

## Rufus - Super Suburban PAWV - Chapter 1

“Let’s see. How to explain this? Just come right out and say it, I guess. I’m a vehicle, you see. A special kind of vehicle. A PAWV. That’s Post Apocalyptic World Vehicle. There is a little bit of BOV in me. That’s Bug Out Vehicle for those that don’t know.

“But I’m much more than just a vehicle to go from Point A to Point B before a disaster happens. I’ve been designed to be used not only for that, but to make sure my owner can travel well after the disaster, including TEOTWAWKI. (The End Of The World As We Know It). Only not really. Because if it is the end of the world, I won’t be here. TEOCAWKI (The End Of Civilization As We Know It) is a more proper term for when I will be used the most.

“So I have some Expedition Vehicle in me, a tiny bit of rock climber, and even a little Mad Max if you lean your head over and squint in bad light.

“I’m as ready for things as my owner, Will Summit, could afford to make me. And that’s pretty prepared. Will isn’t your typical survivalist, much less prepper. He, to put it kindly, is a bit of a PAW fanatic. He is a prepper, of course. But he goes far beyond what many preppers tend to do.

“Will, you see, doesn’t just intend to survive a PAW event, he intends to survive and help rebuild civilization. And you can’t do that staying at a well stocked retreat slash farm slash ranch slash home. That is surviving, of course, and Will thinks the world needs a lot of those kinds of preppers. But he also wants more. He wants people to be able to interact and bring back the best of our past civilizations combined into one that will do better, and last longer, than the last few.

“To do that, he feels he will need mobility, in addition to all his other preps that are set up to help in that quest, while still maintaining his ability to survive to keep doing it. I’m part of that. Me and my equipment and supplies I keep safe and carry for him.

“I am prepared to travel over bad roads, trails, and even where there are no trails, carrying everything that Will needs to have at hand to further his quest. I reside here, in Will’s secondary garage on his estate, ready to do what I’ve been designed to do.

“Let me tell a little about the details of what makes me what I am. Non-gear-heads feel free to skip this part and get to the good stuff. I’m rather proud of what I’ve accomplished, and some people (the gear-heads), like the details, don’tcha know.

“I started out life in a wrecking yard, in three major pieces. First piece and my foundation, is the remains of a late model one-ton Chevrolet heavy duty dual cab 167” wheelbase pickup truck. I don’t know the details before I came all together. I assume that it had been wrecked.

“Just like another major part of me. My body comes from two Chevrolet Suburban rigs, found in the same wrecking yard. The front of me was a brand new Suburban, with all the amenities. Again, don’t really remember life before I came together. The rear portion of my body is from a Suburban of the same style, but a stripped down model. All in all, a pretty good heritage, if I do say so myself.

“Guess I should continue this in some semblance of order, so my running gear is next. Will decided, despite the one-ton truck frame’s strength, to reinforce and add gussets to my frame. Also, while I was there in all my naked glory, skid plates, rock sliders, and a roll cage were fabricated and added to my frame. The old fuel tank was scrapped and three safety lined fuel tanks were installed for extra long range, and, for increased protection for my electrical components against EMP, metal conduit was added for all my wiring.

“Now, Will’s design called for power, speed, and toughness, so I am proud to say my power plant is a 12 valve mechanically injected Cummins 6BT diesel crate engine. A high end supercharger was added to increase performance. The 6BT is coupled to an Allison 6-speed automatic transmission. That combination feeds a Borg Warner transfer case with an air locker. My axles are PortalTek G3 1½ ton portal steering axles, also with air lockers. Yes, both my front and rear axles are steerable to get me... get Will through tight spots. A StazWorks four-wheel steering system with mechanical rear steer lock out controls the rear axle.

“For protection in case of Will pushing me above the mechanical limits of the parts he chose, there are Sonnax over-torque protection units on all three drive shafts with plenty of replacement shear bolts.

“For those times when I might be needed, but am not the primary vehicle... sigh... Remco driveline disconnects are on the front and rear drive lines, which are heavy duty, too. With the drivelines disconnected I can be towed without any problems. Additional heavy duty parts... I guess I don’t really have any parts that aren’t heavy duty... But my suspension and steering gear is heavy duty with a practical but useful four inch lift built right in. Oversize heavy duty disk brakes with a booster stop me on the proverbial dime when Will wants me to.

“And how does all this control power get to the ground, you ask? Well, I have a set of four 35” bead-lock run-flat tires on me and carry a second full set. But I’m getting ahead of myself. There is more to me than what I’ve mentioned so far. Custom made twin cyclone engine air pre-filters clean the coarse stuff out of the air captured by dual engine air intake snorkels. A final stage of engine air filtration are K&M air filters feeding the blower. The large diameter twin exhausts and super quiet mufflers are snorkeled as well, as are all the various components’ vents.

“Will stores a great deal of Evans NPG+ waterless coolant for my heavy duty oversize radiator with twin electric fans. Told you I had more heavy duty stuff. That includes the engine oil cooler, transmission oil cooler, and hydraulic oil cooler.

“There are custom mounts on the engine to accommodate two 12-volt GM generators, as opposed to alternators. That EMP thing again. Dual HD starting batteries make sure the 6BT fires right up no matter the circumstances. A large heavy duty deep cycle battery is on board, connected and charged through a battery isolator to run an 110v/220v AC inverter.

“Other mounts are for an air compressor, hydraulic pump, on board welder, power steering pump, and air conditioning compressor. Of course, the air compressor and hydraulic pump have tanks built into the chassis. There isn’t much space left in the engine compartment, but the whole front end of the body pivots forward and de-mounts if major work is needed.

“Speaking of the sheet metal, the front section of the newest ¾ ton Suburban was modified before being installed. Besides the pivoting fenders/hood/grill assembly, a custom roll cage was fitted inside. Will debated a long time, I guess, before opting not to add Kevlar bullet resistant fabric in the doors and firewall. While it would have stopped a few pistol rounds, major calibers would go through it. And it would have added a lot of weight, especially if window armor was included. So it is up to me to get Will and any passengers to safety quickly if we come under fire.

“Will likes his amenities, so after the front of my body was added to the frame, a custom cockpit was installed, with dual captains’ chairs and center console. A custom computerized ‘glass’ dash was installed over a set of mechanical gages. If EMP fries the computer, even in the faraday box, all Will has to do is move the glass dash aside and he has full mechanical instrumentation. The electronic dash includes GPS mapping and navigation systems.

