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The Survivors

by
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Prologue

Like most days, the sound of the ocean is haunting. Not much scares me anymore, but the whispers I hear in those powerful swells are terrifying. Thanks to the apocalypse that caused the end of the world, I've become the guardian of a refugee camp called Safe Haven. Surrounded with carefully observing sentries, I sit by the immense Pacific Ocean as people work and play, confident that my Eagles will protect them while I tell you about the war, and about how we were forced to flee our beloved homeland in the awful aftermath. The fall of society was a nightmare from which we couldn't wake. Some of us still haven't, and soon, we'll be at the water's mercy again. In less than two months, we're going home. And I'm the only one who knows.

The real America still waits for us to rebuild, but mostly, simply, for us to return. Before we undertake that perilous journey, I have to get the three hundred fifty-seven souls here ready for the trip, and I only know one way it can be done—Adrian has to come back and lead us home, as he promised. Adrian... That incredibly patriotic man has been exiled, even though he is the only reason we survived. His secrets were the excuse the camp needed to turn on him, but I won't do that. I can't. I swore myself to him the same as the rest of his Council, and like them, I still believe.

I've gotten ahead of myself, far beyond the beginning, when our future didn't look as good as it does now. Most people surviving here won't talk about the long, ugly journey we made together. They say those memories have faded, but I know a lie

when I hear one. Some horrors, you just never forget. Like our final battle with Cesar. It's been five years, but I still see the thick streams of blood running down rain-soaked trees. I still smell men burning alive in their metal coffins. I dream of it sometimes, of the cold, wet night when I was the bait, and I'm sure Adrian does too. It was the moment we knew our people would live—because of one man's dream and his terrible lies.

Adrian kept us alive, gave us everything he had, and he always did what was best for the camp, no matter what it cost him personally. He taught us to be stronger than we thought we could be, to defend each other and ourselves and through it all he lied by omission. He knew these scared, hurting survivors would never have trusted him, would never have given him a chance, if they'd known who he really was.

We came a long way together in the year after the war, thousands and thousands of miles of heartbreaking devastation, and it hurts those of us who remain loyal to witness him accept their unfair judgment without a fight. It makes everything we lived through feel less important than it was, weakens the magic somehow, and I can't allow that.

I've been detecting open doors again, and that sly ocean cautions me, says the trip home will be as hard as the one we undertook to get here. If there's a storm coming for the flock, then it's our guardian we'll need to guide us through it.

So, for Adrian and for those of us standing by him, still ready to die for him, and for the dreams he made me believe in from almost the first minute I set foot in his refugee camp, I will tell our story and leave nothing out. Maybe then, these people will realize what he did for our country, accept how much we owe him, and allow him to reclaim what's rightfully his—us.

Before I tell you about our harsh, ugly journey, let me show you what happened on that day, what they did to us and what we did to each other.

This is how our story of survival began...

Chapter One

This is the Way

December 21st, 2012

1

“This is a joke, right? One of Milton’s gags?”

When no one spoke, President Carter examined the paper he’d been given to read, wishing he had surrounded himself with more experienced people. He had no idea what came next. It wasn’t something he’d planned to conquer during his time in office.

“Where do I give the speech?”

Carter had discovered a love of talking to his people, but Ben Seiling, Deputy Chief of Staff, gestured to the radio the president used for the weekly addresses.

“It’s not safe in public. The rioting started an hour ago in most places, and is spreading faster than we can keep up with.”

“No cameras? Press?”

“No,” Ben refused. “We already have two security tapes missing. No reporters, no questions. Too many people will still suspect the truth.”

Usually confident, Carter was almost speechless, unable to imagine how his country would react. He slid behind the impressive desk, for once without reminding himself that it was his. Hand hesitating, he looked up. “We’re sure?”

Ben’s curt nod confirmed it, but the sheer number of Secret Service Agents roving the halls of the West Wing, filling his Oval Office, was what drove it in. As Carter had the thought, three more uniformed men came in from the doors that led to the

Rose Garden, expressions shouting excitement and a touch of fear that wasn't comforting.

“Yes. The agents will take you and your family out as soon as you're finished here. The vice president and joint chiefs will be in the air shortly, headed for the Essex Compound.”

