

Restricted Territory

Return

[When are We Now?]

Early in the evening, on a snow-covered trail, the forest is filled with the sound of wind through the trees, and the sky is getting dark. The recent snow is deep and undisturbed. Suddenly, CJ and Tylor are flung from nowhere onto the snow. They land ungracefully, tumbling to a stop. Snow is in their hair and clothes.

CJ sits up and brushes off the snow. “What the hell?”

Checking himself for injuries, Tylor sits up. “Did we crash?” He looks for the crash site. “Where’s everybody else? Where’s the train?” He looks at CJ. “You okay?”

CJ: “Yeah. You?”

Tylor: “Yeah. Think so.”

The boys continue to brush themselves off and start looking around. They begin to notice a transmission tower, power lines, and a faint glow to the west. Then, lights from a jumbo jet break through the clouds as the craft slowly descends to Mather Field.

CJ jumps to his feet very excitedly. “We’re back. We’re back in 2017!” Pointing out the lights. “See!”

Tylor also gets to his feet. “Yeah.” Now that he’s sure they are back in modern times, he yells excitedly. “Yeah!” He yells into the woods. We’re back!”

They start jumping around, excited about what they perceive to be 2017. In their excitement, they also notice that they have clothes. The boys stop jumping around as they verify that they are still dressed and then jump around again.

After a brief period, their joy quickly subsides, and they stand still.

“What about Uncle Sam, Victoria, and Austin?” Tylor wonders.

“Damn it!” Agitated, CJ starts kicking the snow. “This is so messed up.”

CJ is wandering in no particular direction; he is visibly upset. Then, he suddenly realizes that he and Tylor are out in the open. He motions to Tylor to follow him as he dashes for cover in the trees. They arrive in an area with much better cover. They both look to see if there is any activity around them.

Tylor looks around, waiting for CJ to explain why they are hiding. "What now?"

Speaking quietly, CJ brings Tylor up to speed on his thoughts: "First, until we know it's safe, we need to keep out of sight. Second, we need to let Mom and Dad know we're okay and determine the situation. I don't know what the heck we can tell Aunt Trish."

"We'll have to figure that out later. One step at a time." Tylor brushes some snow off CJ's back.

"Speaking of time," CJ cautions. "There's no telling how long we've been gone. We're just assuming that we're back to the time when we left. We might have been gone for minutes," he starts to worry, "or maybe . . . years."

Breaking CJ's concentration, Tylor points at the trail. "Hey! At least we're back to the same area we started. This is the trail we took to the cabin."

CJ recognizes the path, "Yeah. It sure looks like it. Even if we're back to the right time, we don't know if it's safe."

"Let's get back to the cabin and see if our stuff is still there," suggests Tylor.

"Okay." Afraid he might be sent back to the cabin in 1877, CJ makes one thing clear. "I'm not going inside."

Tylor shakes his head. "Me either. We'll just get the UTV and head back down to the truck. We can call Mom from there."

"Okay then. That's our plan. Just keep an eye out for anything unusual."

Tylor quips, "What could possibly be unusual around here?"

They both turn slightly away from each other and check their guns, making sure they are loaded before stealthily making their way to the cabin site.

[A Trip Back?]

Still concealed, the boys arrive near the cabin. There is a small amount of smoke coming from both chimneys. The UTVs are not out in front. The boys are in the tree line, watching the cabin. Faint stove handling noises emanate from the cabin, then dark smoke billows from one of the chimneys. The boys look at each other and shrug, wondering why someone would make the dark smoke. CJ motions that he will go down through the trees and back up to the barn. Tylor nods and motions that he will keep an eye on the cabin.

Once CJ makes his way to the tree line near the barn, he motions for Tylor to join him. Tylor starts to move, and then, suddenly, the cabin's front door begins to open. He freezes in his tracks. Wac ih 'a steps onto the front porch and looks around as if expecting someone.

Wac ih 'a calls out into the forest. "Sam!" There is a slight echo in the valley. "CJ!" Another faint echo. "Tylor!" A third faint echo. After listening for a response, he speaks to himself. "They should be here by now. Can't miss the smoke."