“Part of the center console is the All-Wheel Steering control from StazWorks and a fold out panel that contains switches that operate relays so any lighting system I have can be run on auto, so the normal switches work; turned off completely; or turned on without activating the regular switches. So Will can turn off the brake lights, for instance, so when he applies my brakes the brake lights won’t light. On the other hand, he can flip the switch to on for a few seconds and the brake lights will come on even as he continues at speed.

“A second fold out panel controls the various other effects that Will has ready to install. But more on those later. Some of the communications gear was also installed in the center console. Again, more later.

“A custom roof console contains more electronics. It is a faraday cage to protect them. The passenger dash has another built-in faraday cage to protect the dash computer and a laptop computer with important information. The second row of passenger seats was another custom setup with dual captains’ chairs and a center console. They fold down and to make the cargo section full length from just behind the front seats to the rear doors.

“While all the work was being done to the front passenger section, the rear section from the other Suburban was added, basically creating an extra long enclosed cargo section. The rear door system is custom built. It is a set of Dutch doors with upper lift hatch.

“Both front and rear wheel wells were re-contoured. With the suspension lift, on top of the portal axles, and even with the 35” tires, there was more than enough clearance to lower and shorten the wheel wells, creating a sleeker look.

“This also allowed some space on top of them under the hood to mounts a few things, and made much more room for a pair of inside toolboxes that run the length of the cargo space from just behind the second set of seats to just before the rear doors. They go from just below the window line, through the floor level, almost to the bottom of the outside body panel, except over the wheel wells. They are the width of the wheel wells to the outer bodywork, with lift up doors in the top.

“But the toolboxes are really meant to be accessed from the outside, through the contoured doors cut into the sides of the cargo section. They are tightly fitted, with quality gaskets and have keyed alike locking mechanisms to make them secure. There’s still plenty of empty cargo room, even with the toolboxes installed.

“A couple other additions to the cab are heavy duty dual arm windshield wipers with an air and brush function to blow dust and volcanic ash off the windshield instead of scraping it and a windshield visor with running lights built in. A bug deflector on the top front edge of the hood matches the visor. The engine air snorkels were faired into the visor.

“And for those times when ash, dust, fallout, biological agents, or chemical elements are in existence, an American Safe Rooms vehicle CBRNE filter system was mounted on the cab above the front seats. There are low profile custom cyclone HVAC pre-filters feeding the CBRNE filter. There is also a solar panel on top of the filter box to trickle charge my batteries.

“Now for some of the things I’m really proud to have had installed. They make me capable of doing just about whatever Will wants me to do. Starting at the front, of course.

“I have a shop built heavy duty front bumper that incorporates a 2” hitch receiver, tow bar, brush guard, roller fairlead winch mount for the twelve-thousand pound hydraulic winch with tensioner and stowing protector, spare tire mount... see, I told you I would mention them later. It’s later.

“There is a tool box built into the bumper containing winch accessories like tree protectors, a cable damper, extension winch cable, clevis’, shackles, snatch blocks, tie-offs, etc. There is a mount for a 20-pound fire extinguisher, and mounts for a short handle round point shovel and pick/mattock.

“Lights to enhance the super bright HID headlights include high intensity driving lights on the brush guard and fog lights mounted low in the bumper. There are tie down/tow hooks welded to the bumper. AC, DC, compressed air, hydraulic power, and welding lead outlets were incorporated in the bumper to provide the means to use various tools that I have in my cargo section. There is a pigtail to connect to a tow vehicle so the lights and brakes will work when I’m towed.

“Now for the rear bumper. Similar to the front bumper, it incorporates a 2” hitch receiver, roller fairlead winch mount with another twelve-thousand pound hydraulic winch with tensioner and stowing protector. There is another built-in toolbox with tow strap, cable damper, extension cable, and the rest of the same items in the front bumper. There are receptacles for all manner of trailer towing lighting and brake systems, including hydraulic and electric brakes.

“Another 20-pound fire extinguisher, a Pull-Pal winch anchor, a stake down type winch anchor with stakes have their own mounts. Right and left swing away racks carry another spare tire, two jerry cans of diesel, one of gasoline, and one of water, along with a sixteen pound sledge hammer, and an axe.

“There are high intensity back up lights, and the same power connectors as the front bumper and similar tie down/tow hooks.

“Now to the center section, namely the roof rack. It is heavy duty and runs from just behind the windshield visor to the rear of the roof, with a large hole over the front of the cab where the CBRNE filter system was installed. I have a roof rack ladder to access it as part of the rear swing away assembly.

“There are remote control dual spot/flood lights front, on each side, and at the rear. Also high intensity fixed spot and flood lights in front, on the side, and the rear. Low profile PA speakers also all around. An elastic cargo net keeps loose items secured. A heavier strap cargo net is packed for heavier objects. Custom lay-over antenna mounts carry the various larger antennas for my communications system. There are mounts carrying the final two spare tires.

“And for the various activities that might cause Will to need things to get into, out of, over, or around, a set of tool mounts carry a Hi-Lift jack, telescoping ladder, articulating ladder, long handle round point shovel, wall climbing/recovery pole, railroad bar, Stanley 30” Demolition bar, a pair of 42” bolt cutters with spare head, some cribbing timbers, two sets of traction pads, several thermal lances, and last but not least, a set of bridging ramps with deployment and recovery gear.

“A large custom heavy canvas cover keeps everything out of sight, just like the ones on the front and rear bumper assemblies.

“Now to the cargo compartment toolboxes’ contents. I have a toolbox with an extensive hand tool kit, a parts box for my spare parts, another toolbox with a 6-ton chain fall, 2-ton cable come-along, and a pair of 5-ton bottle jacks. Another case has a Porta-power tool kit. In their own cases are hydraulic and air powered tools.

“Also in their own cases are a chainsaw and chainsaw support kit, burning bar support kit, and a small oxy/acetylene torch kit with case vented outside for safety. A set of wheel chocks are in the toolbox space above the wheel wells on each side, along with a 2,000,000 cp self contained spotlight.

“Though I don’t carry them all the time, and certainly not all at once, Will has some pre-packed cargo containers with specific items for specific circumstances. There are containers for my roof rack, inside the cargo area and a pair to fit the receiver hitches.

“In a like situation, Will has some companions for me. A pre-packed tandem wheel trailer I can pull with ease, and a barge-trailer with a pair of outboard motors for crossing water obstacles too deep for me to ford or with too soft of a bottom to support me.

“So Will can keep monitor the airwaves, and keep in touch with others, he installed a comprehensive set of communications devices in the various consoles and on independent mounts. Another thing I said I’d get to. Here goes.

