree and fire the hundred rounds bringing down the tree.

“This is not a toy. Do not touch any weapon but you will be shown gun safety by your father. Sharon please come here.”

I show her how to load, aim and fire. With another drum, I have her quickly pull the trigger then let up. She does and a spirt of rounds are fired. Now I have her squeeze and hold. The remainder fire off.

“Sorry Josh, I needed to see how she would react. Now you Marie.”

She is a little more hesitant but repeats the same as Sharon.

“That’s it for today but again children these are not to be handled by you but if there is a battle, Bobby, your job will be to take charge and bring your sisters to the lower basement and stay there until we come to get you. Understand?”

As we are getting ready to go in, several shots ring out from the woods. I have the AK, slap a new drum in it and yell for them to get in the house. Aiming at the area the shots came from, I sweep the area. Josh comes out with the other and together we sweep a good arc then stop.

No more shots, we find the propane guy dead. His hunting rifle next to him. He probably thought that our firing was directed at him so he fired back. But he did approach us armed and in the woods. We each have new drums and go looking.

The gate was crashed. He parked not much further and crept up to us. It looks like he was alone because only the drivers seat was empty. The rest of the interior was packed with the essentials. All the beer and hard liquor that could be fitted in. I pop the trunk and find his gold and silver. No real food.

I have Josh drive it up and park it.

The other’s come out and we tell them that he was alone but I now needed to tell them that there were others that delivered here. “He crashed the gate so we need to fix that now. Josh tells me that the roadside was the giveaway.

“Your delivery instructions were to turn at the boulder on to the logging trail. We need to get rid of the boulder.”

I got a better idea. “Just down the road is that deep ravine. Why don’t I take my loader and we move it to that area. Place it and dig up the roadside to look like it. Then we drop some brush at the roadside blocking our road.”

He likes that idea. It is strange how fate works. We moved the rock and made that turnoff. At our road, we were just finishing when we heard a very loud sound of a crash.

Going back, we can see that we needed to fix the entrance. There at the bottom of the ravine was a mangled car. We went down to see and the driver was dead. The passenger was still alive but he was fumbling around. He just could not reach that pistol he was fumbling for. I shot him.

“I don’t want to fix the roadside. They will see the ravine and start to look around. If that was a family like yours. This will serve as a warning without the need to post. Let’s go home and discuss this.”

Back at the home, we sit with all, including the children, and tell them of the crash.

“My worry is that it could be friendly people. I would not want to find a family at the bottom.”

Marie says something that makes sense.

“Why not use the loader to pull down some of the dead trees in both directions, including the ones roadside at our entrance. Storms come through and trees fall, with no road crews to clear them, people would have to clear them or choose an alternate route around. We will hear the saws clearing the road. We would be able to creep up and see who it is and act accordingly.”

“She is absolutely right.” I comment “Someone intent at getting to us would cut the trees up enough to get around. Josh, we need to go back to the road.”

It took a few days but there are now six dead ones down in both directions.

News

We check the down trees at least once a day. Drive almost to the road then walk. Never single and never unarmed. There is some trash, so we must figure that it must be someone taking a back road and had to turn around. We still need to be vigilant.

An army vehicle would go over the downed trees.

There has been no noise in our area of fighting but it is apparent, listening to our short wave and ham radios that all sides invaded their nearest neighbor. The first thing that was done was to take out their enemy's air power. They were good at that.

From what has been said, my helicopter may be the only aircraft left in this country.

Infrastructure such as roads, ports and electric grids were destroyed worldwide. They found that they were up smitch's creek

They did find a major problem with that tactic, the invading troupes were stranded and are now having to live off the land. Savagely, after all even the civilians are the enemy. We need to fortify our home.

People that just want to live are having their homes food supplies forcibly taken and the most brutal actions taken against them. To the point of rape, torture and murder. It is not uncommon for a family to have a hide away from the house. That is for the young ones to escape to. Once they hide, there is a real chance that they will be orphans when they come out of the hide.

It's the girls that come to us and tell us that they see a few children at our fence. We go to the fence and ask why they are here.

"Our father told us that if anything happened to them, we were to make our way here. He said to tell you that he delivered a lot of lumber here."

We were shown a map that showed the direction from their hide to here. They had to hike at least twenty miles. More if they had to make detours. I have them ushered into the house but not before we searched them and their backpacks. All they had on them were some canned goods and bottled water. The oldest girl had a knife to protect her two younger brothers.

They told us that a fragment of an army is what hit their home town. There are more children out there. I can tell that Marie and Sharon are having their hearts ripped out with that news.

I now know that we are going to turn into a sanctuary for the children.

Now, seeing our concern, the girl tells us, “We three came forward to see what you would do. We had gathered to protect ourselves. There are over thirty more children waiting in the woods for us to yell for them to come in. They are hiding, ready to flee if you chased us out or killed us. Please let them in. I think we were followed.”

I look to Marie, Josh and Sharon. “What can we do? I can see by your faces that they need to come in. I need each of you to voice your opinion.”

Not saying a word, The two adult women, tell the girl that they are welcome and take her out to call them in. The girl calls out and a horde of ragged children come to the gate. Both Josh and I, however stand out with flack jackets and our assault rifles.

Those children seem in a hurry to get inside. When the last gets inside, I yell for everyone to get into the basement lockdown. Most are crying because they knew they were followed.

From out of the woods come a group of soldiers that are ready to overrun us but they did not know what Marie and I only knew. The fence is now electrified with lethal amperage. The first hit the fence and drop dead. We open fire and in a short time the remainder are dead. I got a grazing flesh wound.

The two of us go inside and we are looking for anyone injured because there were quite a few new holes in the walls of the home. Thankfully our two women had everyone go into the basement and locked it down.

