CHAPTER 8 - Yellowstone National Park

It had been tricky as the foreman had suspected; however, the Monarch Drilling crew managed to covertly move over the additional drill pipes and casings they needed to their drilling site without raising any red flags with Sheila and her team. Within eight days after Oscar left, they had already drilled past seven thousand feet. Everything had been going well until they unluckily and unknowingly happened to hit a hydrothermal pocket causing an explosive release of gas, which in turn caused a small tremor registering of 1.8 on the Richter scale.

Within two days, the crew had reached a depth of eight thousand feet when the first earthquake was followed by a second stronger earthquake of 3.6 magnitude, both with their epicenter, as determined afterward by the Yellowstone Volcano Observatory, as being directly below the Stellar drilling site. The more intense prolonged shaking of the second quake was a bit scary for most of the people working at or visiting Yellowstone, but only the five-person drilling crew realized there might be some connection to what they were doing. No one but them and Marshall Pruitt were aware they had drilled so deep.

The apprehensive drilling crew expressed their concerns to Marshall, and he assured them not to worry since the magma reservoir was at least a mile below the depth they had drilled, so there was no chance they could have caused the quake. He told them to keep on drilling.

Marshall's assurances did not assuage the crew's fears, and they told him they were not comfortable going any deeper and were going to stop drilling further.

"What are guys all a bunch of pussies? There is no damn way you could have caused the earthquake."

"I'm sorry, Marshall," said the foreman. "I know you don't think there's not a problem, but we all do. We've talked it over, and we don't want to go any deeper. We're done!"

Marshall was getting pissed off now, and after taking a long deep breath to regain his control announced, "How about if I give each of you a five thousand dollar bonus if you finish the job and go another two thousand feet more? Will that do?"

The crew talked it over among themselves, and with a great deal of apprehension, they reluctantly agreed to continue drilling to ten thousand feet.

There had always been numerous sporadic small quakes before at Yellowstone, so none of the visitors or park personnel were overly concerned. They apparently didn't connect the large flocks of birds they saw flying away from the park vicinity with the quakes, or realize it might portend an imminent disaster. Also, in the days following the earthquakes, many of the geysers became noticeably more active, especially the geysers at West Thumb Geyser Basin with Twin Geysers, which usually are almost dormant, erupting spectacularly about every two hours. Again no one expressed any concerns, and the visitors enjoyed the more impressive shows.

It was three days after the second quake before the staff at the Yellowstone Volcano Observatory belatedly calculated the epicenter and depth of the two earthquakes. The results of their calculations helped them comprehend the possible implication of the two earthquakes occurring at almost precisely the same location. They notified Superintendent Bolant, who immediately sent out two park rangers to present Sheila and Marshall with a cease and desist order. They informed them the quakes could possibly be related to the drilling, and they needed to immediately suspend drilling until an investigation was completed. Of course, when the rangers arrived and confronted them, Marshall claimed to be clueless and denied knowing anything, although he suddenly grasped he may have made a horrific blunder.

Marshall had just finished telling Sheila and the park rangers he would cease the drilling operations as they asked, when a third, much more violent, and protracted quake of 7.8 magnitude struck. It threw all of them off their feet. The 78-foot tall drilling derrick toppled crushing three of the Monarch drilling crew members working beneath it.

When the intense shaking finally stopped, Marshall helped Sheila to her feet, and they and the park rangers ran over toward the collapsed derrick to join the others that had quickly gathered to assist the injured workers.

They never made it to the derrick before the world ended, at least for them!

All crew members, Park employees, and visitors, indeed, all life that had existed in a hundred-mile radius of the drill site were obliterated as the magma chamber below the caldera thrust its contents into the atmosphere. The energy released exceeded that of the infamous Krakatoa volcano. The blast was thirty times more powerful than the Mt. St. Helens eruption, and as powerful as the combined force of 30,000 Hiroshima-size atomic bombs. The explosion killed thousands as the Caldera collapsed. However, like Pompei, it was the release of the incinerating fury of pyroclastic superheated gases that killed hundreds of thousands more. In a two-hundred mile radius, countless numbers of animal life were also incinerated by the noxious cloud of gases.

The eruption hurled hot ash over thirty miles into the air. So much ash was expelled that when it began to fall back to the earth, it blanketed most of North America. As far east as Chicago, an inch thick of gritty gray ash covered almost everything. The winds from the titanic blast reportedly circled the earth six times before they died down, bringing with it a sulfurous stench that gagged survivors. The sonic boom produced by the explosion exceeded 207 decibels, the loudest noise in recorded history. It was heard distinctly in Florida, and even in Japan, over 5000 miles away from the volcano.

Ash was thrust all the way up into the stratosphere, where it darkened skies around the world. Sunlight that did penetrate produced eerie green and orange sunsets around the world. Ghostly rings (Bishop's Rings) cloaked the moon and sun in the places those celestial bodies could be glimpsed.

Meteorologists from Milan calculated that temperatures around the globe would drop by over 2 and 1/2 degrees, which doesn't sound like much, but could be enough to limit the recovery of crops and produce freak blizzards in Europe and the midwestern United States in July.