“AM/FM/Satellite/CD/DVD/TV Video system. NWS EAS SAME receiver. 6 FRS/GMRS short range handheld radios. 2 Bearcat BCD396XT PS Band scanners with Hustler MRM mobile scanner antennas. Cobra 148GTL AM/SSB CB mobile with Wilson 5000 Roof B mobile CB antenna. Yaesu FT-8900R 10m – 70cm VHF/UHF amateur mobile radio with Diamond 8900A 10m – 70cm mobile antenna with mount & coax. 4 Yaesu VX-8R 6m-70cm VHF/UHF amateur handheld radios. Yaesu FT-897D HF transceiver with KJ&U KW 6 – 160 screwdriver mobile HF antenna and Yaesu ATAS 120 antenna with mount, triplexer & coax.

“For more private communications, though by no means totally, Will uses the Motorola CDM 1550 low band HF business band radio with a Wilson 5000 CB antenna cut to BB frequency, and 6 Motorola HT-1250 low band business band handheld radios.

“And for marine and aircraft communications and monitoring I have a Furuno FS1503EM SSB marine Band HF/SSB mobile radio with avKJ7U KW 6-160 screwdriver antenna adjusted for marine band, a Furuno FM3000 marine band VHF mobile with Wilson 2m magnetic mount cut to Marine band, and a Standard-Horizon HX471S VHF marine band handheld radio. An ICOM IC-A200 mobile airband radio with mount & antenna, and an ICOM A24 airband handheld radio cover the aircraft bands.

“That pretty much is it, except for a few things that Will fitted but removed. They would be added again when I really became needed. The high output disruptive sound & strobe light system. A gag-gas dispenser system and oil slick, smoke, and caltrop dispensers. Rammer/pusher bars on my bumpers, and a hanging chain tire armor/deflection system. Infra-red driving lights and some night vision goggles so Will can drive me completely blacked out. Radiator armor with air flow deflector panels to protect my radiator.

“I guess I don’t look like much, with the good parts covered by their fitted covers, and the tan and light gray of my paint scheme. But I can do things Will wants me to do. So looks don’t count for much.

“After my shakedown cruise, as we say in the vehicle business, when all the small details that needed attention were dealt with, I’m now sitting in the garage, just waiting. Oh. I should point out that Will does have a name for me. Well, for the computer that controls some of my functions. He calls it Rufus. And the laptop is called Rufus Two. So I’m often referred to as Rufus. Believe me, I didn’t pick the name. But it is my name, therefore, I’m proud of it.

“Which brings me to a delicate point. Will does talk to me, as if I were human. It’s a little quirk of his. Don’t think less of him for it. He’s a good guy. Else I wouldn’t even be here. Or know all the things I know. Will really talks a lot, sometimes.”

## Rufus – Super Suburban PAWV - Chapter 2

“Well, Rufus, old boy,” Will Summit said, running his hand along the fender of the rig he’d had built several months previously. “Time to show your stuff. We have a situation on our hands that I think you can help with.”

“Of course, I was ready for anything Will might ask of me. When he climbed inside and settled himself in the driver’s captain’s chair I was just waiting for him to press the start button. When he did, the 6BT fired right up, just like it was supposed to do.

“Will put the custom Suburban into gear and pulled out of the garage. A touch of the garage door controller had the door going down almost before I was out. Will put me in four wheel drive high range and then he turned me right and we headed for the long driveway that connected the heart of his estate to the county road system. My tires bit into the deep snow without a slip or slide.”

“Going to be a good test for you,” Will told me. “This blizzard has left a lot of people stranded, without power, and they’re not getting anywhere without a proper vehicle. Going into town to pick up a few supplies to distribute. There’s a Blizzard response team with supplies at the Town Hall, but they have a limited number of vehicles that can get through the snow. All the snowmobiles they could get are in use. But they can’t carry much.”

“And that’s what we did. Will loaded me up at the Town Hall and off we went. It was light duty for me, but it seemed to mean a great deal to a lot of people, according to Will.

“I was still running just fine at the end of the day, and when Will was asked for just one more run, he knew I could make it and said we’d go. It turned out that the blizzard wasn’t over. The snow and wind picked up, but with my high ride suspension and high traction tires, I just pushed right on through, with Will warm and comfortable inside. The heavy duty windshield wipers kept the snow off the windshield.

“Will flipped the switches that powered up my front auxiliary lights so he could see better, and anyone foolish enough to be on the road in something other than me could see us coming.

“But there was nothing out there but blowing snow for a long time. When Will turned me off the highway onto a driveway, the bright lights illuminated a clapboard house, with one feeble candle glowing in a front window.

“Will pulled me right up to the front porch, being careful not to run me into the porch support posts. Not for my protection, of course. My heavy duty bumper would just trash the post. Not even sure it would mar the paint, such as it was.

“Will activated the driver’s side lights and the rear lights so he could see what he was doing when he opened my driver’s side door and dropped down into the deep snow. I waited patiently, keeping my interior warm and the area lighted as Will carried several cardboard boxes up onto the porch. He stayed inside for some time before he came back out.”

“You know, Rufus,” Will said when he got back inside, “Doing things like this is just the right thing to do, you know. Makes me feel good I was able to help out. Poor old Mrs. Becker. She only had one more candle, a few crackers to eat, and only a couple bottles of water. At least she’s warm enough, despite being without her furnace.

“That old house was built right, with lots of insulation. Keeps the wind and cold out pretty nicely. She has to crack a couple of windows when she runs the kerosene heater she has to take the chill off. She should be all right for the duration.”

“That was all Will said until we got back home and I was in my garage slot.”

“You did good, old son,” he said as he closed the driver’s side door and locked me up with the remote he was never without.

“It was back to waiting for me. But not for long. The snow was mostly gone when Will came to the garage and started me up. He wasn’t talking, so I didn’t know what was happening. He just took me over to the fueling pump and filled the one tank that was a bit low from the blizzard run. Then he put me back in the garage, still without a word.”

“But something happened a few days later that had me shaking. Not in fear. Literally. The ground moved and my suspension quivered a bit before settling back down. But Will didn’t come out. Not immediately. When he did come out a few minutes after the shaking he was in a hurry.”

“Gonna see just how well you’re put together, Rufus,” Will said as he hurriedly climbed into the driver’s seat and started the custom Suburban. As soon as the garage door was up, he pulled out.

“Will was in a hurry. I could tell that the way he fed biodiesel to the 6BT. The supercharger kicked in and we were off. Not since the trial days had I been pushed this hard. But it was nothing I couldn’t handle. I had more to give, if Will wanted it. Then Will started talking. I think it made him feel better.”

“Got the real thing, now, Rufus. Not that you’d know what it is, but the Yellowstone Super Volcano just blew.”

