

a friendly enemy

a novel

by

James Gottesman

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Chapter One

July 2000—Hayden Lake, Idaho

Richard Girnt Butler ended his Aryan Nation tirade to raucous cheers. The crowd of two hundred fifty stood and waited for Butler's signature end to the meeting. He raised his right arm, palm flat, to the ceiling and softly uttered, "Sieg Heil." The crowd responded quickly, in unison, "Sieg Heil." Butler repeated the pledge over and over, each time louder and louder. The audience responded with increased fervor until the Nazi flags hanging on the walls and the picture of Adolf Hitler shook.

A young family, Carter and Bertha Woodhead, with a young girl and boy, stood to the left and behind Butler. Carter and Bertha kept their hands raised in salute, screaming, while the girl cupped her hands over her little brother's ears.

Chapter Two

Spring 2012

**North of the City of Dominion,
Stevens County Washington State**

Cheryl Sweitzer sat with a plate of food at their small kitchen table after serving her husband and son dinner.

“My dad thinks it’s time you start doing some speaking at the meetings,” Addie Sweitzer said.

“I know. You don’t think my mom and dad haven’t asked?” Cheryl said.

“You’re the face they see when someone goes to the website. People are going to think that we hired some pretty actress unless you get up in front of everyone. You haven’t been to a meeting in months.”

“People in the Brotherhood know who I am. I don’t need to get up in front of everyone,” Cheryl said.

“I’m telling you what the Brotherhood council is saying. That’s all. Your dad is the Grand Wizard, and your father-in-law, and now me, are on the council. How does it look? Some think your absence from meetings and demonstrations means you don’t believe in what we stand for.”

“Maybe I don’t. And you can change the website for all I care. For the sake of little Addie, maybe it’s not such a good idea for me

to be the face of anything. That man at the Safeway called us such terrible names this afternoon. And it's not the first time that's happened."

"Then the guy was..." Addie held his hands over his son's ears. "...was an asshole with a capital A. Happens to me too. Water off a duck's back, as far as I'm concerned."

"Our son is old enough to understand. He kept asking me on the way home why that man was yelling at him. He's only six years old. If I want to go into town and buy something, I should be able to take Junior and not worry about being accosted."

"He'll understand in time," Addie said, his voice touched with anger.

Cheryl looked to her son. Little Addie's head swiveled back and forth, unused to hearing his parents argue. "Let's talk after Addie is asleep."

An hour later, Cheryl and Addie were back in the kitchen. Addie nursed his second shot of whiskey as Cheryl sipped on a cup of tea.

Cheryl said, "You said Addie will understand in time. I'm not sure I want him to understand. I read the newspapers and magazines when I go into town."

"I don't want little Addie reading that shit," Addie said. "Or you."

“I’m not a child and you’re not my dad. I can read whatever I want.”

“If you bring that stuff around here, your dad or mom will go ape-shit. You know that.”

“I know. I dump it before heading home. But I’m learning,” Cheryl said. “We, you, me and our parents and the Brotherhood had managed to isolate ourselves with our beliefs. Very few, and a smaller number in power, believe what we’re taught. I’m just thinking you and I need to keep an open mind and explore the world. We need to find out for ourselves if what we believe is believable.”

“Shut up,” Addie yelled. “You’re talking crazy.”

“I just want you to keep an open mind. Is that so crazy?” Cheryl asked.

“End of discussion and my mind is as open as I want it to be. I’m working with your dad early in the morning, so I’m going to sleep. I don’t understand what’s gotten into you. You’re getting stupider by the moment.”

Cheryl said nothing as her husband rose and headed toward their bedroom.

...

At 6 a.m., Carter Woodhead, head of the local Aryan Brotherhood, grabbed a well-worn thermos of day-old coffee,

turned back from the open door of the farmhouse, and yelled back to his wife, Bertha, upstairs in their bedroom, “Bertie, Addie and I are going out back for a few hours.”

Bertie said, “Don’t yell. You’ll wake up Cheryl and Junior.”

Bertie and Carter lived in a large farmhouse in northeast Washington State, fifteen miles outside the city of Dominion in Stevens County. Woodhead Farms had two hundred acres on which they, very successfully, grew potatoes and Christmas trees. Their daughter, Cheryl, son-in-law, Addie, and grandchild, Addie, Jr., lived in an unattached two-bedroom unit twenty yards to the south of the main house.

At the same time Carter had grabbed his thermos in the main house, Addie Sweitzer slowly opened the bedroom door in their small unit.

“Why so early?” Cheryl asked, half asleep. “It’s Sunday.”

“Your dad and I are going to work in the shed.”

“Is Erwin with you?”

“No. Just your dad and me.”

“Is that safe? Don’t you need him?”

“No. We’re fine. We’re working on remote-controlled nickel wire ignitor switches. Boom-Boom showed us how to set them up yesterday. It’s really cool.”

“What? What is a ‘re-mocha-nick-tor-witch’?” Cheryl mumbled.

“You’re funny, babe,” Addie said. “Go back to bed. I said remote-controlled nickel wire ignitor switch.”

“Oh. Please be careful,” Cheryl said, rolling over and closing her eyes.

“Yeah, yeah.”

An hour later, Bertie entered the kitchen to refill her coffee cup. She wondered if she should take the rest of the pot out to her husband and son-in-law in the shed.

“Why not,” she said to the pot.

When Bertie opened the back door to their farmhouse, a blinding light, followed by a blast wave, seismic in proportion, shattered the glass pot and threw Bertie back into the house across the kitchen floor. Miraculously, she was neither cut nor burned.