Tylor signals to CJ, 'You cover me' [points to CJ, puts his hand over the pointing hand (covering it), then points to himself]. CJ is uncomfortable in making his presence known. He shakes his head. Tylor does not heed the response and steps a couple of feet out of the trees. CJ draws his gun, ready to defend Tylor if need be.

Surprising Wac ih 'a, Tylor calls to him, "Hi. I'm Tylor."

Wac ih a' turns to face Tylor and calls down to him, "I heard someone yelling a little while ago. Are you Okay?"

Having never met Wac ih a', Tylor is not letting his guard down. "I'm sorry. Who are you?"

"I'm Wac ih a'. I take care of the land here." He waves his arm as a welcoming invitation. "Why don't you come in and get warmed up? Sam said you would come up on Wednesday, but I never saw you before you left."

Since Tylor has never met Wac ih a', he will not compromise his safety by going inside. "No thanks. I just want to get my UTV and go back down to my truck."

"The snow machines are in the barn. Let me show you." Wac ih a' sees the gun on Tylor's hip. He puts his hands in the air and does a slow turn to show that he is unarmed. "I'm not armed. I'm assuming that's CJ in the trees." Wac ih a' points to the area of CJ with his head. "He can relax." Wac ih 'a puts his arms down. "I'm not going to harm you."

In an almost curt tone, Tylor explains the reason for their distrust. "We're not too trusting right now. People in this area have been trying to kill us."

Wac ih a' responds calmly. "I see." He steps off the porch, walks within ten feet of Tylor, and stops. "Where's Sam?"

"He's – Well, I'm not quite sure."

Wac ih a', now between Tylor and the barn, motions for Tylor to continue toward the barn. Wac ih a' stays about ten feet ahead of Tylor as they walk to the barn, keeping a comfortable distance for Tylor.

"Mister Wac ih a'. What day is it?" Asks Tylor.

"Please just call me Wac ih a'. It's Monday."

CJ joins Tylor as they pass by his post, but he stays a little behind to watch Wac ih 'a.

He is not quite sure he wants to know because the answer may be one he doesn't like. "No, I'm sorry. I mean the whole date."

"Of course. It's the twenty-seventh of November, 2017. Are you and CJ okay? You've been missing for four days. Dressed like that, I'm surprised you're still alive." Wac ih a' refers to the fact that they are not dressed to be overnighing in the winter woods.

The boys look at each other, wondering if their appearance is unusual. Neither considers it remarkable, so they dismiss the comment.

Wac ih a' continues, "Sam said you would be here last Wednesday. When I came out that evening, your snow machines were here, but there was no sign of you or CJ, except, of course, the clothes you left at the door. Sam left without saying anything the day before. I'm starting to feel like I'm a bad host."

They arrive at the barn door. Wac ih a' opens the door. Two UTVs with snow tracks are there. The boys' bags are still on the UTVs, and a garbage bag is on the seat of CJ's UTV.

"All your belongings are still on the machines," Wac ih a' tells them. "Sam's bags are in the room where he left them." He points to the garbage bag. "That's the clothes you left on the porch."

CJ is curious about how things were left. "So the clothes were just lying on the porch?"

"Actually, they were piled up at the door. Pockets had cell phones and keys in 'em, too. That's how I got these (indicating the UTVs) here. Hope you don't mind." The boys shake their heads no.

A commotion is heard at the front of the cabin. A faint voice melds with the rest of the forest sounds.

In the distance, a soft voice filters through the air. "Captain? You okay?"

The three men freeze in their tracks, listening for more.

Tylor recognizes the voice; he becomes surprised and excited: "That's Austin!"

Tylor starts running to the front of the cabin, and CJ is right behind him. Wac ih a' trots along behind them. The boys call to them as they get closer and in line of sight.

CJ happily calls out, "Austin? Uncle Sam?!"

Tylor arrives first at the duo. Sam is on his back, on the ground, and Austin is standing over him. Tylor asks, "Are you guys okay?"

Austin steps away so CJ can check on Sam. In a weak voice, he utters, "I think the captain's hurt. He doesn't talk."

CJ gets down right next to Sam. "Uncle Sam? What's wrong?"

Sam takes a big, slow breath.