“Will went silent as we went over a bit of a hump in the road and I went airborne for a second. But my suspension was built to take it and Will is a good driver. There was nary a bobble as we continued barreling down the highway. Will began to speak again.”

“Yep. This is the big one. I’m not leaving family hanging. I’ve got to get to them and get them back to the estate before we get too much ash fall.”

“Will fell silent then, and his hands tightened slightly on my leather wrapped steering wheel. We went airborne again a couple of times but were then on the smooth pavement of the newly resurfaced Interstate Highway, headed west, according to the GPS, mapping system, the

electronic compass, and the magnetic compass. We were headed west, fast. Most of the time, at least.

“Occasionally Will would touch the brakes and slow me down, waiting for an opportunity to get around another vehicle. There weren’t many going our direction, but they weren’t going anywhere as fast as we were, so we came to a slow moving block every once in a while.

“Then suddenly Will was pushing the brake pedal harder than he had ever done before. We shed speed like a duck back shedding water, as Will is wont to say sometimes. This wasn’t a slow moving group of vehicles. It was a multicar wreck. But there were already some ambulances and two police cars there with all their red and blue and green and yellow lights flashing.

“Will had me stopped in plenty of time. But we didn’t stay stopped for long.”

“Time to see just how tough you are, Rufus,” Will said. He turned the steering wheel slightly, activated the four wheel drive, and pulled down past the shoulder of the highway.

“That was when I knew why Will had built me the way he had. He didn’t creep along, he gunned the 6BT, the supercharger bellowed just a little, and my front bumper assembly smashed into the wire fence that ran parallel to the highway. Of course the fence was no match for me and we went right through. It tore my front bumper cover a little bit, but I didn’t care. I hate wearing the thing anyway. People can’t see some of my best features when they are covered up.

“Even when we hit a large wet area, with standing water from the snow melt, Will didn’t slow me down. My big 35s splashed mud, but dug in and we went right through. Right after that, Will tweaked the steering wheel and we went through the fence again, climbed out of the ditch, and back onto the pavement, well past the point of the accident.”

“Might just get a ticket for that,” Will said. “But I’m not stopping until I get there!”

“Will was good as his word. We only slowed down when we had to. Darkness fell and Will didn’t spare the watts. The high intensity off-road lights, with highly illegal remote control covers, were switched on and lighted up the highway like daylight.

“The other side of the road, going east, was packed with vehicles. They were moving slowly. We only went around a few more vehicles westbound, catching them and passing them in the matter of a minute or two, leaving them behind in the darkness.

“After a long run, Will began to slow down. We were coming to a town. Will guided me down an off-ramp, and turned off the off-road lights. There were people all about, loading their vehicles by the light of their puny lights.”

Reaching up to take a microphone from a hanger, Will keyed it and spoke. “This is Angus. You read me Juliet?”

“I read you, Angus. We’re ready.”

“I’ll be there in about five minutes. Make sure everyone has gone to the bathroom. No stops for potty breaks.”

“Will do, Angus. Juliet out.” Will hung up the microphone and put both hands back on the wheel.

“Will had to dodge me around a couple of times, to avoid getting hit by cars with crazy drivers. With all of my protective devices, I wouldn’t be hurt much, and Will not at all, but Will didn’t want any delays. And besides, I was more than capable of making the maneuvers Will needed me to make.

“The brakes came on hard and we turned into a driveway to a house. Everything was dark, except for some flashlights. Leaving the 6BT idling and the driver’s door open, Will hopped out and ran to a woman. They hugged, and then he hugged two children.

“A few seconds later my rear doors and hatch were open, as was the driver’s side second row passenger seat door. Everyone began piling things into my cargo compartment. Rather untidily.”

“Got to go to the bathroom,” Will said and ran into the house as the last few suitcases and boxes were added to those already inside.

“The two children opened my rear passenger doors and clambered inside, buckling into the bucket seats tightly. They were silent. So was the woman that got into the front passenger seat after closing all my cargo area doors. She did it securely. Before she bucked in herself, she turned to the children to check to make sure they had their seatbelts on.

“I was ready with my precious load, and Will didn’t keep me waiting. He ran out of the house without bothering to close the front door. He was back in the driver’s seat and we were off again within a few seconds.”

“Hold on,” Will said over his shoulder. We have to make time. It could get a little rough. But don’t worry. The Suburban is equipped for what we’re doing.”

“It was a little strange going up the off-ramp when we got back to the Interstate Highway. We were going west in the east bound lanes. The GPS, mapping system, and both compasses confirmed it.

“If that was what Will wanted, that’s what we would do. I go where Will directs me to go. And just as fast as he wants me to go.”

“Wow!” said the boy in the right rear passenger seat. He was leaning forward, to look at the speedometer reading the glass dash was displaying. “We really going that fast, Uncle Will?”

“We sure are,” Will replied. He cut a look at his sister and continued speaking. “I would never drive this fast if it wasn’t a real emergency.”

“I understand,” said the girl. “It was the big boom at Yellowstone, Momma said.”

“That’s right,” Will replied. “And we have to get as far east and south as quickly as possible.”

“Just be careful,” said the woman.

“You know it,” Will said.

“I felt his hands gripping the steering wheel a bit more firmly. But he wasn’t squeezing them tensely, just firmly. He knew I could do anything he asked of me.

“After a bit, we began to come upon other vehicles doing the same thing as Will was doing. Going west in the east bound lanes. Much like the trip west, Will guided me skillfully around one after the other of the vehicles. Twice he slowed down and took the median to get around stopped vehicles that were blocking the travel lanes.

“Will looked in the rearview mirror for long moments during an open stretch of road. Again his hand tightened perceptively on the wheel and he pressed down a bit harder on the accelerator. The blower was growling and the 6BT’s exhaust rumbled. I was going as fast as I could. Well, on a flat road, anyway.”

“What is it?” asked the woman.

“Take a look to our rear. Unless I’m greatly mistaken, that is the ash cloud headed this way.”

“Uncle Will?” asked the little girl, her voice filled with fear. Her older brother reached over and took her hand in his.

“We’ll be all right, kids. Don’t worry. Rufus here will get us through this just fine.”

The boy laughed. “You gave the truck a name? Like they do ships?”

Will laughed too, never taking his eyes off the road. “Well, I guess I sort of did. It just evolved. From the computer.”

“That’s funny, Uncle Will,” said the little girl, not quite as afraid as before.

“Suddenly Will stomped on my brake pedal again, hard. Up ahead was another major accident, this one on a bridge. There was no getting across on the west bound lanes. Traffic was backed up for miles, from ditch bank to ditch bank.”