The 7:14 a.m. explosion in rural northeast Washington State could be heard for fifteen miles. A nearby retired US Air Force Korean War veteran called NORAD to see if WWII had begun.

In truth, Carter Woodhead and Addie Sweitzer had accidentally blown themselves up.

That afternoon, a half mile south of the explosion site, a neighbor mounted his barn roof to see if he could get a view into

Woodhead's compound. He found Carter Woodhead's intact, but somewhat charred, wallet just under his barn's weathervane.

The next morning, local radio station KUSB FM, channel 95.1, reported that FBI agents had already arrived in Stevens County to assist the Dominion PD and county sheriff's office investigation into the explosion.

The *Pend Oreille County Courier* published a special four-page pictorial edition two days later describing the incident in detail and then included the history of the white supremacists in eastern Washington and northern Idaho.

Regarding the explosion, an FBI bomb specialist told the *Courier*, "I was in Korea. The blast site crater was bigger than a five-thousand-pound bomb." The specialist's investigation of the shed explosion revealed that ammonium nitrate and fuel oil mixtures made up the majority of the explosive device. The debris also contained traces of black powder, nitroglycerin, dynamite, and C4. Woodhead apparently possessed a veritable potpourri of other illegal and incendiary devices, including a US Army M240 machine gun, AK-47s, bazookas, anti-tank weapons, Russian hand grenades, Czech landmines, and a 155mm Vietnam-era howitzer.

The FBI searched Woodhead's entire property and removed all illegally kept weaponry.

The *Courier* article noted that Carter Woodhead had started the Aryan Brotherhood local chapter three years earlier. He had been a young member of Richard Girnt Butler's Aryan Nation.

Butler's notorious chapter, The Aryan Nation, went bankrupt and relinquished all their land holdings in 2001 after losing a \$6.3 million lawsuit brought by Victoria and her son, Jason Keenan. The Southern Poverty Law Center had represented the Keenans. According to court records, the Keenans' car had been shot at by Butler's men after it had backfired while driving near the Aryan Nation headquarters. The car crashed, injuring the Keenans. Butler's men then harassed the Keenans, both Native Americans. The Keenans' successful lawsuit followed. Once losing their property and money, the Aryan Nations disbanded.

Subsequently, local fire departments burned most of the Aryan Nation enclave during planned firefighting training exercises. North Idaho College received the land as a gift and turned it into a park dedicated to peace. Butler died penniless in 2004.

No one believed, or at least hoped, that any white supremacist groups would return to the area. They were wrong.

Carter Woodhead never stopped idolizing Butler and never gave up hope that the Aryan Nation would rise out of the ashes. Using Internet-generated contributions, Woodhead and a few dedicated Butler followers who remained in the area regrouped and

created the Northwest Aryan Brotherhood. Woodhead installed himself as the Grand Wizard and headquartered the Brotherhood at his farm. The Aryan Brotherhood had steadily increased their membership and at the time of this publication had over two hundred active members. Six different anti-Semitic, anti-Native American, and anti-Black incidents had been attributed to the Brotherhood, but, lacking evidence, no charges were forthcoming.

The short obituaries of Woodhead and Sweitzer were published in the *Courier* days earlier.

Carter Woodhead, Grand Wizard of the Northwest Aryan Brotherhood, is survived by his wife, Bertha, a daughter, Cheryl, and a son, Henry, who is serving with the 101st Airborne in Afghanistan.

Adolf "Addie" Sweitzer, twenty-eight years old, had recently been promoted to the Brotherhood council. He had married Cheryl Woodhead, Carter's daughter, in 2005. Sweitzer is survived by his wife, Cheryl, their six-year-old son, Adolf, Jr., his parents, Gert and Heidi Sweitzer of Dominion, Washington, and two sisters.

The Woodhead/Sweitzer joint funeral will be a private affair, restricted to invited guests only.

* * *

A week later, the Aryan Brotherhood website posted a note that Erwin Kruger would take over the group's leadership as Grand Wizard and continue the work of Carter Woodhead. Gert Sweitzer, Addie's father, would be the second in command.

That same day, another neighbor, eight hundred yards to the north of the farm, discovered the firing mechanism of a pre-Civil War flintlock musket in his chicken coop. The musket had been a prized possession of Carter Woodhead.

Chapter Three

Three weeks later

“No way am I going to the meeting,” Cheryl screamed at her mother. “And I never want to see Erwin Kruger again. Ever. As long as I live.”

“He was your dad’s best friend and his most trusted ally,” Bertie said. “He cares about our cause as much as I do, and your dad did.”

“He’s also the asshole that killed Addie and my father. He should have never left them alone to work on explosives. He was the expert and knew it was dangerous. I blame him for everything. That’s why we had the fight at the funeral. It should have been him in the casket, not my father and husband.”

“Your dad said Boom-Boom taught him how to be safe and he was teaching Addie,” Bertie said.

“Well, I guess it just didn’t work out, did it? And another thing, I never want to hear his goddamn nickname again.”

“Everyone calls him Boom-Boom. You can’t stop that.”

“I remember the last words Addie said that morning as he went to join Dad in the shed,” Cheryl said. “I was half asleep but I still remember. Nickel wire ignitor switch. Addie said it, then walked out and Dad and Addie died. Nickel wire ignitor switch, not

goodbye or I love you. All that comes from Kruger and that's why I'm leaving. I get sick just seeing him and that name. I'm leaving and that's that."

"You have to be there. You're an important auxiliary member of the Brotherhood and we can't let your dad and Addie die for nothing."