The president flinched as two more shots rang out in quick succession somewhere nearby. He swept the damning newspaper lying on the spotless desk:

Betrayal is the Foundation of America!

The Gospel of Mary was discovered in Southern France last month and has now been proven genuine by experts secretly asked to test the parchments. In them, is a tale of murder, extortion, kidnapping, and forced reproduction that scientists claim have kept secret the descendants of Jesus Christ. The list of powerful families around the globe that are being accused is staggering...

Carter gestured to the newspaper. Tomorrow's edition; he was positive he didn't want to know how it had been obtained. “When did they discover the site?”

“An old manuscript was unearthed in France last year. One of the experts refused a large payment to keep quiet and we couldn't secure all the copies of his findings. A local station is set to run the story tomorrow.”

“Not anymore.”

“Exactly.”

The first term president stared at the Seal, the desk, the walls. These things had been his, and he had done justice to them where he could, but this? It was beyond his control.

Carter hadn't quite believed it when he'd first been informed of the file known only as “DOC,” but it hadn't taken him long to understand how much the world would change if the public

suspected the massive secret that had been kept all these years. The days of government rule would be...

“Mr. President, please.”

Breaking into a sweat and not caring that he was ruining a very expensive suit, Carter stared at the small sea of faces, now hearing heavy stomps above them which could only be agents storming through the Residence for his family.

Ben, perhaps reading some of his thoughts, spoke up. “These men have no families to rescue, have been paid well in gold and passes, and all of them voted for you. There are no deserters here. You and your family will make it to NORAD, safe and sound.”

Only slightly reassured, the president skimmed what might be his last address, worry burning intensely. He glanced up from the pages at the impatient Deputy Chief of Staff. “You’ll activate the sirens?”

Both of them looked up as the ceiling lights changed to a pale red.

“As soon as you’re on your way. Now please, you have to go. DC is a direct target!”

Carter delayed, hating it that he was being rushed, wasn’t being told everything. “What about air traffic and vital services?”

The deputy’s lined face went blank, and when he replied, it was with a tone that implied it didn’t matter. “They’ve been instructed to land the planes anywhere they can, so Star Wars doesn’t shoot any more down by mistake. Last report said four confirmed crashes, two more suspected. Mr. President, we have to—”

“What about vitals? Evacuations?”

Ben sighed in frustration, knowing the president would have his report before he did anything. Carter could be pushed, but it had to be gently. “The internet is locked down; only our senior military have the codes needed to access it. As for EVACs, those on the lists are thirty-five percent recovered at this point. Ahead of schedule.”

“And vitals?” Carter insisted, knowing it was ugly. In the answer, he heard the same terror and anxiety he felt in his own stomach.

“We have reports of massive abandonment of posts already. Media stations in France and China are on it. Daycares, schools, hospitals, radar and traffic towers, police stations, utility plants—they’re already starting to shut down. Citizens will have nothing to depend on, no way to survive after the first few months.”

The deputy’s voice lowered. “The draft convoys started out half an hour ago. Waves of refugees have been spotted hitting towns ahead of the trucks. Some of those places are attempting to barricade themselves in. We’ve covered it. *Our* men will follow orders.”

The president winced at the mental image. He’d been briefed, but he hadn’t honestly thought they would do this to their...

“Carter.”

It was the first time the deputy had ever called him by his first name, and to do it here, in this hallowed place, was such a transgression of protocol that it got Carter’s full attention. This was the strategy that smarter men than himself had agreed upon, and after, when it was time to come out of hiding, he would still be in charge. The US presidency was not allowed to change hands during a time of war, unless there was a death.

“We’re using the rest of our arsenal? Retaliating, even though we caused it?” Carter questioned.

Ben motioned for one of the agents to grab the tapes and hidden microphone from the desk. “It’s all under way.”

Carter’s finger pushed the button, not asking how that was possible without his approval. He’d learned a lot about leadership in the last few years and one of the biggest lessons was that you didn’t ask questions unless you could take the answers. Stomach churning, he began, “My fellow Americans, this is your president, Carter Heins, and I have grave news. Let me start by asking each of you to care for and comfort each other in this time of crisis, and we’ll get through it. Together,” he lied,

ignoring the man waving at him to skip what didn't matter; to just inform his people that the entire world was about to change violently and forever.