“Hang on tight, kids,” Will said again.

“Again Will steered me not only into the side ditch, but through the fence again. He put me in locked four wheel drive because it was muddy as we approached the small stream the bridge crossed.”

“Can we cross that?” asked Will’s sister.

“If anything can, it’s Rufus,” Will said. “He’s built to ford streams up to window level. Or higher. It all depends on the how firm the bottom is. And we’re about to find out.”

“Going fairly slow, but fast enough to have some momentum, Will guided me onto the bank of the stream and then into it. I was sinking slowly even as I went forward. But the tires suddenly gripped firmer earth below the mud and ahead we went.

“I have to admit, I fishtailed just a little bit when Will drove me up the far bank. But not much, and it didn’t slow us down.”

“Aw!” said the boy. “The water barely came up onto the doors!”

“That’s a good thing,” his mother said firmly.”

Will smiled. “Told you Rufus could handle it.”

“And I handled getting through the fence again and back up onto the Interstate. Again there was open road, due to the blockage on the bridge. There were many cars stuck in the median that had tried to cross over from the stalled east bound lanes to the west bound ones. A few made it, but we went by them like they were standing still.

“A big gust of wind that Will didn’t see coming swerved me just a tiny bit. It was a hot wind, according to the outside temperature probe. I mean hot. Over a hundred degrees hot. The temperature just moments before had been only forty-two.

“Again Will put the pedal to the metal, and we were off at my highest flat land speed. The temperature began to go back down.”

“Just the front of the front,” Will told the others. “We’re still okay.”

“We were getting close to home when the temperature spiked again. And this time the wind carried particles with it. They weren’t sand and they sure weren’t snow. It was the volcanic ash that Will was worried about.

“Will reached up and adjusted the airflow from the CBRNE filter unit. There would be no ash getting inside to bother the family. And my engine intakes were filtered almost as well. The air hungry supercharged 6BT would not fail due to dust in the intakes.

“It was quite some time before more than just a few flakes of the ash slid off the windshield. Between the bug protector and the visor, the air flow was enough to keep it clean as the cloud caught up with us and the leading edge pushed out in front of us.

“But the time finally came when the ash tried to accumulate. That was when Will activated the wiper control to use the brushes on the wipers instead of the rubber, and turned on the compressed air that worked with the brushes to lift and blow the ash away rather than grind the sharp particles into the windshield.

“There were a few other vehicles still going, and already their windshields were looking scratched. One guy was even driving with the window open, looking out it to see. But suddenly he jerked his head back inside and the car went off the road.”

Will saw the action of the other driver and muttered something under his breath.

“What was that, Will?” asked his sister.

“Just that guy... He was foolish. Between the ash and heat that he breathed in, you can say the volcano killed him.”

“Uncle Will?” It was the scared voice of the little girl again.

“This filter will keep that from happening to us,” Will quickly said, reaching up to touch the air outlets that were pouring cooled, filtered air into the interior of the Suburban.

“Oh. Okay, Uncle Will. Rufus is doing a good job, isn't he?”

“Rufus is as good as they come,” Will replied, hoping it was true.

“We left the Interstate and were on the side roads now. The ash was accumulating on the ground, but I was still breathing just as well as the family was. Even the windshield only had a couple of small scratches.

“Then we were home. The garage door was going up and inside we went, pulled in front first, unlike Will's usual method of backing me in.”

“Okay, kids,” Will said as they all left the Suburban. “Grab just what you have to have to get through the rest of the day and tonight. We'll go over to the house in the tunnel.”

“You have a tunnel, Uncle Will?” asked the boy. “Way cool!”

“Yeah. It is that,” Will said. “That's part of the reason we're going to use it. That air outside could scorch our lungs if we breathed very much of it, and the ash would cut them up inside. We're protected in the tunnel, and in the house. Even at that, we'll be down in the shelter, if it gets much worse than it is. It has the same type of air filtration as Rufus here does.”

“That's good,” said the little girl.

“She touched my surface and quickly pulled her hand back.”

“It’s really hot!”

“I know,” Will said. “Come on. Let’s get to the house.

“Will led them to the back of the garage, moved a couple of things, and they disappeared out of sight. Inside the garage it got dark when the automatic lights turned off after no movement for five minutes and I was once again in the dark, waiting for when Will needed me again.

## Rufus- Super Suburban PAWV - Chapter 3

“The wait for Will to come get me again was a long one. Though not as long as the wait between my trials and the Blizzard Run. The first time was when he came up from the tunnel to unload me. But that was all. He didn’t say even one word. But there came the day when Will came in the small door of the garage and did speak.”

“Well, old son,” Will said, “Time to get you back into action. Got to make a run into town to see how things are there. We’ll see how you do in the sloppy mess that is now all over everything.”

“Will climbed in and started me up. When he backed me out we once again went to the fuel pump to refill. The ash that had only begun to accumulate when I was parked had continued for a long time apparently. There was over a foot of accumulation surrounding the estate buildings. Some of my companion vehicles from the equipment barn had been hard at work. The area estate area was clear of all but a thin layer of windblown ash.

“Will or some of the others in his extended family must have used the Bobcats and Unimogs to clear the area around the buildings. That’s all I could tell at the moment. Hopefully Will would get talkative, the way he usually did, and say what had happened. All I could do was wait to do as he directed me.”

Will got back into the Suburban and started it once again. “You know, Rufus, that this is going to be tough. We got two feet of ash, that when it rained, compacted down to about a foot. I cleared the driveway, but the rest of the roads are going to be a mess. Just hope I built you well enough to make it through it to get to town. Got some friends that survived that need a bit of a helping hand.”

“Will stopped me again, beside the main house, and several people came out. They were carrying boxes and buckets and some totes that they placed in my cargo area, almost filling it. When the rear doors and hatch were closed, and then the rear passenger doors, Will’s brother got into the front passenger seat and Will got behind the wheel again.”

“You think this rig will get us there, Will? That ash is tough going,” said Mark, the brother.

“I have great confidence in this thing. I built it for conditions such as this.”

“I was going to do everything I could to fulfill Will’s faith in me. But I have to admit, the going was tough. The heavy rains had hammered down the ash in many places and I just climbed up onto it and went. But there were areas where it had accumulated in low spots. Those tended to be soft. There was a limit to my abilities. And an ash swamp was one of them.

“But Will had to try. So there I was, stuck out in the soft spot about the distance of my length, plus half again. Will had planned for such contingencies, and I was well equipped to deal with the situation.