"That's exactly the point," Cheryl said, clenching her jaw. "They did die for nothing as far as I'm concerned. I lost my husband, the father of my child, and my dad in one stupid second. For what? Really, for what?"

"You're being pig-headed. You know you are," Bertie said.

"I'm not the pig-headed one. Me staying here on the farm isn't going to happen. We're not going to take over the world. I'm tired of being hated just walking the street in Dominion. I'm done with Brotherhood, Nazis, Uncle Boom-Boom and all his craziness. I'm done."

"You need to have faith. You have to believe in the cause," Bertie said, her eyes starting to tear.

"I don't and I won't. I'm done hating. It doesn't work for me. How am I supposed to hate Jews and niggers and spics when I don't really know any? They've never done anything to hurt me."

"They're destroying our world." Bertie wiped the tears, first with the right shoulder and then the left.

“They’re not. A bomb just destroyed my world.”

Mother and daughter stood silent, entrenched in posture.

“What are you going to do?” Bertie demanded. “You’ve got no skills, no job, and no money.”

“Yeah. You and Dad made sure of that. Homeschooled because you didn’t want my mind tainted. All I could do was read books, and even those had to be picked by you and Dad. I had no formal education. You and Dad promised I could go to college if I married Addie. Then he wouldn’t let me go because he needed me to be at home while he worked for the Brotherhood. Why?”

“That’s what God wanted for you.”

“No. That’s what Dad and you and Addie demanded. No one ever asked me what I wanted. Addie and me, we had a little bit of savings. I’m getting a job in Dominion and when I get enough money, Junior and me, we’re moving to Spokane or somewhere. Maybe I can go to college and get a real education. I’m not staying here.”

“Who’s going to take care of Addie, Jr. when you’re working? Have you thought this out?” Bertie asked.

“I’m good. I’m sharing a job with another girl named Doris. I met her at church. She has a son Addie’s age. We’re going to split kid duty.”

“And who’s paying for your car, cell phone, health insurance, and where are you going to live?”

“I’ll figure it out. I don’t need a car and I’ll get health insurance. Whatever I do, it’s got to be better than this.”

...

Cheryl moved into Doris McDonald’s one-bedroom apartment on the upper floor of a two-story 1950s apartment complex near the center of Dominion, Washington. Cheryl slept with Doris, and the two children slept together on a convertible sofa bed. The Dominion Public Library was a short two blocks away. Cheryl visited the library every chance she could with both children. When Cheryl wasn’t working or watching the kids, she read.

Initially, Bertie called every day to beg Cheryl to return to the farm.

“I’m okay, Mom, really,” Cheryl said.

“How can you be okay?” Bertie asked.

“For my own sake, I have to prove to myself that I can be self-sufficient. You only hope that I can’t.”

“That’s not true. I need you. The movement needs you too.”

“We’ll see,” Cheryl said. “We’ll see, won’t we.”

After three weeks away from home, when Bertie called, Cheryl remained cordial but offered her mother little information on how

she was faring other than “Everything is good, Mom. Addie and I are fine. I’ll call you if we need something.”

Two months later, Bertie Woodhead had rebuilt the farm’s shed thirty feet from the original site. She, Gert Sweitzer, and Erwin Kruger would take three months to replenish the armory.

Soon the frequency of the calls between mother and daughter diminished and mutual silence became the norm. At four months, Cheryl and Bertie hadn’t spoken for two weeks.

Cheryl had saved three hundred and forty dollars over her initial assets and felt she had enough to move out of Doris’s apartment. She put down first and last month’s rent on a small one-bedroom apartment over a dry cleaner in Dominion, only a block from their job at a small hardware store.

Cheryl borrowed a pickup truck from Doris’s teenage brother, Homer, and returned home for the first time, with Homer, to retrieve some personal belongings, furniture, and kitchenware for the apartment. The truck had no place for Addie’s car seat.

Cheryl left Addie with Doris and returned alone late that night in Homer’s truck.

Before leaving, Doris asked, “Aren’t you taking Addie with you? You know your mom will want to see him.”

“No,” Cheryl said. “My way of showing Mom that I’m not dependent on her.”

“That doesn’t make sense.”

“My life doesn’t make sense right now.”

“You know you’ll just make her more upset,” Doris said.

“Yep,” she said, ending the discussion.

Cheryl called Doris as she neared the farm to say she was wrong to not bring Addie.

When Cheryl arrived at the farm the second time that day without her grandson, Bertie said, “What were you thinking? Why would you not bring my grandson to see me?”

“I’m sorry. I wasn’t thinking and it was mean of me. I promise Addie and I will come back as soon as I’m moved in,” Cheryl told her mom.

Cheryl planned to stay overnight, load the truck in the morning with personal belongings in two large boxes, and return to Dominion. Once moved into her new digs, she would return to the farm with Addie.

Cheryl went to sleep hopeful.

Mother Earth made sure that returning to Dominion would not be easy.

Chapter Four

Seattle, Washington—early the next morning.

Ben Miller, MD, in his fifth year of a six-year urology residency, sat at the nurse's station on 3-West of Seattle Medical School writing orders on a patient admitted with a ureteral stone. He looked at the digital clock behind the empty secretary's desk—11:30 p.m. "Shit," he said to no one in particular. Miller knew he wouldn't get the patient to the operating room until 2 or 2:30 a.m.

As Ben wrote, Betty Smart, RN, head nurse on night shift, sat next to him.

"Good evening, Captain," Betty said, referring to Miller's rank and a standing joke between the two captains in the Washington State National Guard.