“Just got the wind knocked out of me,” Sam reports. “He’s heavier than he looks.” CJ and Tylor smile. “Give me a minute.”

CJ smiles at Sam. “Okay, old man, but you’re not that feeble. I’ll give you half a minute. Your thirty seconds has already started.”

Turning Austin toward him and embracing him, Tylor checks on Austin. “Austin. How about you?”

Without strength, Austin loosely embraces Tylor. “I didn’t get hurt, but I’m not feeling too well.”

“Let’s get them in the cabin,” suggests Wac ih a’.

CJ is afraid of getting thrown back in time again. “No.”

Still on his back, Sam cannot see Wac ih a’ or the cabin. “Cabin? Where the heck?” He starts to sit up. The strength hasn’t yet returned to his abdomen, so he plops back down. “Yeah. If there’s a cabin, take Austin in and get him warmed up. He can’t get chilled.”

CJ whispers to Sam, “2017.” Sam looks a bit confused. CJ clarifies, “Ren’s place.”

Now understanding the situation, Sam whispers, “Been here long?”

CJ: “About an hour.”

Wac ih a’ steps into Sam’s view. “If it’s okay, I’ll take him in now. He looks pretty sick.”

“Wac ih a!” Sam remembers what Austin said about his name. “You sly fox, you.” Now able to sit up. “It’s good to see a friendly face.” He looks at Austin, eye to eye, assuring him of his safety. “Austin, this is Wac ih a’, he won’t hurt you. You remember, I spoke of him before. He’ll get you warmed up. I’ll be there in a couple of minutes.”

Austin, CJ, and Wac ih a’ are standing beside each other, facing Tylor and Sam (still sitting on the ground).

An image flashes in Tylor’s mind:

Tylor sees Victoria holding the satchel strap and Jacob hanging out of the train.

Victoria sees Tylor.

Tylor nods that all is well.

Victoria kicks Jacob while releasing the satchel.

The image disappears, but the assurance that Victoria is safe and that she knows Austin is safe plants itself firmly in Tylor’s consciousness.

Austin and Wac ih a’ walk to the cabin. Wac ih a’ offers his arm to Austin. Without hesitation, Austin takes hold of Wac ih a’ as they walk.

Weakly, speaking in Miwok as they head to the cabin, Austin says, “<Miwok> walpu- wac ih a’, Şoja • he-tY pasas-•i- me • we- </Miwok>” [Trans. Good morning, Wac ih a’, ‘my name’ White Squirrel].

Walking, even that short distance, drains Austin’s strength. Wac ih a’ picks Austin up and carries him. As they go up the stairs, Wac ih a’ tells him, “White Squirrel, please use English. My Miwok is very bad. Oh, by the way, it’s evening.”

“Yes, sir.” Austin notices all of the changes as they go through the door. “What happened to the cabin?”

CJ is next to Sam and is about to help him up. Thinking that since they were together on the train, they would all arrive together in 2017. “Where’s Victoria?”

With assistance from CJ, Sam gets to his feet. “I’m not sure. Austin and I fell off the train just before Placerville. She was in the car, but she didn’t fall with us. She was fighting with Jacob when I saw her last. Lewis shot Sheriff Hawkins.”

“Don’t worry about the sheriff, comments CJ. “We removed Lewis’ cartridges’ powder and shaved down the bullets. The only thing pushing the bullet was the primer. He should be okay. Maybe he hurt, but okay.”

“It did sound odd,” recounts Sam. “CJ, when did you fall off the train?”

He answers, “We didn’t. We were just sitting there in our room, then we were tumbling in the snow.”

“Victoria must still be on the train,” suggests Sam. “I think she’s going to stay there.”

“She is,” states Tylor authoritatively. “And she’ll be okay.” Sam and CJ look at Tylor, then at each other, shrug, and then back at Tylor. “She won’t be coming to this time. That’s what Falling Leaf was trying to tell us. I don’t know how she knows, but she does. I know it, too. I realize I always did, but I didn’t want to listen. We aren’t going back to that time.” He nods toward the cabin where Austin is getting warmed. “None of us.”

