



NOVEMBER STORM



T E S S E R E A N S T O R Y S E R I E S



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Beyond the Shadows

It's just after midnight and I am standing on the outskirts of the farmer's field holding a rifle I swore I'd never own. I promised myself I would never own a gun for the reason that they've taken so many innocent lives. For starters, I want no part of that, I already hold enough guilt for being the kind of banker that takes people's homes when they can't pay. Regardless, the day came where I had no choice but to own a firearm. Mostly it's because of my failed trust for the good people in law enforcement to protect myself and my family. Although I truly believe they did their best, unfortunately, their best didn't stand a chance when the power went out, *and never came back on.*

Before I share what came next, let me backtrack to just before the collapse of society as we know it. And no, it doesn't start with people running mad in the streets. No, this story begins with a snowstorm, an old man in a pickup truck, and an act of empathy that saved my family.

Into the Storm

It was late November, just before Thanksgiving and we were having one of the worst storms I had seen in years. It was now a full-blown blizzard and the snow was coming down almost two inches per hour. If you're from the Midwest United States and know storms like I do, then you know this wasn't the kind you wanted to be stuck out in. As luck (or lack thereof) would have it, I had an emergency meeting at the office that couldn't wait. My boss, Jackie, phoned earlier that day in a panic. She said she needed me to put out a fire which was, as she put it, "*The final challenge before the new shopping plaza could go in.*" Needless to say, I had no choice as she made it clear there was a lot at stake.

On the way to the bank, the whiteout conditions made it almost impossible to see where the road was let alone the dark silhouettes of cars zig zagging out of control in front of me. After at least a half dozen near misses, I found myself jamming on the brakes of my SUV nearly sliding into the old pickup truck broken down next to the curb. Standing next to the beat-up truck was a bare-faced elderly man holding what appeared to be a tire-iron. It turns out he had slid off the road trying to avoid the less experienced drivers and smacked into the curb. Now, on top of being stuck outside in a blizzard, he was also given the gift of a flat tire.



As I watched him move sluggishly through the thick snow, something came over me. Yes, I was already late to an emergency meeting at the bank, but there was no way I was going to let this old guy fend for himself in this horrible weather.

Quickly, I yanked the wheel and pulled behind his truck in order to protect him from the ravenous traffic. After angling my SUV to protect him and switching on the hazard lights, I got out and asked him if he needed help. He took one look at me while scanning my two-thousand-dollar suit and matching shoes, then declined as if it would be a detriment to my attire. Regardless of being turned down, I stayed by his side acting as a lookout.

After glancing at my watch about a hundred times — while fighting with the devil on my shoulder telling me I made the wrong choice to stop and help him — the old man finally completed the task of installing the spare tire. He then somberly walked over to me, took off his snow-covered baseball cap, then shook my hand and thanked me for my random act of kindness.

After getting back into my SUV, I waited a few moments to make sure he got back safely into his truck. With both of us now back on the road, I continued my trek to the bank. I figured after a few miles I'd see him disappear from my rear-view mirror. But I didn't. Instead, I saw those same headlights follow me all the way to the bank.

Once we arrived, I got out of my vehicle and he got out of his. As he approached me, my mind went numb trying to imagine what he was going to say. I mean, he already thanked me, which was good enough. But he didn't stop to shake my hand again. Instead, he continued walking past me towards the bank's front door. My heart sank as I was hit with the realization that *he* was the fire I was there to put out. Quickly, I rushed past the old man and held the door for him. I could feel my blood pressure rise as he scurried past me offering a defeated smile.

As fate would have it, the *fire* in need of being put out was the task of foreclosing on his family farm. And now with the farm soon to be out of the way, Jackie could move forward with her shopping plaza project.

I could barely believe the shitty luck this guy was having, yet there I was, front and center to all of it. As we signed off on the papers — that would short sale his home giving him mere pennies on the dollar — I was astonished when he stopped and thanked me again for helping him with the flat tire. It was the most uncomfortable departure of two individuals I had ever experienced in my life. All I could muster up in return was that I was sorry, and that I sincerely wished there was something more I could do. He simply nodded, dropped his head, then disappeared back into the storm.



The Rifle

The clouds were now covering the moon, making the only visible light the small fire I built, which was about fifteen yards away from where I stood in the shadows. The fire was close enough so I could see most of the farmer's field, but far enough to keep me hidden in the darkness.

As I took a sip of my coffee, I looked down towards the rifle to witness the fire reflecting off its scope. It was purchased several years ago before the collapse. As I've already mentioned, I never did like guns. I remember how awkward I felt the day I bought it too. Being in the gun store made me feel like a child stepping into an adult world I had no business playing in. To me, guns have always carried the stigmata of rage and wrongdoing. I would rather protect my family with a baseball bat if I had the strength to do so. But those days are long gone. Plus, I'm not dumb enough to bring a baseball bat to a gunfight.

This truth allowed me to take a deep breath, remove my biases, and learn to embrace the things that would normally scare me. In this case, the rifle that now rested by my side. Much like the rifle, our worth is only as good as the mechanism that propels it. Whether it's through our thoughts, or a physical skill, these are the things that give us value to others. But now that there is no longer a banking system to support my credentials, my usefulness has collapsed just like the economy did when the first EMP hit our atmosphere. It was only a short while ago my family was almost completely without provisions. This challenge presented me with two options; One, take what we needed by force — which I certainly wasn't keen on, nor capable of doing — or two, barter my protection with the rifle I vowed I'd never purchase.