"At ease, Captain. You and Bill want to drive to Fort Lewis Friday night and stay over?" Ben asked, referring to Betty's husband, Jerry, a corpsman sergeant. All three had joined the National Guard to earn more money. Ben needed money to pay back educational debts, and the Smarts to help support three children.

Ben adored Betty. He had known the competent, honest, trustworthy, and funny RN from his first day at Seattle Med. He

thought often how difficult her life had been growing up in some Arkansas backwater town, she black and her husband white.

“Nah,” Betty said. “We’ll leave on Saturday morning.”

“I hate these goddamn Reserve weekends,” Ben said, “and I especially hate getting up at 4:30 to get there on time. I’m going to stay at the Motel 6 just south of Tacoma on Friday night. They give special rates to Reservists. It’s worth the ten bucks to me.”

“Yeah,” Betty said, “but you don’t have to find a babysitter for three kids. That’s a ton more than ten bucks.”

“How the hell do you get a babysitter to come at 4 a.m.?”

“We pay her an extra ten bucks.”

Ben laughed for a moment. “You know your husband is the luckiest guy in the world, and that’s not a question, it’s a statement of fact.”

“And your ex, whoever she was, has got to be the dumbest to let you go.”

“Maybe, maybe not,” Ben said. “She couldn’t handle my hours and she couldn’t handle being two thousand miles from her mother.”

“That’s not reason enough for me.”

“It was more than enough for her.”

“How’s it been going with that Family Practice resident at the university you were seeing?” Betty asked.

“Don’t ask.”

“What happened?”

“She rotated onto surgery at the U and got yelled at by a general surgery resident. She texted me that all surgeons are assholes and think too much of themselves.”

“She’s wrong,” Betty said. “Somewhere out there has to be one that’s not.”

“Thanks. I needed that.”

“You know I’m kidding. You’re not a bad guy...most of the time.”

“I’m trying. My parents told me last night that I should have gone into something else. Anything else. They think surgery caused a permanent defect in my social skills. The way I go through first dates, maybe they’re right.”

“A couple of suggestions?”

“Okay.”

“Don’t keep looking for women that will please your mother,” Betty said. “They don’t have to be cardiac surgeons or judges. Please yourself. Find someone who thinks they’re the luckiest person in the world to be with you.”

“Are you done?”

“No. You could also dress nicer.”

“C’est la vie,” Ben added. “Hey, I have to go and get the consent from this stone.”

Betty said, “You may want to talk to the patient. The stone ain’t sayin’ much.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Ben said, heading down the hallway.

...

At 4 a.m., as Ben brushed his teeth in Resident Sleep Room #4, he felt off-balance.

“Am I dizzy?” he queried himself. Confused, he thought the room swayed right, then left, then back, and he reflexively dropped his toothbrush and grabbed the edges of the sink. When he looked up into the mirror at the hanging light fixture, he realized it moved wildly, right and left, in and out of the mirror’s reflection. “Whoa,” he said loudly to himself.

The swaying lasted for two minutes, then stopped. Once steadied, Ben walked out of the room into the hallway. Bob Phillips, an orthopedic resident, exited his sleep room at the same time.

“What’s happening?” Bob asked.

“If I didn’t know better, I’d think we’ve just had an earthquake,” Ben said.

“I’ve never felt one before,” Bob said, then added, “Cool.”

“We used to have them all the time in San Francisco. Let’s go to the lounge and see what’s on the news.”

Six residents and interns, already in the lounge, stood surrounding the television, when KABC-TV interrupted a rerun of *The Cisco Kid*.

“Stefan Bunin here for KABC news. I’ve just received a briefing from the National Earthquake Information Center. The NEIC has described a massive earthquake measuring 8.7 on the Richter scale that occurred twenty minutes ago in Eastern Washington. To keep that in perspective, the famous San Francisco earthquake of 1906 was estimated at 7.8. That makes this tremor ten times more powerful. The epicenter appears to be fifty miles north of Spokane between Pend Oreille and Stevens County. Seismic waves have been felt here in Seattle and to the southeast as far as Boise. We expect the damage to be significant. Power outages from Spokane to the Canadian border have occurred and we have no information from the areas affected, including Spokane, Lincoln, Stevens, and Pend Oreille counties. We will keep you apprised of information as we receive it. The NEIC warns that serious aftershocks could occur in the affected areas over the next few days. We’ll have a full report on the 6 a.m. news. Now back to the regular programming.”

Phillips spoke quickly to the array of residents, surgical and medical. “I bet a bunch of broken bones, but not much to do now. We may get busy by morning. I think we better get some sleep.”

A few residents stayed around the television, but Ben and Phillips returned to their sleep room.

At 5:30 a.m., Ben roused quickly, responding to a noisy and vibrating cell phone under his pillow. He turned on the bedside light, cleared his eyes, and put on his glasses: 253-967-1110 XXX.

“Oh, God,” Ben said to his cell phone. He knew the number belonged to Fort Lewis and he knew the triple-X meant an emergency.

He immediately picked up the bedside phone and selected CALL BACK. The line was busy.

Ben, now alert and awake, redialed the number four more times before getting through.

Ben learned that Christine Gregoire, governor of Washington, had mobilized the entire Washington State National Guard, including Ben’s unit. The units would be sent to eastern Washington and needed to report to Fort Lewis by 1300 hours, or 1 p.m.

Ben first contacted the chief of Urology, Dr. Scott Anderson, then the chief resident in Urology, Charles Caplan, to transfer care of his patients in the hospital. Ben dressed, drove back to his

apartment on Capitol Hill, packed a suitcase, and then called Betty Smart.