Sam shakes his head, trying to make sense of what Tylor said. “I’m not sure I caught all that, but our priority now is to get Austin to the hospital. Tylor, you can explain all that again on the way. Are our UTVs still here?”

“Yes, sir.” CJ points to the barn. “They’re in there.”

Thinking, Sam tilts his head forward and stares at the ground for a second or two. After formulating a plan, he lifts his head. “CJ, get the UTVs out front here and warmed up.”

“Aye.” CJ takes off to the barn.

“Tylor, send a message with the spot to Trish. Tell her to have an ambulance waiting for us at the parking lot. We’ll be there in fifteen minutes.”

Tylor is very concerned about Austin. He wants to get him to the hospital as quickly as possible. "What about a chopper?"

Looking at the sky and evaluating the weather, Sam shakes his head. "It's too dark and about to snow again. They won't fly in this weather; besides, it'll be a code two transport." He messes up Tylor's hair. "Good thinking, though. With your message, tell Trish it's for someone with complications from a horse riding accident, possibly pneumonia. When you're finished, help CJ. I'll be out as soon as I get Austin bundled up."

"On it." Tylor starts for the barn as Sam heads to the cabin. Tylor stops as if he had an epiphany and turns toward Sam. Tylor's stopping draws Sam's attention. "Don't worry. He's gonna make it." Tylor smiles and then runs off to the barn.

Sam looks bewildered. A few seconds ago, Tylor was super worried; now, he seems as if all is well. Sam shrugs it off as he hurries to the cabin. He stops at the first step and wipes the snow off the top left corner of the stone, revealing Ren's symbol. Sam smiles and then hurries up the stairs and into the cabin.

[Bundled Up]

Austin is sitting in a chair next to the cooking stove in the cabin. He is hunched over a bowl and has a spoon in his hand. Wac ih a' is sitting in a chair facing Austin.

Rushing into the cabin and his room, Sam calls out to Wac ih a' as he is busy getting clothes to bundle Austin. "Wac ih a', I'm sorry to have to run off like this. We'll be back in a few days. We need to get Austin to the hospital right away. The boys are getting the UTVs ready." Sam goes to the kitchen carrying an armload of winter riding clothes. "As soon as I get him bundled up, we'll be on our way. Sam drops the clothes by Austin, then returns to his room to get more stuff.

"I have already given him some soup, but he did not eat much." Wac ih a' gently takes the bowl from Austin's hands. "He is beat up pretty bad. I know it wasn't you, but there will be questions at the hospital."

"I know. Everybody's going to have questions." Of the many things Sam has to contend with, he also has to develop a plausible story for all of Austin's injuries. "I don't have all the answers yet. Austin isn't even supposed to be here. Things are going to get complicated."

Wac ih a' thinks about CPS and the police getting involved. "I reckon they will."

Sam starts putting his riding gear on Austin. Austin is little more than a manikin that Sam is dressing. He is barely with it. "I know this is too big for you, but it will keep you warm on our trip." While Sam is zipping and snapping up the coat, he whispers to Austin, "You are going to have a ton of questions, but just go along with everything the boys and I say. I'll explain later. You just have to trust me." Now he speaks a little louder so Wac ih a' can hear. "I love you, son." He kisses Austin on the cheek before slipping winter riding pants on him.

Austin poses a question Sam is not ready to deal with. "Where's Victoria?"

"She's okay. She's still on the train. Okay? Austin nods his head. Sam finishes bundling Austin, puts a helmet on him, and turns on the intercom.

Sam shakes Wac ih a's hand. "Wac ih a'. Thank you for everything. Give me a couple of days, then I'll be back. I have a lot of explaining."

Wac ih a' calmly says, "Take your time. I'm not going anywhere."

Sam grabs his jacket, picks up Austin, and goes out the front door.

[Austin's First UTV Ride]

The two UTVs are running in front of the cabin. It is beginning to get dark. CJ and Tylor are in their riding gear, including helmets, sitting in their UTV. Sam puts Austin in his UTV, opens one of the cargo boxes, gets his spare helmet, turns on the intercom, and puts on the helmet.

Over the helmet intercom, Sam asks, "Hey buddy, can you hear me?"

