

# Laramie Conquers the Last Frontier

by  
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(6<sup>th</sup> and final installment of series entitled: *Laramie on the Lam*)

## Chapter 1 Shake, Rattle, and Roll

Maestro's whining was Laramie Wyoming's first clue that something was wrong. Seriously wrong.

A split-second later, the ground beneath his feet heaved and shuddered; loose rocks and pebbles from the steep incline ahead skittered down the path toward him and bounced against his feet. Maestro, his black lab, swayed, then stumbled as the dirt under her paws started to slide. She looked up at Laramie and whined some more.

"Hold on, girl," Laramie said. The land lurched again; he lost his balance and toppled against a tree. Maestro fell against his legs. He stumbled, but managed to grab a small tree limb just in the nick of time. He scraped the palms of both hands against the rough bark. *That's gonna sting tonight.*

Laramie gained his footing and looked around him—no one in sight. He waited a few seconds, then let go of the branch and took a step toward the path. Almost immediately, the earth hiccupped again, this time more violently. He slammed against the tree trunk and reached for the same branch. Too late. He collapsed to the ground, threw one arm around the tree and the other around Maestro, and then hung on for dear life.

Somewhere nearby, a tree crashed through the underbrush, its branches grabbing and slapping at the limbs on neighboring trees on its way to the ground. Some snapped, while others bent low, and then rocketed upward again as the tree continued on its journey downward. Something—probably another tree—blocked its fall and Laramie could see its trunk teetering at a 45-degree angle, branches bobbing up and down.

More rocks rolled toward him, kicking up dust as they bounced with wild abandon down the path. He tried to pull away when he saw a medium-sized stone careening straight for him. Too late again. The runaway rock came to a rest with a hard thud against his upper leg. Great, he thought. I'll have a bruise on my leg to match the ones Prentiss gives me on my arm. *If I live long enough, that is.*

He shoved the stone aside and nudged Maestro so they could move closer to the back of the tree to avoid the avalanche of pebbles that still hopped and skipped down the path straight toward them. *Leave it to me to be at the bottom of a hill.*

Another tree toppled, this time farther away. Birds squawked and flew into the air; their frantic fluttering added to the general ruckus. Branches swayed overhead as the forest cracked and groaned. It sounded to Laramie as though a noisy, careless giant was plodding his way through the trees, crushing the bushes and grass underfoot, kicking up stones in his path, brushing against tree limbs with his long arms and disturbing the birds and squirrels whose homes rocked back and forth in his wake. Laramie looked around, half-expecting to see a pair of mammoth legs striding in his direction. He could even hear (or was his just *feeling* it?) a low

rumble as the ground around him shuddered and shook.

Maestro wasn't happy. She looked at Laramie and her brown eyes begged him to make the commotion stop. "Wish I could, girl," he said to her before leaning down to give her a tight hug. "You'll be all right. Just hang on for a minute."

It probably lasted only a few seconds, but when the shaking finally stopped, it seemed to Laramie as though two hours—two long, noisy, scary hours—had passed since he felt the first trembling of the ground beneath him. He waited a few seconds before standing up—he'd already learned that lesson. No sense getting knocked to the ground again; he'd been bruised and battered enough for one day. Maestro scrambled to her feet and stayed close by Laramie's side.

As if they hadn't had enough adventure to fill a lifetime during the last few months, Laramie Wyoming and his loyal dog, Maestro, standing on a hiking path in the middle of an Alaskan forest, had just survived one of nature's most violent outbursts—an earthquake.

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Even though he felt all alone in the woods—aside from Maestro, of course—Laramie knew he wasn't. Prentiss had been right behind him and his parents and Cheyenne had been bringing up the rear. Where was everybody?

"Prentiss? Prentiss, where are you? Mom? Dad?" He listened for the sound of a familiar voice. Nothing. Just the overwhelming quiet of the deep forest. Even the birds had settled down once the swaying stopped.

"Prentiss, answer me! Are you okay?" He twirled around, looking in every direction. He thought Prentiss had been behind him when the quake struck, but after all the rattling, he wasn't sure of anything.

He tried once more. "Prentiss!"

"I'm coming. I'm coming. Hold your horses."

Laramie grinned. Even after a teeth-rattling quake, Prentiss Williams managed to sound peeved. A few seconds later, Prentiss stepped out from behind a large tree a few feet down the trail from Laramie.

"Hey, man," Prentiss said as he reached Laramie. "What the heck happened just now?"

"Earthquake," Laramie said. "You okay, man?"