“I was just about to call you. Can you drive Jerry down to Ft. Lewis?” Betty asked. “I can’t leave until I get someone to watch the kids. Planes will be leaving McChord all day to Dominion and I should be there before dinner.”

“Sure,” Ben said. “I’m ready to go. Tell Jerry I’ll be there in twenty minutes after I get some gas.”

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Using the combined resources of Air Force and Army regulars, the 394th Field Hospital of the Washington State National Guard, a twenty-four-bed surgical detachment, became fully operational twenty hours later on the playfield of Dominion Junior High. Three-quarters of a mile away sat Providence Hospital, the only major health facility and trauma center in northeastern Washington State. Deemed unsafe, the city managers of Dominion temporarily shuttered the partially collapsed building.

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Chapter Five

The Woodhead farm was a mere fifteen miles from the earthquake's epicenter.

The earthquake had attempted to create a blended smoothie of three hundred square miles of northeast Washington. No person, animal, or object was left unshaken. Every inflexible structure made of brick, stucco, or cement cracked.

The Woodhead farm, built in 1924, made entirely of wood except for the glass windows, swayed back and forth, but remained standing. Cupboards fell to the floor and shards of glass from every window lay strewn across the floors.

Cheryl and Bertie found themselves on the floor of their bedrooms, fortunate that flying frames and dressers had not crushed them. Cheryl escaped with a bruise on her thigh from an airborne dresser drawer and a small forehead bruise from a trashy paperback, appropriately titled, *The Big One*.

Bertie, thrown ten feet to the edge of her bathroom entrance, held onto the door post while her feet kept the swaying door from beating her to death. She escaped with a partially torn right rotator cuff. She would never again comfortably lift her right arm above her chest in a Nazi salute.

An eight-foot wood and cement bridge over the drainage ditch that paralleled the front of the Woodhead farm provided the only access to the highway. The bridge now sat at the bottom of the trench and until rebuilt, no vehicles would be able to enter or exit the property. Doris's brother's truck lay on its side. It may or may not have run, but either way, the collapsed bridge made the truck's running moot.

As soon as the shaking ceased, Cheryl crawled downstairs into her mother's bedroom to find Bertie relatively unscathed. Together, remaining on all fours, they exited the farmhouse and came to rest twenty feet from the porch.

Cheryl's thoughts went immediately to her son. *Is he safe?*

Without, power, electricity, cable, phone, or cell service, Cheryl had no idea whether Addie had been injured or worse.

Despite her mother's pleas to stay put, Cheryl packed a knapsack with food, water, sunscreen, and a loaded handgun. She crossed the ditch and started the fifteen-mile hike south of Lake Williams, through Echo, into Dominion.

On a cloudless day, the sun would burn the fair-skinned Cheryl quickly. She lathered SPF 50 along with bug repellent on her face and neck.

Cheryl, anxious to reach Dominion and her son, walked rapidly. She tried her cell phone every thirty minutes but found no

coverage, even in places along the highway where she knew coverage had been excellent before the quake. She powered off the phone and placed it in her backpack.

Cheryl, five foot five, thin, and athletic, would normally have had no difficulty hiking for half a day with little rest. Knowing she needed to find her son, she would have hiked for as long as it took.

The trip, normally five hours at average pace, would take her over thirteen hours.

She hadn't figured that every bridge, ten in all, over various branches of Mill Creek would have had the same fate as the bridge over her family's drainage ditch. The collapsed bridges forced Cheryl to climb down the embankments of the streams, cross, and climb up. In mid-spring, the streams and creeks ran high, deep, and fast. Forging each stream remained difficult, if not treacherous.

At the first crossing, Cheryl, holding her backpack and hiking boots over her head, stumbled on a rock and fell to her knees. Water soaked her pants and shirt, but her shoes and the pack remained dry. The wet clothes would chill Cheryl for the next three hours, but she could do little other than hike on. Luckily, before the next crossing, Cheryl found a broken rake handle to use for stability.

Five hours out, Cheryl found herself at the fourth crossing. Before stepping into the creek barefoot, backpack in one hand and

the rake handle in the other, she heard rustling in the bushes behind her. She turned and saw nothing, but yelled, "Hello. Hello." No response came from the bush, so she quickly dropped her stick and backpack onto the bank, extracted her handgun, released the safety lock, and waited for anything to come out of the bushes. Minutes later, she saw a doe and two fawns raise their heads, turn, and run deeper into the forest.

"Good luck," Cheryl said to the four-legged interlopers as they disappeared. She put the safety lock on, returned the gun to her backpack, picked up her rake handle, and crossed the stream.

Cheryl, dehydrated and exhausted, walked into Dominion at 8 p.m. Few people remained on the street and DO NOT ENTER yellow taping surrounded most buildings, including the hardware store at which she and Doris worked. Her apartment building had suffered damage, but she knew her babysitting friend, Doris, and both their sons would have no reason to have been in her unit during or after the tremor. Her pace quickened, and she turned left on Birch Street, heading three short blocks to Maple Street and Doris' unit.

Doris' apartment complex looked as if a giant barber had given the building a haircut, leaving the roof tiling strewn around the periphery. Other than shattered windows, the building looked mostly intact.

The main entrance to the apartments stood slightly atilt with a mishmash of plywood nailed haphazardly to what remained of the front door. A sawhorse blocked the entrance with a handwritten sign, DO NOT ENTER.

Cheryl moved the sawhorse aside, ran her hand over the roughened plywood, and then pulled and pushed hard. The makeshift door did not budge. As she eyed the entrance, a cruising Army Jeep slowed in front of the building, twenty feet away.