“Using some words I don’t know, Will and Mark got out and went to my rear bumper. Will used the winch control to unroll the winch cable as Mark dragged it toward the nearest anchor point.

“That was a tree, stripped of all its leaves and some of its branches by the ash fall. Will trudged up carrying the flat webbed tree protector and wrapped it around the tree, holding it while Mark connected the hook of my winch cable to it.

“Will insisted that Mark hang the cable damper on the cable, just in case the cable was to break. Not likely, but Will didn’t take chances with human lives. I was there to take the risks. It really didn’t take long for me to pull myself backward with the winch as Will worked the control. A few more minutes to recover the tree protector and rewind the rest of the cable up against the tensioner, and Will was guiding me around the spot.

“It was no problem to work my way through the soft earth that had been blown clear of the ash. Then Will took me back up onto the highway. We made good time on the stretches where the road was clear, but went slower when on top of the ash that was hard packed, and even slower when I pushed through the unconsolidated stuff that was drifted to various heights on the road.

“Several more times, when the road dipped, and the ash was really deep, Will guided me around, without trying to cross what were now known to be dangerous conditions. We made it to town, again going to the Town Hall. There were people gathered around. Will shut down the 6BT and he and Mark began unloading the things from my cargo section to eagerly waiting people.

“They both disappeared for a while inside the building. A couple of boys were looking me over in admiration, despite my now ash encrusted surfaces. One of the boys tried the driver’s side door, but Will had locked me up with the remote, so he couldn’t get in.

“Both boys did cup their hands on the windows to try and see through them. There were a couple of ‘wows!’ and words like that, but Will and Mark were back. Will unlocked me and climbed into the driver’s seat as Mark entered the other side. We didn’t go directly home.”

“I want to check on Mrs. Becker, Mark,” Will said.

“So we headed out that way. The roads were about the same, except at one place. We’d crossed a couple of bridges on the other road, that were still in good shape. But the one just before Mrs. Becker’s place wasn’t in good shape.

“Mark and Will got out and scouted around a bit, looking for the best way around. They came back to stand beside me and Mark said, “We’ll have to go around the long way.”

Will grinned. “Not necessarily. Help me with the bridging ramps. All we have to do is get from the edge of the bridge, down onto the rest of it where it has fallen. The Suburban can climb that grade, easy.”

“If you say so,” Mark said.

“Using the swing out arms with winches on them to lower the two 14’ long, 16” wide bridging ramps, they disconnected them and carried them, one at a time, to set them at the edge of the bridge where the span had slipped off the ledge that usually carried it safely. The two men put them parallel to the gap. They weighed one-hundred-fifteen pounds each. Nothing for me, but Will and Mark groaned and grunted some as they placed them just where they wanted.

“Next, Will eased me up close to the edge , my front tires just touching the ends of the ramps. Then he and Mark hooked up hand winch cables from the front corners of the roof rack to the far end of each ramp. One at a time they winched the far end up a few inches and then swung the ramp around over the edge, lining it up with my tires.

“Then they lowered the ramp and did the same thing with the other one. Will went down one ramp and retrieve the winch cable while Mark did the same on the other side. Mark waited while Will drove me onto the ramps and down to the fallen bridge section. My front bumper scraped a little, and then the rear one, but I made the transition just fine. The ramps never moved. Both ends had spikes that bit into the ground or pavement to keep them from sliding.

“Reversing the procedure, the hand winches were attached to points on the rear of my roof rack, the ramps lifted slightly, spun around, and unhooked. A couple more minutes and the ramps were back on their mounts on my roof rack, and Will and Mark were again inside. I went up the sloping pavement of the fallen bridge, the tires chirping just a little due to the grade. It was steep, but within my capabilities.

“We made it to Mrs. Becker’s without any more delays. Will went in while Mark waited beside me. When Will came out he didn’t look very good.”

“Should have come sooner,” Will said, the dejection in his face obvious. “She’s been dead maybe three weeks.”

“Will, we came out as soon as it was safe and possible to do so. We can’t save everyone.”

“I know. I know. But that isn’t going to keep me from trying. Let’s go. We can’t bury her right now. But when we have some other things taken care of, I’m coming back to give her a decent burial.”

“I understand, Will. I’ll be right with you.”

“The two men got back inside and Will headed me down the road. We weren’t going back the way we’d come. We went the back way in to the estate and again I was placed in the garage, facing out, but not before Will and Mark washed me down on the pad outside the garage and then put me up on the rack in another garage bay. They checked all my fluids and changed my oil.

“While I was up on the rack, Mark lubed the few of my joints that didn’t have remote lines on them. When I was back down on my tires, Mark went from one zerk to the next on the four panels in my wheel wells that put grease to fixed lubrication points. They cleaned out all my

air filters and then took me to the fuel pump next. Finished, cleaned, lubed, and fueled, Will backed me into my garage bay and locked me up until the next time I was needed.

“It wasn’t long. We made several trips over the next few days, always taking the boxes of things into town or to outlying houses. It was on one of those out of town runs that we ran into trouble.

“When Will pulled me into a driveway my sheet metal began to ping and holes appeared in a couple of places. Will didn’t hesitate. He had me in reverse and we backed out of there in a hurry. Mark was on one of the radios, giving the information on what was happening to someone somewhere.

“Will finally slowed me down and turned me around, but he didn’t go on back the way we had come. Instead he looked over at Mark, who was with us again on this trip. Sometimes it was someone else in the family.”

“What do you say, Mark? A little intelligence gathering?”

“I’m game,” Mark replied.

“I hadn’t mentioned it before, because there was no reason, but on all of these runs, Will, and most of the adult passengers, were wearing or carrying guns of various types. Will and Mark got out, taking their rifles with them this time. They’d always just depended on their pistols before. With several holes in me, fortunately none of which were serious, I was glad they were taking something more powerful than their handguns.

“A few minutes after they left, there was the sound of gunfire, and moments later Will and Mark came running back up to me. Wasting no time, they clambered in and Will had me on the move. Fast. There were two vehicles suddenly following us and Will stepped on it. We blew through several drifts of ash. But after the second one, the following vehicles stopped and turned around. Will slowed me down to a more practical speed and he and Mark looked at each other.”

“Bad move on our part, Mark,” Will said. “Remind me not to be quite so curious. Let the National Guard handle the hard cases.”

“Yeah. Very good idea.” Mark picked up another microphone and began to talk to someone about the stronghold and me being shot at.

“We barely made it to town again when we met a pair of pair of National Guard Humvees, followed by an M1A1 Abrams tank on a heavy equipment movement trailer.”

“I don’t think that group is going to be harassing anyone else,” Mark said.