Concurrently, CJ and Tylor answer, "Yes, sir." Austin answers a second later, weakly echoing what he heard the others say, "Yes, sir."

Sam shakes his head because of his mistake. "My fault. Try it again."

Sam runs a test for the coms: "CJ?"

CJ: "CJ here."

Sam: "Tylor?"

Tylor: "Tylor here."

Sam: "Austin, just talk if you can hear me."

Austin copies the others: "Austin here. But how?"

Finished buckling Austin in, Sam interrupts him but talks in a loving and understanding tone. "I'll explain what I can once we get started. CJ take point. Call out anything we need to watch for."

CJ: "Copy. CJ's on point."

Sam: "Austin. Hold on tight. This will take a bit over ten minutes, and it'll be a little noisy. Put your head back against the headrest. Let me know if you get dizzy again."

Austin: "Okay. . . I mean, copy."

Sam: "CJ, head out."

The UTVs roar down the trail. CJ drives the lead UTV; Sam, with Austin riding shotgun, follows a short distance behind. Wac ih a' watches as the tail lights go out of sight.

[Masks and Needles]

A fire engine and an ambulance wait in a dark parking lot, both with their emergency lights on. The back of the ambulance is open. Austin is on the gurney in a supine position inside the back of the ambulance. There are two paramedics and Sam in the ambulance. CJ and Tylor are looking in from the open door.

Sam knows that 2017 will be a shock to Austin. Austin may feel as though he is in a different world; the environment, the objects, the actions, and even the language are different. His mental state of slipping into and out of consciousness may lessen the shock. He knows there will be big problems at the hospital, but getting treatment for Austin is paramount. The rest will be sorted later.

Lucas, one of the paramedics, tells CJ and Tylor, "Hey guys, we have to close the doors and get him some privacy."

CJ asks, "SCH?" (Sacramento Children's Hospital)

"Yeah. Dispatch shows they're open."

Handing CJ a big pile of winter wear that was previously on Austin, Sam tells CJ, "Wait, take this. I'll call your cell if we get diverted."

CJ takes the clothes. "Okay, see you there." Tylor closes the ambulance doors.

The paramedics see that Austin has a black eye. They check his abdomen and find a large bruise. Seeing this, the paramedics strip Austin down by cutting off his clothes. Using C-spine precautions, they roll him onto his side to look at his back. They see the two wounds from the belt. They roll him back onto the spine board, strap him down, and cover him with blankets. While Wyatt (primary paramedic) continues the medical survey (assessing heart rate, taking BP and temperature), Lucas gets a medical history from Sam.

Wyatt calls up to the driver. "Code two, SCH." (Code two = rapidly, but no lights and siren)

The ambulance moves out. Wyatt applies a C-collar and starts an IV as Lucas continues with the history. Soon, the road noises indicate that the ambulance is traveling at freeway speeds.

Lucas asks Sam, "So, what happened? Oh, no. Sorry. Let's start with who he is."

Sam has no way of proving Austin's ID or relationship. He knows there will be significant paperwork and custody issues at the hospital, but Austin's care comes first. He tries to use as much of Austin's actual

information as he can, clearly stating the changes so Austin can hear. “His name is Austin Jeremiah Reynolds, born on February Third, 2007.” Sam looks at Austin to see if he is listening. Austin seems a little surprised, then nods his head just a little so that Sam can see.

The paramedic is typing this into his tablet. “And who are you to him?”

Sam takes a leap of faith, hoping Austin will not get upset. “I’m his dad.” Sam looks at Austin again. Austin slowly closes his eyes. As Sam answers questions, Austin reaches out and takes Sam’s hand. Sam uses two hands to hold Austin’s hand during the rest of the transport.

Lucas finally gets past the who and gets to the what. “Okay, now let’s find out what happened.”

“He was out riding a horse last week by himself.” Sam feigns a light scolding. “He knows better.” “Anyway, he fell into a fence and brush when the horse slipped on ice. The horse took off and left him. He got back about an hour later, almost hypothermic. We got him warmed up, cleaned up, fed, and put to bed. Other than a few pretty good scratches on his back, he seemed okay.”