“Hey, lady, you can’t go in there. It ain’t exactly safe,” yelled the corporal in the shotgun seat of the open Jeep. An M4 Army carbine lay across his lap.

Cheryl turned quickly. “I have to see if my kid is okay.”

“Nobody’s in the building. They’ve all been checked. You can’t go in there.”

“I have to see for myself,” Cheryl yelled back, dropping her backpack on the ground. Not waiting for a reply, she turned and rammed the makeshift door with her shoulder. The door opened halfway before the bent frame would allow no more. She entered the dark hallway quickly, pulled her cell phone from her pocket, and turned on the flashlight app. She knew the building’s layout and moved quickly to the right toward the stairway. The easily heard racing footsteps of the Army non-com approaching the building stopped at the half-open door.

“Lady. Stay where you are. It’s not safe in there.”

Disregarding the warnings to halt, Cheryl yanked the yellow DO NOT ENTER warning tape at the bottom landing with her free hand while the light pointed up the stairs. She grabbed the twisted railing when she saw the searching motions of the corporal’s flashlight. She took the first stairs two at a time, then again.

The railing abruptly ended on her third step up, and her right foot fell into a void. She tumbled sideways, then downward, six feet, onto a large stack of glass, stucco, and wood debris, hitting her shoulder, then head. The sound of Cheryl hitting and rolling on the ground was akin to a random spoon finding its way into the twirling blades of a garbage disposal. It allowed the corporal’s flashlight to find her—semiconscious and bleeding from the back of her head.

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“Captain, we’ve got an incoming,” Betty Smart said. “Just called in. Some lady entered a building after being warned and fell. Apparently stable but with a scalp lac. She was bleeding pretty good, but they controlled it with pressure.”

Four minutes later, Cheryl arrived in the makeshift receiving tent on a gurney, with an Army corporal holding a blood-soaked, large towel on her scalp. An Army private stood in the background and held Cheryl’s backpack.

“Roll her over here into the first bay,” Ben said, as he took in the patient’s large unfocused blue eyes, glazed over. Blonde hair with soft curls, some covering the right side of her sunburned face, was lost in the blood-matted hair, towel, and the corporal’s gloved hand. A small forehead bruise did not look fresh.

“Get some vitals started, draw a CBC and chems, and an IV with D-5 and normal saline,” Ben said calmly to the army nurses standing on the opposite side of the gurney. “Betty, search her belongings and see if you can get some ID and make sure she’s not allergic to anything.”

“Addie. Addie. I need to find Addie,” Cheryl repeated softly.

“BP is ninety over sixty-four. Pulse eighty-four,” the nurse said.

“What’s she saying?” Ben asked calmly, holding Cheryl’s hand and extending her fingers fully. “I don’t think she’s in shock. Her hand is warm, and she’s got blood in her creases. I’ll bet her ’crit is above thirty-five.” Ben turned back to his patient. “What’s your name, miss?”

“Cheryl,” Cheryl said softly, then hesitated. “Addie. Addie. I need to find Addie.”

Ben, gloved, turned to the corporal and put his hand over the blood-soaked towel. “I’ll take this. You can let go.” Ben and the

corporal exchanged hands on the towel. “What was she doing?” Ben asked.

“Not sure,” the corporal responded. “She said she was looking for her kid. We couldn’t stop her.”

“An educated guess tells me her kid’s name is Addie,” Ben said. “Was she unconscious when you found her?”

“I’m not sure. She was just lying in the rubble, bleeding from her head. When we rolled her over, she was maybe a little confused for a moment, then got combative until she saw the blood all over her jacket.”

“Thanks,” Ben said as he slowly elevated the towel to take a look at the scalp laceration.

Ben then turned to the nurses standing by the bedside. “Three-inch, pretty deep gash. Just a bit of oozing now. Get me a razor to shave her scalp around the cut, some one percent lidocaine with epinephrine, a laceration tray, Betadine, and saline to wash out the wound. And before I forget, give her a tetanus shot. I’m thinking she might have had a slight concussion but nothing serious. We’ll sew this up and watch her tonight.”

“Her name is Cheryl Sweitzer, age twenty-two,” Betty said, looking a photo and ID. “She’s very pretty. One hundred twelve pounds, blue eyes, blonde hair. A picture of her and a small boy and fifteen bucks in her wallet. Address is some apartment, listed

off Main Street here in Dominion. She has a loaded handgun in her backpack along with some sunscreen, snacks, and an empty water bottle. That's it."

Ben turned Cheryl's face toward his and held it until she made visual contact. "Cheryl, I'm Dr. Miller. You're in a US Army emergency department. Do you understand me?"

Cheryl nodded assent. Then said, softly, "I need to find Addie." After hesitating a moment, she added, "My head and my left shoulder hurt."

Keeping eye contact, Ben spoke slowly. "You fell and cut your head pretty bad. You might have a concussion. I'll need to examine your shoulder and the rest of you to make sure nothing else is hurt."

As Ben put a light beam into Cheryl's eyes to check her pupils' response, she said, "I need to find Addie, my son."

Her pupils were normal, symmetrical, and reactive to light.

"Yes, we'll help you find Addie. Are you here with anybody else? Your husband? Family?"

"No. I'm alone. My husband died in an accident a year ago. Addie needs me. He's with Doris, my friend. He gets sick easily and I want to be there for him."