“Yeah. Okay. Let’s get back home. Time to add a few things to Rufus here,” Will replied.

“When we got back home, Will pulled me into the work bay of the garage and he and Mark got out. They were suddenly surrounded with other family members. They’d heard the

radio transmissions and were worried about Will and Mark. There were a couple of comments about the holes in my bodywork, too.

“But Will reassured everyone and the others left, except for two young men. They were Will’s cousins, Hadley and Blake. They stayed behind when Will asked them to help him and Mark do some work on me.

“It took that afternoon, and the following morning for the changes and additions to be made. I was better equipped now than ever before. All those items I mentioned earlier that Will had fitted, but removed, were now fitted again.

“The high output disruptive sound amplifier was installed and hooked up to the controls already in the hidden panel. Blindingly bright strobe lights were added around the edges of my roof rack. Also mounted on the roof rack were the nozzles for a gag-gas dispenser system and it, too, was wired to the effects switch panel.

“Tucked up to the frame in front of the rear bumper an oil slick dispenser, smoke generator, and caltrop dispenser were installed, connected, and loaded. The rammer/pusher bars were welded to both my bumpers, and a hanging chain tire armor/deflection system mounted to protect my tires.

“Infra-red driving lights were added to the brush guard and the roof rack. Mark brought out four sets of night vision goggles so Will can drive me completely blacked out while others keep an eye on the surroundings.

“Lastly, radiator armor with air flow deflector panels were added in the space left for them behind the spare tire mount on the front bumper when it was built. They would protect my radiator from a frontal attack by heavy rifles. There was some additional weight, but I was designed from the first to include the items so I can handle them easily and still perform my other duties.

“It was a couple days later when Will came to get me again.”

“Going mining today. See what I can salvage in the city, if anything.”

“Will fell silent when Mark joined him. But that was all right. I was going to be put to good use again and that’s all that matters to me. Will kept me down to a rather sedate pace when we got to the Interstate, so he and Mark could watch for hazards. The Interstate was mostly clear of ash, except in protected areas where the wind didn’t have much of a chance to move it around.

“But there were drifts to bull my way through, and some spots Will took me around. There were a few other vehicles on the Interstate, some of them right out in the middle of the road. The first two Will stopped at and he and Mark checked them.”

Will and Mark climbed back into the Suburban. “I don’t think we need to check these abandoned cars anymore, Mark said.”

“I know. There is not that much we can do for those the ash fall killed. Still want to check semis for useable goods, though,” replied Will.

“You sure it is going to be all right? I don’t want to get tagged for looting.” Mark looked a bit worried.

“You heard what the National Guard Commander said. ‘Take anything useful that is plainly abandoned. We need all the resources we can find. But anyone found taking items from other people, or even places that are obviously being salvaged by others over time, will be considered looters and dealt with harshly.’

“That’s what we’re going to be doing. Only abandoned things, and only useful things. Remember, we’ll be giving a good share of what we find to the community. The city is abandoned, for the most part. They took four feet of ash to our two. There was much more than double the damage that our two feet caused.

“With the city crippled by that much ash and the majority of the people dead because of it and the rest evacuated, all those resources are just sitting there. Some of them won’t be salvageable if it takes too long. That’s why the National Guard is allowing the salvage work.” Will looked over at his brother.

“Yeah. All right. I’m okay with that,” Mark said.

“Mark and Will fell silent after that, and we continued west, toward the city. It was late afternoon when we hit the edge of it. We’d stopped seven times to check semi trucks. Will and Mark had used the bolt cutters from my roof rack to get into the backs of the box trailers. Mark took notes while Will got into the trailers and called out what items the trailers contained. Three of the rigs were fuel tanker trucks with a semi trailer and a pup each.”

“First thing first,” Will told Mark when he pulled into a large open area strip mall. “Couple of coin shops in here that I’ve bought PM coins from. I want to see if there is anything left.”

“I guess we can consider gold and silver useful. Sure can’t eat it, though,” Mark said.

“It will come in handy at some point, I’m sure. Now are you going to help me, or not?”

“Okay! Okay! But we have to give some to the community, too. Is that agreed?”

“Of course,” Will replied. “I intended to do that all along.”

“Let’s get this done and move on to the list of things we’re also here for.”

“Well, I tell you, it was a boring time for me for a while. Will parked me where they could keep an eye on me, locked me up, and took out some burning bars, the support kit, and Mark carried the big bolt cutters.

“Just as it was getting dark, the two came back, stowed the gear, minus a couple of the burning bars, and went back toward the buildings. When they returned they were staggering under the weight of several canvas bags. There was a thump when they tossed them into my cargo hold onto the folded down rear seats.”

“Poor old Max,” Will said. “I really thought he would have made it. He always said he had whatever I might want in precious metals. I’m sure he was a prepper and most of what we got there was his private holdings.”

“I guess he couldn’t bear to leave it behind,” Mark said. “I can’t believe he just sat there with the shotgun in his hands and died.”

“Yeah. Come on. Let’s get the rest of the stuff.”

“Will and Mark made three more trips, but they carried many different kinds of things. There were no more of the heavy canvas bags. With my side lights on, Will moved me closer to the buildings further along in the mall and the two began loading up the rest of the items they’d found and stacked at the doors of the shops. I wasn’t completely full when we headed home, but it was close.

“We did the same thing several days in a row, though one of Will’s cousins went with us instead of Mark. We got a late start for some reason and met Mark and the other cousin coming back with one of the sets of box trailers found the first day.

“They were pulling it with one of Will’s Kenworth semi trucks that he used to pull trailers for the estate. The engines of the trucks that had been on the road had seized because of the ash that had been ingested through their standard air filters as they tried to outrun the ash.

“Three of the eleven sets of trailers we’d found in those seven stops were at the estate when Will parked me in the garage about midnight of that second day. The rest of those days were the same, except the third day and afterwards, I pulled an open tandem wheel trailer with sideboards to bring back items Will found and wanted that wouldn’t fit in my cargo hold. It was no problem. I had plenty of power for it.

“Other people were using other vehicles to get other things while Will concentrated on high value, critical, and hard to get to items. The hard to get to items is where I really helped out. Will had to dig out some doorways where ash had accumulated, using the long handled shovel on my roof rack while whoever was with him used the short handled shovel on the front bumper.

“He used the sledgehammer in lieu of the bolt cutters, burning bars, and cutting torch where it was more practical. A few times the ladders were put into use to get over fences that were too heavy duty for me to bust through. Will used almost all of the tools I carry at one time or another. By the time Will stopped the recovery efforts when it began to snow in early September just about everyone that had gone with him on his trips had some very nice things to say about me.