“At ten twenty-eight this morning, a terrorist was able to gain access to our nuclear arsenal by hacking into the system and introducing an unknown virus that shut down our firewalls and allowed our defense system computers to be breached. As a result, control of over half of our warheads was compromised. The terrorists immediately initiated multiple launches, and the warheads are not responding to the abort codes. Ten minutes ago, these stolen weapons began reaching their targets, and other countries have retaliated, thinking we've declared war.”

The president paused. He couldn't believe he was saying this, and he felt an entire country holding its breath, listening, looking for comfort that he couldn't give.

“We predict that the United States will take at least five nuclear hits. The list of cities that are expecting bombs include Washington DC, Houston, Lansing, New York City, and Los Angeles. Leave these areas immediately.”

Noise levels instantly went up throughout the White House, and outside more gunshots destroyed the tense silence. Loud and rapid, they should have drawn immediate attention. When they didn't, the president understood this was really happening, and he was positive he'd be the last man to sit here. Gunfire directly outside the fences, and the agents in the room hadn't even blinked. It wasn't a tasteless joke. The world was really ending.

“I'm declaring martial law nationwide, effective immediately. The curfew is an hour before sunset. Looters will be dealt with harshly. Our southern border has been closed, all air traffic has been grounded, and prices are frozen across the board.” He hesitated again, and then drew in a deep breath. “I've also reinstated the Draft, effective three hours ago. All males, ages sixteen to forty-five, will surrender to the convoys of trucks on their way from bases across the country. People who refuse, flee, or follow the trucks with harmful intentions will be

considered treasonous and dealt with accordingly. Stay in your homes, do what the soldiers tell you to, and pray for your country. God bless you and God bless the United—”

He was jerked out of the seat at a motion from Ben, and the president stopped struggling as the agents rushed him outside, where panic was roaring from the streets.

“Warning! Incoming!”

The lawn speakers blared behind them and Carter suddenly understood that it was too late. *We’re not going to make it!*

The agents literally threw him onto the chopper, and the president huddled with his pale wife and twin boys as Marine One quickly rose into the air. As it ascended, the blades were assaulted with rocks, shoes, briefcases, and cell phones that doomed citizens threw in fury.

The agents on the ground began to fire as a mob overwhelmed the iron gates and rushed across the White House lawn.

Blood splattered, bodies fell, and then Marine One reached an altitude that cut off Carter’s view of the ground.

“Daddy! Fire in the clouds!”

The explosion was blinding, and Carter kissed his wife’s tear-stained lips as the shock wave caught up to them.

There were no survivors.

2

Only two White House security tapes survived the blast, thanks to the quick instincts of a well-connected reporter with a shark’s reputation, and they were what most of the stunned viewers were switched to when the president’s voice disappeared so abruptly. The first was a ten-second clip, and in that short time, one perpetrator of the apocalypse was revealed.

Former President Robert Milton slid the disk into the main computer with a sneer of contempt that few would have recognized from his time in office. Once exalted, he was now

reduced to message-boy for the current administration, and he had volunteered for this part of covering the centuries-old lie.

Clearly trying to hurry, the traitor looked over his shoulder repeatedly while typing in codes. He placed his hand on the scanner, and the lights in the room flashed to deep red. Stepping over a body, the broken man took a marker from the desk and wrote on the wall before the screen faded to black.

The second tape was shorter. Only four seconds, it was a brief flash of the same traitor, now putting the shiny barrel of a gun into his mouth, hands already stained with blood.

There was a violent flash and the former president slumped to the floor. His message on the wall glared at the crimson-streaked camera lenses.

I did it for my country, because my country would not do it for herself.

These two clips only circulated for a few minutes before the stations airing them went to static, but it was enough. Most people understood the truth. There hadn't been a terrorist attack: the government had caused it. America, and the world, had been betrayed!

As to why—that didn't become clear for a long time after the war, and even then, only a select few ever discovered the secrets of the Freemasons. There were more imminent atrocities to be survived first.

3

Marc Brady

Virginia

In northern Florida, a twenty-megaton ICBM caused the swampy shelf to begin cracking like window glass. The blinding flash was felt as far away as the Virginias, where fleeing citizens

were stuck in crammed lanes of traffic on Interstate 81, with no way to avoid the danger. Nor could they escape the long convoy of draft trucks that were battering their way through the wrecks and vehicles in the grassy median, following orders with no exceptions.