The face and abdomen injuries are a lot newer than the scratches. Multiple injuries of different stages of healing are a red flag for child abuse. Trying to see if this is a made-up story to cover up child abuse or an accurate recounting of events, Lucas presses on, “Is that where he got those bruises on his abdomen and face?”

Being well aware of the protocol for injured children, Sam makes sure to identify the injuries as different events. “No, just the cuts on his back. Like I said, he seemed fine and had no complaints for the next few days. Then, yesterday, he said he wasn’t feeling well, like a little weak. He went to bed early. He didn’t get up until about 15:30 this afternoon. He wandered into the kitchen and fainted on the kitchen table and chairs, ending up on the floor. We use a wood-burning cook stove, so I’m glad he didn’t fall that way. Anyway, when I checked him, he was feverish. He said he was having trouble catching his breath.”

“Does he have any other medical history, allergies, or medications that he takes?”

“No. He’s normally a very healthy kid.”

Sam’s cell phone rings. He looks at the ID and sees that it is Trish.

Sam tells Lucas, “It’s his mom. I better take this.” Austin’s eyes open slightly and slowly close again.

“Hi, babe. It’s Austin.” Sam tries to give Trish a heads-up about some strange happenings. “I think he might have,” Sam looks at Austin’s face, then remembers the ‘death sentence’ of the term pneumonia. “. . . a really high fever. We are on our way to SCH now. ETA is about forty-five minutes.”

Wyatt informs Lucas. “I’ll call it in.”

Lucas agrees, “Yeah, go ahead.”

Wyatt: “SCH, Medic 278 inbound to your facility code 2.”

Radio: "Medic 278. Go ahead with your report."

Wyatt: "SCH Medic 278 inbound to your facility code 2, ETA forty minutes. Patient is a ten-year-old male, 35 kilograms. He is non-verbal and lethargic. Pupils, round, equal, and reactive. Chief complaint: dyspnea with vertigo and syncope. Skin is hot and damp, temp is 103.6, BP is 108 over 60, pulse is 132, and respirations are 18 and shallow. PO2 is 84. He has lower lobe rales bilaterally. BGL is 100. Break"

. . . .

"Medic 278 continuing. Patient experienced a fall from a horse about a week ago and another fall from a syncopal episode today, at about 15:30, from a standing position onto wooden furniture and floor. Patient has no head, neck, or spine complaints. Lacerations and contusions are consistent with the history. We have him supine, with C-spine precautions. Oh-two, 12 liters via non-rebreather. Established an IV of normal saline, tko. ETA 35 minutes."

Radio: "Medic 278, SCH. Increase the IV rate to 500 cc's per hour. Update us every 10 minutes or upon a change of condition."

Wyatt: "Medic 278 copies. Increase IV to 500 cc per hour and update every ten minutes or when the condition changes."

Radio: "SCH clear."

Trish informs Sam, "I have Austin's medical record number. It's on our plan. Medical record,"

Sam echoes the information Trish gives him, "Medical record," Lucas looks at Sam and writes the number as Sam repeats it. "3 7 5 4 0 0 9 2 Charlie."

He was surprised that Trish wasn't confused about the patient being Austin, whom she had not met, and even more surprised that she had a medical number for him. He tried not to show his surprise to the medics but also checked to see if they were actually on the same page. "How did you find it so quickly?"

Understanding that Sam couldn't know she was ready for their return, Trish explains it while throwing a curve, "I got a letter from Victoria while you were away and a visit from Special Services. The letter explained a lot and suggested I get a few things in order for our son's return. You and I have got a lot of catching up to do. The sooner, the better."

Sam confirms they are talking about the same Austin: "I understand what you mean. By the way, it is February 3, 2007, right? And what about shots?"

"Yes, Austin J Reynolds, February third, 2007. Everything is up to date. It's all taken care of. I'll see you at the ER."

Sam suggests, "You might want to call Tylor. He's riding with CJ. They'll meet us at SCH. He may be able to fill you in on some more details."

Trish informs Sam, "He's talking to Bill right now. Susie and Bill are riding with me. Susie's on the phone with the hospital."

Sam is relieved and confused but does not question the information. "Okay, babe. Love you."

Trish: "Love you, too."