"I'm pretty sure Addie's okay," Ben lied, having no idea if her son might be one of the twenty people, including four children,

known to have died in the earthquake. He then asked Cheryl a litany of simple questions to check for confusion, including date, time, and place. She answered quickly and confidently.

Ben then asked a standard list of pertinent questions. “Are you taking any drugs, prescription or recreational? Have you been drinking alcohol? Could you be pregnant? Do you have any medical conditions, like diabetes?”

Cheryl answered no to everything but added, every so often, “I’ve got to find my son.”

“Does anything else hurt?”

“Just my shoulder and my head. Oh, and I hurt my thigh during the earthquake.”

“Can you sit up?”

“I’ll try.”

Ben turned to Betty, already gloved, and said, “Hold pressure on this towel gently.”

With Betty’s help, they sat Cheryl up. Ben slowly rotated Cheryl’s left arm. “Does that hurt?”

“Not too bad,” Cheryl said.

“Squeeze my hand.” Her grip was strong.

“Can you bend your arm?” She did without wincing.

“You probably bruised your shoulder in the fall. I don’t think it’s hurt too badly. But first, I’ll have Betty, here, get you into a hospital gown. Are you okay with that?”

“I need to find Addie. I left him here with a friend, Doris McDonald, two days ago and then the earthquake...I need to find him.”

“Is Addie his real name or a nickname, in case he’s registered with the emergency shelters?”

“It’s Adolf but we call him Addie.”

Ben hesitated. *Weird. Who names a kid Adolf in the last seventy years?*

“Okay. Let’s get you sewed up, make sure nothing else is injured.”

“How long is this going to take?” Cheryl asked. “I’ve got to find my son. He’s just six years old and has a bad stomach and I need to be there for him.”

“Less than thirty minutes,” Ben said as he watched Cheryl thinking about time. “Then maybe we’ll find Addie. You and me, okay?”

I wonder where Adolf comes from? Probably some great-grandfather’s name. Still weird.

“Thank you,” Cheryl said.

Betty added her two cents, dripping with sarcasm, “You really going looking for some kid in the middle of the night with a lady who might have a concussion?”

“Yeah. I said I would,” Ben said to Betty and turned back to Cheryl. “One more question. You have some kind of handgun in your backpack. Why?”

“That’s a stupid question,” Cheryl responded immediately.

“I don’t think so,” Ben said, with a touch of sarcasm.

“First it’s a Glock G43,” Cheryl said, “and secondly, I just walked fifteen miles, alone, to get here.”

“Who were you afraid of?”

“You’re not from around here, right?”

“Right.”

“I’m not afraid of who; I was protecting myself from what. Mountain lions, wolves, coyotes, moose, whatever. I put the gun back into my backpack as soon as I reached the outskirts of town. I have a license to carry.”

“Oh, sorry. I didn’t think about that,” Ben sighed.

“Like I said, you’re not from around here. Most everyone carries protection when they’re out in the wilderness.”

Ben, feeling stupid, asked no more questions. He left Cheryl with two nurses with instructions to put her into a hospital gown

and gently wash her face and neck. He then entered the cubicle and found Betty Smart.

“Betty, see what you can do to find her kid. Call Major Port and see if she can locate an Addie or Adolf, last name probably Sweitzer, at the school gymnasium or a woman named Doris McDonald. If she finds either, maybe you can bring them here.”

After a chaperone nurse put Cheryl into a hospital gown, Ben found no other abnormalities on her physical exam, save a fresh large bruise over her left shoulder, and older bruises on her thigh and forehead. With full range of motion, Ben didn't believe x-rays of the shoulder would be needed.

Thirty minutes later, Ben had completed anesthetizing, washing out, suturing, and bandaging Cheryl's scalp laceration.

When done, Cheryl said, “I'm so tired but I've got to leave now. I need to find my son.”

“I'm not sure that's a good idea tonight,” Ben said. “We've got to watch you to make sure you don't have a concussion. Besides, it's dark and dangerous out there. I did send a nurse over to the school gymnasium, where most of the families are being housed. Maybe she'll bring your son back.”

Cheryl's eyes closed before Ben finished the sentence.

He had Cheryl moved to a cubicle near the nurse's station with instructions to wake her every couple of hours to check her vitals and neurological status.

As Ben sat at his desk and wrote notes on his laptop, Betty walked into the emergency room.

"What did you find out?" Ben asked.

"Nada. The lights were off and there were two hundred families, mostly sleeping on top of each other. They've only got names on forty percent. No Sweitzers or McDonalds were registered. Colonel said to come back at seven, just before they'd get breakfast. We'll have to shout out names."

"Thanks, Betty."

"Uh oh."

"What's up?"

"Look behind you."

Pushing an IV pole in one arm and holding her clothes in the other, Cheryl approached Betty and Ben, giving him his first good look. Other than the wrapping around the side of her head, light blonde hair, almost soft gold, with slight curling, flowed over the bandages to her shoulder. Cheryl's warm fawnish-yellow clear complexion contrasted the sunburnt nose and ear tops. Wisps of sun-induced freckles, sprinkled across her nose and upper cheeks,

gave her a look of youthfulness. She walked confidently toward Ben and Betty with purpose.

“She is pretty,” Betty said to Ben.

“Where you going?” Ben asked.

“You have kids, Doc?” Cheryl asked.

“No,” Ben said.

Cheryl turned to Betty. “He’s naïve. You?”

“Yep. Three.”

“Explain to the doc why I’m leaving to find a sick child, my only child,” Cheryl said. “I don’t care how dark or how dangerous it is. I can’t stay. I have a six-year-old that needs me. And I need him.”

Ben looked at Betty.