“I was kept serviced and fueled, and stored in my garage bay for several days after the snows started, plugged in to the power system because of the cold. But Will took me out early one morning. I was ready to go, despite the very cold weather. All my batteries had heat mats, the transmission and oil pan had heaters, and there was a circulating heater in the radiator system, so all my fluids were warm and the batteries were ready when Will pressed the button to bring the 6BT to life again.

“Though I was ready, Will waited a few minutes to allow my interior to warm up some, and to make sure there would be heated air for the defroster to keep my windshield clear. But Will is pretty tough, I guess, and we didn’t wait for long.

“When Will guided me out of the garage he stopped by the house and his sister Emily, radio name Juliet, came out carrying a large red bag with a cross on it. It’s her medical bag. She’s a para-medic. She put the bag on the passenger side rear seat and got into the front passenger seat.”

“Oooh! Nice and warm already,” Emily said, putting her hands up near the defrost vents and rubbing them together.

“You have what you need?” Will asked.

“When Emily nodded, Will put me in gear again and we were off. As with the ash, the Bobcats and Unimogs had been on the job clearing the accumulation off the grounds of the estate around the building complex and the driveway down to the road.

“When we reached the road, Will put me in four wheel drive high range and we hit the twenty-inch snow without slowing down. At least, not at first. Will decided to put me in low range four-wheel drive, with the front and rear axle lockers engaged. He left the transfer case unlocked.

“We made it to the town hall and Will and Emily got out, Emily taking her medical bag. Will left me running, but locked me up. The 6BT idled quietly, water vapor from the exhausts curling away in the light wind up above the items on the roof rack. This time there were no youngsters hanging around to admire me.

“Will was gone for a long time, and when he came back, he was alone. When he unlocked me and climbed in he was muttering.”

“Hard headed woman. Too good for her own good. Can you believe it? She’s staying here in town until the National Guard shows up with more medical personnel, equipment, and supplies.”

“We went back home and Will garaged me again for the three days it took the National Guard to get a medical team to the town to relieve Emily of her medical duties so she could come home.

“Even with my capabilities, it was a near thing getting to town and back again. Like my first real work run, there was a blizzard with high winds, heavy snow, and sub-zero temperatures. The snow was almost three feet deep this time. But it was a fine, powdery snow, on top of the hard frozen layer below. So for the most part I was only pushing through about eighteen inches of the loose stuff.

Once in a while my weight would break us through the crusted snow, but with both axles and the transfer case locked, my 35s pulled us back up onto the top of the packed snow and we continued the trip with barely a bobble. I got Will and Emily home safe and sound, and Will parked me again and plugged my power cord into the wall. It would be some time before I was needed again.

“The family stayed close to home all during the long, cold, dreary winter. Only the Bobcats and a couple of the U500 Unimogs were taken from their barn to keep the blowing snow cleared from the estate grounds around the buildings.

“But Will did finally come for me again, many weeks later. Again my cargo compartment was loaded up, with some things going on the roof rack. And, for the first time since Will first tried them out on me when they were built, both front and rear receiver hitch cargo baskets were attached. They were loaded to capacity. My springs settled just slightly, but I’m more than capable of handling the weight.

“So, with a full load, Will in the driver’s seat, and Emily in the front passenger seat, Will headed me out. But instead of turning toward town, Will took me the other way.”

“What do you think, Will?” asked Emily. “Think we’ll get there in time?”

“I hope so, Emily. Going in to the Haskell’s the back way is a risk, but if we can make it, the time will be cut in half. I’m afraid we won’t get there in time if we go all the way around. Even with the bridging planks, we can’t get across the river. The barge would work, but it would take almost as much time and a lot more work to use it to cross the river. This is the best option, I’m sure.”

“Okay. I hope your confidence in this truck is justified.”

“Oh, I think... I think the Suburban might still have a surprise or two that you haven’t seen yet.”

“Emily didn’t think I could do something, but Will did. That meant I would have to do my best, and be successful no matter what it was Will asked me to do.

“It was a little while before I found out. There was still some snow on the ground, on top of the ash, and the temperature was still down in the thirties. But the sun was shining, and visibility was good.

“When we turned off the county road and entered the National Forest, we didn’t stay on the narrow pavement very long. Will put me in four-wheel-drive high-range and released my rear steering lock-out.”

“You can’t possibly make it through the forest, Will! The trees are just too close together!” Emily sounded more than a little worried.

“Will’s right hand went to the rear steering joystick as he kept his left hand on the steering wheel. Emily drew a sharp breath when Will drove me between two trees and almost into one just in front and to the left. But Will tweaked the joystick and my rear tires turned to the left, kicking my front to the right, clear of the tree in the way.

“It went like that for an hour, my rear tires seldom aligning with my front tires, as Will zigzagged through the thick forest. The branches were mostly bare, including some of the evergreens, due to the ash fall and then the harsh winter.

“The only time things were really close was when I hit a patch of ice on the north side of a tree and my back end slid over, just barely kissing the tree. It left a small dent in my side, but Will or one of his mechanic buddies could pull it out without any problem.

“When we broke out onto a road after a little over an hour, Emily relaxed. She’d been tense the entire time. After locking the rear wheels into their fixed position, Will picked the speed up. The going was still pretty slow, because the road had not been traveled or cleared since the ash fall. But I bulled the way through, under Will’s skilled touch and we arrived at a big house, with a huge barn behind it, and several smaller buildings here and there. The ground had been cleared of ash, it seemed, but there was still a thick layer of snow.

“With her medical bag in hand, Emily hurried up to the house, tromping through the snow with determination. Will began to unload the front and rear cargo baskets and stack the things on the porch of the house.

“No one ever came out of the house as Will continued to work. After moving everything from me to the porch, he began to carry the things inside. When he took the last load in, he didn’t come back out for a very long time.

“But come back out, they did. Will and Emily both looked happy.”

“I can’t believe we made it in time, Will,” Emily said. “Getting here as quickly as we did saved that man’s life. I wouldn’t have been able to save him if the appendix had burst. Not with the equipment and supplies I have available to me.”

“You did good, Sis. And don’t feel bad about Mrs. Harris and the family insisting on paying you. They are a proud family and intend to make it on their own.”

“I know. But two pigs?”

“Piglets. Runts at that, this coming spring. We still have to fatten them up and then butcher them. It’s fair payment.”

“Well, okay. If you say so. And you are right about the Suburban. It’s a great rig. Did you proud on this run.”

“It always does,” Will replied. And I expect it to for many years to come.”

End \*\*\*\*\*

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