Looking back, approaching the farmer was scary enough. He owned a gun himself and made that obvious as I entered his property unsuspectedly from the east. When he saw me moving across his field, he hollered and pointed his twelve-gauge shotgun towards me offering a single chance to leave with my life. I don't blame him either, you can't trust anyone nowadays, especially if they're as desperate as I was. But as soon as he saw my face, his attitude changed, and he lowered his weapon.

My heart almost stopped as I could tell he was the same farmer I helped with the flat tire just a short while ago. All I could do now was pray he would remember me for my good deed that stormy night vs. my actions that almost cost him his family farm. I am grateful to tell you that he chose to remember my good deed that night before all else.



Now, because of my lack of skills on a farm (although I do have some), I was only able to offer the same thing I gave to him that fateful stormy night in November. *Protection*. Not the kind he was clearly capable of on his own, but something much greater; what I was offering was *peace of mind*.

The deal was simple; as his family slept, I would remain on the property, armed, and ready to protect the farm from anyone, or any *thing*, that would muster up the ignorance to try and take what we were *both* working to protect. In exchange for my security detail, he would give me enough food to feed myself and my family.

In the beginning it was tough to be away from my own wife and kids while protecting his, but since we were so close it all worked out.

As time went by and we got to know each other more, he allowed me to take on more jobs and eventually move my family onto his farm. At first, he taught me how to grow crops, raise cattle, and harvest the fields. But since I was a businessman in my former pre-collapse life, it didn't take long before I was able to return the favor by showing him how to expand his profits through barter and trade within the community. Our trust became our bond and, it wasn't too long before we were able to share more as a result of our relationship.

This reminds me that even the tiniest acts of kindness still matter. It also reminds me of the fact that our comfort in society, and all that comes with it, can vanish in the blink of an eye. It took only four days before my family and I realized how much water we used. And, only a few hours with no electricity before the haunting sensation of despair reared its ugly head. I now get why people panicked. No one was prepared. *And I mean no one*. Worse, no one was able to use the skills they spent years in college acquiring. So yes, those now unable to help themselves became victims of their circumstances almost overnight, especially the children, the elderly, and the sick.

Most generators lasted for only a couple of weeks - some far less. Antibiotics, vaccines, if they weren't scooped up by the scared or by force, went bad within days without refrigeration.

Not having power forces you to realize that selling something online is a blessing. And, it's also an illusion that can be taken away in a heartbeat. To believe I ever had control astonishes me, simply because the one thing you think about when the power goes out is; *what do you truly have to offer others without it*. No stage in the world will get you a meal if there's no one to listen to your pitch. And, if what you're selling never had tangible value in the first place, well, you're already up the creek without a paddle.

This leads me to why I brought a rifle into the story. Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying my choice to own a gun was the sole reason for saving my family's lives. A gun is nothing but a tool in the right hands, just like a lawnmower, or a



hammer. In the hands of someone who understands how to use it, respects it, and means no harm except towards those who mean harm upon them, my rifle stood as an asset that helped keep my family fed. However, the true asset behind my relationship with the farmer wasn't the gun, it was simply an extension of the empathic choice I made during that fateful November storm.

For the record, there's nothing wrong with being against, or for guns, that's not the point. The point, is that if I didn't stop to help the farmer out during that storm, owning a gun would have made little difference.

In Completion

Of course, the story I just shared isn't true. The power is still on, or you wouldn't be reading this. And yes, I sell on the internet. In fact, almost everything I do to earn an income is leveraged by some form of electricity, fuel, or a tool we take for granted every day. But my true value is much more than that because I have learned to see far beyond just earning an income. I've learned how to be aware of *true* needs, not just desires or wants, but the *real, tangible needs* of those I seek to serve. Just like the farmer, I have learned to apply my skillsets through the practice of empathy and compassion; *there is no higher currency*.

As for some truth behind this story, well, the farmer's name is *Ray, and he is my neighbor. Although our relationship is far from that in the story, he and I have a clear understanding of support for one another, and that's all that matters. If the power were to actually go, and stay out, he knows he could count on me in a heartbeat.

**As of today, I have moved my family to a remote area and have met a new farmer, who is now one of my best friends.*

Lastly, as fate would have it, we are now in a pandemic situation which makes this story (although written almost two years ago) even more valuable. And for the record, I'm not trying to scare you with a story of social or global collapse. I simply felt that a story like this would give us a good foundation for understanding the principle of taking care of one another. We need to get beyond our biases and fears so that we may be of greater service to not only those around us, but also to ourselves and our families. Those who don't take the initiative to help others are rarely helped themselves. *Remember that.*



Here's what I'd like to leave you with. First off, we can understand the application of compassion, this is what this story is truly about. It's also about tying together two variables, that at first, don't seem connected. (The storm and the rifle) Then, we are able to see relationships get built within the context of giving and receiving. In this case, it's actually *give, give, share*. The banker freely gave his support to the farmer when he had a flat tire. The farmer then gave to the banker by accepting his offer to barter protection. Next, they built a foundation in order to build a life for not just each other, but also for their families, as well as anyone else that was willing to share, barter, or offer their services in kind.

In business we need to understand that there's a mutually beneficial balance that must never be crossed. It only takes a single act for someone to take without giving, for balance to become unsteady, and ultimately one-sided. If you read my email about reciprocity, this is the lesson.

In that email I wrote this.

By offering help, we become proud of our actions, open ourselves up to good karma, and create more possibilities for the future. This is what the businesses Jen and I started are for. We didn't start eight companies to just earn money, we started them to push ourselves, feel good about our future, and be of better service to those we wish to serve, those we care about, and most importantly, each other.

It's not about the tools we learn to use, it's about the hearts we choose to open.

Remember this, because today could be the day you support someone who could in return, *support you*.

Humbly yours,

Adam King

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