

It Seemed Like a Good Idea at the Time

by Jim Harrington

Day 1

The rifle rested in the crook of Adam's arm as he knelt in the blind and waited for a buck to appear. Not that he cared if one did. Hunting season was merely an excuse for a vacation day or two to enjoy what Mother Nature had to offer. He preferred hiking, but the IED made that impossible. Adam peered over the top of the wall. A narrow strip of forest rimmed the pasture behind him. On a normal day, there would be a small flock of sheep, a goat, a pair of horses, and, sometimes, two potbellied pigs. Today there were none. He turned his functioning ear toward the farm and listened for baas, or neighs, or any sound of animal life. Silence. He peered through his binoculars at the rundown barn. The grey-haired farmer limped into the open and headed toward the house. Smiling, Adam pulled his coat tighter and focused on the darkening western sky. Local meteorologists had predicted up to six inches of rain over the next two days. Adam wondered what kind of damage that might cause given the rivers and lakes were already high.

Eva stepped out of the hut she and Javier shared and slogged through the mud toward the coop to fetch fresh eggs for Javier's breakfast. The serape draped over her shoulders did little to keep the chill from penetrating the thin material of her dress. She placed a hand over her mouth and gasped when she reached the coop and found no eggs, not even broken ones. Her stomach tightened. She scanned the yard in the dawn light for any sign of life. None existed. She took a deep breath and headed back to the shack. Javier became angry when he didn't get his eggs. Eva slowed her pace as she neared the door. She knew what was in store for her.

Day 2

Adam returned to the blind, having had no luck the previous day. The field was still barren of animals. He sat this time and listened to the rain pummel the blind's roof. He enjoyed being outside away from his job and other people and responsibility and looked forward to the opening of deer season the most of any season. Adam rose to his knees when he heard a sound and held the gun to his shoulder. He turreted the barrel from side to side. Nothing. Must have been a squirrel, he thought. He lowered the weapon and stared up at the trees. For the first time, he realized there were no birds or squirrels or any other being in sight. Only him and the steady rain.

Eva rose before the sun to check the coop. The purple bruises on her arms and legs and chest ached. She couldn't see the blotches on her back, but assumed they looked the same. As he always did, Javier had blamed her for the lack of eggs for his breakfast. She reached the coop and knelt down. Again, there were no eggs, or chickens, or rooster, or animals of any kind. She sneaked back into the house and placed her belongings in a burlap bag. She wove a rope through the material to create a harness and left. Eva couldn't take another beating. She stepped out into the rain, only a scarf protecting her head, and headed northeast toward Dallas and beyond. She hoped Javier would assume she'd head home to Mexico and look for her in that direction when he awoke from his drunken sleep.

Day 3

For a third day, Adam sat in his perch. The rain continued, longer than anyone had predicted. He wiped his nose, the morning chill snuck under his coat. He listened to the water rush through the stream along the south side of the field, overrunning it's banks. He'd never seen it rise this high. The morning news reports focused on the rising rivers, especially the Mississippi. Farms along its banks were already flooded. He'd always been fascinated by nature and its power. As a child, he dreamed of becoming a meteorologist, or a geologist, or a forest ranger. That was long before he enlisted in the Marines and went to Iraq. Now, he felt lucky to have a job in the local hardware store.

Eva jogged toward the semi, the wet dress clinging to her legs and hips. She opened the door. An older man with unkempt hair covered by a green, sweat-stained cap asked where she was headed. She said north, and he said me too. At least as far as Kansas City, anyway. Hop in. She stared briefly at the hole in the elbow of his plaid shirt. Mud covered the knees of his jeans. Eva hesitated to get in but figured the man couldn't do anything worse to her than Javier had. She glanced back down the road to make sure Javier wasn't following her, climbed into the cab, and placed the bag between her and the driver. He chatted as he wrestled the rig through the rain. She grunted in response and kept her eyes on the road. When the man stopped at a roadside diner to eat, he put a hand on her knee, said she could have something special for dessert, and nodded toward the sleeping compartment. Eva forced a grin and once inside excused herself to go to the ladies' room. Exiting through the kitchen, she continued her journey north on foot. If only it would stop raining, she thought.

Day 4

The rain continued for a fourth day, and Adam found himself both nervous and excited. He'd heard on the radio that the Mississippi continued to rise. Forecasters warned of a doomsday scenario with millions of acres of farmland underwater, homes ruined by surging waters, and the potential for drownings. Excited by the power of nature, Adam decided to drive east to Kansas City to check the great Mississippi for himself. He'd made the trip many times and marveled at the site of the river meandering along its way. As he neared the city limit, he saw lines of cars heading in the opposite direction. With no thought of joining them, he drove on, hoping he could get close enough that he wouldn't have to drag his right leg too far.

Eva slid out of the pickup truck, grabbed her belongings, and thanked the farmer for the ride. A thin layer of water covered the sidewalk. She hugged the bag to her chest and ran toward Meg's: The Best Damn Diner in KC. She hadn't eaten since leaving home. Eva rummaged in the bag and found the five dollar bill she'd stolen from Javier's wallet. She could have taken more but was afraid to.

Inside everyone was talking about the river. Some of the men said they were heading out as soon as the roads cleared a bit. Others said they'd lived here all their lives and weren't about to leave now. Eva slid into a corner booth. A waitress strolled over and Eva ordered a grilled cheese sandwich and a glass of water. It was what she'd ordered the only time Javier had taken her to a restaurant. Waiting for her food to arrive, Eva noticed water rising rapidly in the street and creeping under the diner's door. She shivered, grabbed the burlap bag, and ran out into the street. She spotted a hill to her right and headed in that direction. She didn't trust tall buildings. When she neared the top of the mound, Eva saw a man standing with his back to her.

Day 5

Adam surveyed the river as water continued to rise over the banks and race through the streets. He'd never seen anything like it. The Mississippi no longer had boundaries. He twisted counterclockwise and saw the young woman approach and stand next to him. She was pale and her hands were shaking. He asked if she'd eaten lately. She shook her head. He reached into the bag hanging from his shoulder and offered her an apple. She bit into it greedily.

They stood without talking and felt the water rise up their legs. Sensing the woman's fear, Adam reached for Eva's hand, and she gave it to him. They stood like that as great mists of water rose into the cloudy sky, obliterating their view.

Day 6

Having nowhere else to go, Adam and Eva stood on the hill and watched the blackness envelop them. Adam squeezed Eva's hand. Eva returned the gesture, and they waited as the Earth went totally black and mankind ceased to exist.

Day 7

Disappointed and saddened by his initial attempt at creating a new civilization, on the seventh day, God rested to consider what he'd done wrong and how he could do it better next time.

