

Excerpt from "Gathering In"

The night of the pulse, Geo Tully and Wes Marcus were in the basement of Wes' aunt's home that had become their safehouse.

Wes held up a photo album that showed a man standing in front of the house with a shovel. The front door stood behind him, but not the view of the house that Geo was familiar with. The articulated arm of a backhoe could be seen on the edge of the frame.

"The porch is an addition," Geo acknowledged.

"And look at how deep the hole is behind him."

Geo turned to the front wall of the basement. The shelves had kept him from investigating here. They appeared to be attached to the wall, but when he ran his hand along the back edge of the shelving unit, he found a throw-bolt. He pulled it down and tugged on the shelves, swinging them out away from the wall. Hinged on the far side, they glided on hidden casters. Behind them was an open space that stretched the length of the porch. Geo tried the light in the ceiling, but it didn't turn on. He used the flashlight on his phone to illuminate the small room. A ham radio sat at one end, covered with plastic, while the other end was stacked with storage boxes.

"I knew that tower had to still have a use," Wes said. He squatted down to look under the table to radio sat on. "He left it disconnected. It'll take me a moment."

The light bulb in the main basement flared and popped off. Wes smacked his head on the underside of the table. Geo's phone light went out.

"What is that smell?" he asked.

"My phone just fried, I think."

They fumbled around in the dark to find the stairs and make their way to the kitchen. Duke, the Labrador retriever, stood in the livingroom, staring at the window and whining.

Geo peeked out the curtains. The neighbors were coming out on their porch, staring around.

"You smell that?" Wes asked. "I'm going to go check for fire."

"Do you hear that?"

Duke whined louder. Loud voices filtered in through the glass. Geo watched as the neighbors ran off their porch. Wes swept the front door open.

“What the hell?” Geo growled.

“They need help,” Wes said and ran into the street.

“Stay, Duke,” Geo ordered and followed his stupid partner into the street, where the neighbors could get a full view of their high-and-tights. A municipal bus sat at the corner, smoke pouring out of its windows as the people inside tried to get out, screaming, kicking, punching at the glass, but when one window shattered, it just fed the fire that was killing them.

Wes ran to the rear passenger door and tried to pull it open, convulsing and chewing his tongue, smoke rising from his body.