“Permission to speak,” Betty said to Ben.

“You don’t need my permission. You outrank me by three months,” Ben said.

“You’re still the doctor and me a nurse.”

“Speak.”

“If one of my kids was missing and sick, I’d go,” Betty said. “I’d beat you on the head if you stopped me. I’d say give her an ‘Against Medical Advice’ consent and let her go.”

Ben turned back to Cheryl. “I’d really like you to stay until morning.”

“Nope. Thanks for everything, Doc. Get me unplugged so I can go. I’ll sign whatever you want me to sign. Please. I need to find my son.”

“Okay. I have a deal for you. I said earlier that I’d help. I’m off in five minutes for the next eight hours. How about I go with you to the school gym where your son is most likely to be. That’ll give us at least an hour or two for me to observe you. If he’s not there, you’ll be free to go.”

“Deal. Unplug me,” Cheryl said.

Betty placed a hand on Ben’s shoulder preventing him from standing. “Captain, I’d like a word.”

The two medical corps officers, trusted friends, walked away and around a corner.

“Are you crazy, Ben?” Betty asked. “Is Little Ben is thinking for Big Ben?”

“Maybe, maybe not. Let’s just say crazy and call it even.”

Cheryl retreated to her cubicle and dressed after Betty removed her IVs. Together, Cheryl and Ben exited the hospital tents and walked to the motor pool.

Once in the Army jeep, Cheryl asked, “I’m just curious why you, or anyone in the Army, would be so nice.”

“We’re all nice,” Ben said.

“Right,” Cheryl said with enough sarcasm and oomph to end the conversation.

Ben started the engine and maneuvered out of the motor pool area. He had planned to ask about how her husband died and thought about the origins of the name Adolf. Once clear of the pool gates he turned toward Cheryl to see that she had fallen asleep.

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Ten minutes later, Ben nudged Cheryl awake and together they walked into Dominion High School, using a flashlight to follow wall signs to the gymnasium. As they peered inside the massive gymnasium, only a few red EXIT signs could be seen reflecting off the flashlight’s beam. Mattresses and sleeping bags lay strewn in a patchwork fashion across the entire floor. Only the whimpers of small children along with “shhhh” sounds from varied adults emitted from the cavernous gymnasium.

“Now what?” Ben asked.

“I don’t know. Maybe we can walk the perimeter of the inside and see what we can see,” Cheryl said.

They walked inside the gymnasium double-doors and Ben’s flashlight surveyed the edges of the auditorium to the right and left of doors. Most sleeping bags abutted the edges.

“That’s not going to work,” Ben said.

After they retreated and stood blocking the exit, a mother carrying a young girl about four years old walked toward them.

“Excuse me, we’ve got to get to the bathroom,” the mother said.

Cheryl and Ben parted and let the woman pass.

“How many other bathrooms are there here?” Ben asked the woman.

“One set here and another set on the opposite side. That’s it,” she answered.

“Thanks.”

Ben turned to Cheryl. “I have an idea. You stand by these bathrooms and I’ll stand by the others. We’ll ask everyone who walks in whether they might know Addie or Doris. I don’t think we have any other options until morning when the sun’s up. You take the flashlight and I’ll use my phone app.”

“Okay, I guess. At least it’s something,” Cheryl replied. She then sat, leaning against the wall outside the bathrooms.

Ben walked the outside hallway around the gym and stood in front of the bathroom doors.

A slow but steady stream of full bladders approached the bathrooms every five minutes. Ben asked the same question to all.

“Excuse me, I’m Captain Miller in the Medical Corps. I’m looking for a woman named Doris McDonald, who might be

taking care of a young boy named Addie Sweitzer. Might you know where they are?”

Forty-five minutes later, a woman walked toward him holding a young boy. Ben posed his question softly.

“Yeah. I know Doris and her son, Eric. They’re sleeping a few bags over from me.”

“Thanks. Finish what you need to do and maybe you can take me to her.”

Ten minutes later, Ben, holding a sleeping six-year-old, walked the gym periphery with Doris behind, holding Eric, about the same age and also asleep.

Turning the last corner, Cheryl saw them coming and repeated, “Addie, Addie, Addie,” as she stood and ran toward Ben and her son.

Ben handed the sleeping child over and watched as Cheryl started to bawl, followed by circle hugs from Doris.

Cheryl, amidst the frenzy, saw Ben broadly smiling.

“Thank you. Thank you so much,” she said.

Ben nodded.

Both children awoke briefly and then fell back asleep in their mothers’ arms.

“Cher, I have an extra blanket for you. We’ll make space,” Doris said.

“I’m sure you’re okay to stay here tonight,” Ben said to Cheryl. “You should come back to the medical tent tomorrow. I’ll be on at eleven hundred. That’s eleven a.m. in army speak.”

Ben thought about Cheryl until he fell asleep that night.

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When Ben returned to the medical area, reporters and cameramen surrounded the entrance looking for sound bites.

“What’s going on outside?” Ben asked Betty after entering the tent structure and seeing a lineup of patients on folding chairs.

“They let the news guys fly in this morning. They’re everywhere,” Betty said.

“I’m not talking to them.”

“You will if Colonel Minkove tells you to.”

“You know I found that lady’s kid last night,” Ben said, changing subjects.

“Good for you. She’ll be forever in debt to you.”

Ben nodded. “Yeah, maybe. She’s supposed to return this morning to let me check her wound.”

Betty laughed. “You wouldn’t have asked anyone else to return for a week.”

Ben deflected the obvious dig and said, “Let’s see the sickies.”

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