I hit the intercom and have them stay there until we sweep the woods and clear the bodies. Four hours and all are back up out of lock down. They all are huddling together around those who appear to be their leaders. I talk to them in a very calm tone.

“You are all welcome to stay here. First, it appears that you have group leaders. For now, they will still be your leaders. We four adults will be in charge. Your group leaders will meet with us every morning and they will flow down the day’s tasks. But for now, is anyone of you hungry?”

They all raise their hands,

We shift into high gear and soon there is a group of children that are tearing into the plates set before them. We made sure that they had seconds.

I asked the leaders to come forward.

“There are four full bathrooms. The older girls will take the younger ones and give them a bath. Then you boys will do the same after they are done. We have a vast array of children’s clothes. All jeans and shirts.”

Bobby shows each where the new clothes are.

While they are bathing, I tell Josh, Sharon and Marie. “We need to keep an eye on these new ones. The oldest ones especially. Their leaders are in their early teens. We need to feel out where their intentions lay. For now, we take them at face value but those soldiers weren’t too far behind.”

Josh says that we need to check their trail. “It will not be hard to find. What I want to see is there any signs of someone leaving items along the way to guide the troupes here. We need to talk now as what to do if we find that they were leading the troupes here.”

Sharon says it best, “How are you going to tell which child did it? I hope you don’t find anything but it may be time to scout that town.”

Now’s the time to reveal something that even Marie does not know of. “I need to show you something.”

I lead them down to the second level of the cellar. Against the left wall, I take out a key I always carry and stick it into a hole. The shelf unit now slides open to reveal a large garage containing more ATV’s that I have modified. Two are gas powered but two are electric with solar panels. The four have been equipped with remote controlled machine guns. The driver can reload the feed as they drive because the feed is in the area of the passenger seat.

They are just looking at me then looking at those ATV’s and back to me.

“Well, I made this place to be a secure refuge. I knew that we may need to scout or attack. We need to two electric ones this time. The two gas powered ones are for attack. This stays locked at all times but there is a concealed ramp that spills outside the back of the propane tank.

Marie now shows that she has a revelation. “Is that why you have the helicopter parking area so large?”

“Yes. That shed moves out of the way. With all these children here, Marie, I’m going to have Josh and Sharon watch the children since they have the three of their own here. You and I will scout out the trail and that village.”

Josh reminds us that these would not have been moving like ninjas, they would be just moving in a mass, oblivious of stealth. “You need to look out for objects left.”

Now for serious matters. “Marie, once we get near the town, we will be seeing who is left in the town. Are there more soldiers but what happened to the parents. You must be prepared for the worst. Torture and mutilation. Any that are still alive but near death, I

will put them down. We will have to be tough for those children but know this, they may already know. You must be ready to kill."

We are on our way once we made sure that Josh and Sharon knew that they needed to have side arms on at all times. They were told to tell the children it was just in case there were still soldiers out there.

The trail was not hard to follow. Other than needing to dodge some trees, the path was wide enough to clearly follow. We did not see anything left behind. That is a relief. Anyone could and can follow the trail.

When we got close to the town, we left the ATV's way off that trail and hid them with brush.

The carnage was evident. There are no longer organized armies, just gangs with one intent, inflict cruelty on the population. Food and fun, to them. Butchery to the victims. There were no survivors in the town. However we did find a few of the soldiers keeping guard of their spoils.

I knee capped them. They did not have their weapons with them. No need, the population was causing no problem, they were dead.

The two of us walked in and those spouted that we were in trouble. The patrol will come running.

"Do you mean those who followed the children? They are all dead. Tell me why did you do all this carnage?"

We need to subdue …"

Marie had heard enough and unloaded a clip into them. The bodies of the towns people had been dragged into the church. We found some that were not when we swept the town for anyone still alive. There were none. The houses where bodies were found, including the church, we set them on fire. Those few soldiers we killed were left where they fell.

They had loaded all the food onto a trailer. Getting the ATV's, I towed the trailer back to our home. Now the thing that I dread. Even though we figure that they know, we still need to explain what we found in less detail to those children.

They are my family

We have started to be a children's refuge. You know, I really do not mind one bit. I shutter to think what my mind would be like if my relatives had accepted my offer. I realize now that they were greedy self centered bastards.

These children have become comfortable here but they are also very cautious. Trying to survive causes them to be alert. We adults are the same. We go into an alert when there is an indication of something not right.

The road to our home is now no longer hidden. The gangs that we have repelled, singles looking for just some extra food that we could spare and such have trampled the road beyond concealment. We have had parents come much to the delight of a child but the request is always the same.

"Would you please keep caring for our child? We are constantly fleeing and the child looks well cared for."

Still there is fighting going on. Of course the child will stay, we now are family. Not until we personally see that the fighting has stopped, would we let one of our children go.

We all work here. Just because we have stores in the basement does not mean that we don't farm or hunt. I had bought enough seeds to carry us each year with ample vegetables for five years. There is still a lot of game so birds, deer and such give us plenty of meat. I do wish we had a river nearby. I miss fish.

The longer this goes on, the closer we have to watch the stores and the more we need to become reliant on farming and hunting. I have a lot of how to books. We now use the fat of our large animal kills to make a rustic version of soap.

The teens are now able to hunt along with us but we make sure that there is always two adults and three teens to defend the home. The radios say that there is still fighting but now it is away from us. We still need to be on guard.

It has been almost six months since this started, so it shocked me when we were told by the children that there were some angry men at the fence yelling for me by name. Much to my shock, there were two of my relatives but they had a bunch of what look like thugs with them.

I yell loud, "All children go to the lock down room. Sharon, go with them."