“All males will surrender to the draft! If you resist or run, you will be shot!”

The faint bullhorn woke those who had been dozing in the uncomfortable seats of the cold Greyhound bus, and a ripple of warning went through the armed man sitting against the frosty window. People were standing, muttering among themselves, but the grunt only observed, waiting to determine how he should react.

“Hey!”

“He hit an old guy! They can’t do that!”

“They shot a woman! Murder! Call 911!”

Sergeant Marc Brady used his military voice to be heard over the din, shouting, “Everybody out! Make room!”

The others who were stuffed into the crowded bus shifted toward the doors at the order, but they were panicked, shoving and yelling.

Marc hefted himself up onto the vinyl seat and dove out the open window as more gunshots and screams exploded from the traffic behind the bus.

People were pouring from their vehicles now, running for the nearby homes and businesses of Wytheville as the MRAPs full of soldiers followed, firing M16s at the citizens who refused to surrender. Backdropped by thick, black smoke and an angry, red sky, these soldiers remorselessly shot fleeing males and anyone else who got too close to their intended targets. Only a few of the soldiers bothered with the bullhorns or their aim. These were government men, specifically selected for draft recovery, and they didn’t listen to begging or excuses.

Recognizing the bloodlust, Marc rolled through the slush, moving under the bus, and he stayed there as the chaos got closer, arms and ankles locked tight around the greyhound's icy frame. The war had cancelled his leave, but he had to get home, and he *was* going—a decision these draft enforcers would shoot him for.

Gun in hand, Marc stayed still as the trucks rolled by and the citizens he was sworn to protect were gunned down.

A second later, the air shifted, thickened, and he instinctively shut his eyes and buried his head against his arm as the sky lit up and the sun fell on him.

4

Samantha Moore Wyoming

The electro-magnetic pulse shot out brutally, and the devastating wave traveled the same path as the radiation and pressure blasts and then went further. Moving through the air and over the land, the EMP traveled like electricity—surging through train tracks, electric lines, and low band communication equipment. The surge short-circuited nearly everything it touched—sparking fires, stopping pacemakers, making engines stall...and causing planes to fall from the smoke-filled skies.

“Please, can’t you tell us where we’re going?” Samantha asked, staring intently at their captor.

Her mesmerizing blue eyes and calm demeanor encouraged the grim soldier to answer her when he hadn’t answered any of the others crammed into the chopper.

“We’ve been diverted to NORAD. The Essex Compound is under evacuation.” He said it soothingly, but the deadly rifle in his hands didn’t lower as the loud chopper blades struggled to cut through the thick haze.

The chopper suddenly lurched sideways, and Samantha stifled her scream, but not a low groan as the chopper was hit by an invisible wave of force and lurched again.

The other Seattle civilians aboard the struggling chopper echoed her noise of near panic.

Taken together, they'd been "relocated" from their jobs at the Environmental Protection Agency by big soldiers with clipboards, government passes, and guns. After witnessing a coworker shot when he tried to run, none of them had rocked the boat despite obviously being abducted by their own government.

The need to fight warred with her survival instincts and Sam brushed only a quick glance over the other well-dressed, "lucky" few on board with her. In their faces, she recognized the same dismay and slowly dawning terror, and yet, she could have been alone—she didn't feel a connection with them. She was different.

Samantha fingered the badge around her neck, almost wishing she didn't have it. If her alarm hadn't worked, the former president—Robbie Milton of the infamous suicide video—would have died in Nebraska, and none of this would be happening. Sam had been horrified to recognize the "terrorist." Did her saving his life four years ago make some of this her fault?

Sam assumed they were flying low to avoid Star Wars, and she stifled another sound of misery as the cities rolled by. She was unable to believe that was her country down there tearing itself apart. Shootings, fires, assaults, murders, and bodies everywhere—in cars, on streets, even on playgrounds! Moreover, no one was coming to collect them!

Samantha swallowed her panic. This wasn't happening. Just a horrible nightmare—

She gaped in terror, forgetting to breathe, as an unending line of destruction rushed over the land, eating everything in its path. Power lines lit up, sparking violently; gas lines ruptured and exploded; and homes and cars disappeared under the rapidly advancing brown and gray avalanche of death that was now

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