"Yeah, but I don't want to ever go through that again," Prentiss said. He leaned down to pet Maestro, then straightened up and looked around as if fearful another earthquake might break out at any second. Laramie didn't blame him. He felt the same way.

"Me neither," Laramie said. "We'd better get back down the trail. Mom and Dad'll be worried silly. Hope they're okay."

Before the sound of his words had died away, Laramie heard his parents' frantic calls.

"Laramie! Prentiss! Are you okay?"

Cheyenne chimed in, too. "Me-me! Princess! My-so! Where are you?"

Laramie cupped his hands around his mouth and yelled, "We're fine. We're coming down right now."

With Maestro hot on their heels, Laramie and Prentiss scrambled and skidded down the path. Ten seconds later, Mom and Dad smothered both of them in anxious hugs.

"I was so worried," Mom said. She pulled back and looked at Laramie, then over at Prentiss, who was still wrapped up in Dad's arms. "Are you two okay?"

"Just a few bruises, I think, Mom," Laramie said. "How about you guys? You all right?"

Dad leaned over and hugged Laramie. "We're all fine. We were lucky enough to be on a level patch of ground. I was so worried when I realized you two were above us."

"Yeah, well, it wasn't any picnic, that's fer sure," Laramie said. "Lotsa rocks and stuff crashing down that hill, but I'm fine. So's Maestro." He patted her on the head. "You were a brave girl, weren't you, Maestro?" He looked up. "How about you, Prentiss?"

"I'm fine," Prentiss said. "Got tossed into the woods, but the rocks 'n' stuff missed me, so I guess I was lucky."

"Earthquake, Me-me," Cheyenne said, tugging at the pocket on Laramie's shorts. She pronounced it 'ert-quake.'

Laramie leaned down and said, "Sure was, Chey. Were you scared?"

She nodded her head several times; her pigtails bounced up and down. "I sure was, Me-me. Were you?"

"Yep," he said, straightening up. "Wouldn't want to go through that again, but it'll be a cool thing to tell Jake about!"

"I'm not in the mood for any more hiking, boys," Dad said. "Let's get off this mountain before we get another rattler."

Prentiss looked at his feet. "Rattler? You mean I've got to worry 'bout snakes, too?"

Dad smiled. "No, I meant another quake. I called it that because it rattled us around."

Prentiss looked relieved. "Oh, good. I don't need nuthin' more to worry about right now."

They all turned to walk back down the path to the motor home waiting in the parking lot below them.

"Hey," Prentiss said, "why don't they tell us 'bout these things before they happen? Somebody coulda got hurt. Seems like the weather guy coulda said something 'bout it, don'tcha think?"

"That'd be nice," Mom said, "but there's no way to predict an earthquake."

Prentiss looked horrified. "None? Then how do we get outta the way?"

"That's just it, Prentiss," Dad said. "You don't. That's why so many people are killed every year by earthquakes."

"You mean nobody knows where or when it's gonna happen? It just... *bang!*...happens?"

"Sort of. Of course, they have some idea where it's more likely to happen. Fault lines, smaller quakes you can't feel, stuff like that," Dad said.

"Fault lines? You mean there's someone we can blame?"

Dad grinned. Laramie could see he was trying not to laugh out loud. "No, Prentiss. Fault lines are cracks far below the surface where two sections of the earth's crust rub against one another. When the pressure builds, something has to give, and that's when an earthquake occurs."

"What's causing the pressure?"

"The plates—that's what they call the sections of crust that are rubbing against one another—are actually floating," Dad said. "When one moves north, for instance, and the other moves south and they rub against one another, it causes an earthquake. Or maybe one section of the crust climbs over the other one. That tremendous force causes the earth to tremble and then we have an earthquake."

"So why would anyone live near one of those blame thingies? Those... what did you call them? Faults. Yeah. Who'd be dumb enough to live near one?"

"Well, lots of people, actually. See, we didn't know where all these fault lines were until the past century or so. People built towns over them not knowing about earthquakes that might have happened hundreds, even thousands of years ago. Now, some of those towns are huge cities. They can't just move all that stuff to a safer spot, so they do the best they can by making

their homes and buildings safer in case an earthquake strikes."

Prentiss looked miffed. "Well, you'd think they'd at least post a sign or somethin'," he said. "'Warning: live here and ya might die' or somethin' like that. Might save 'em the trouble of buildin' where they shouldn't—or gettin' tossed into the middle of the woods."

"Good idea, Prentiss," Dad said, "Maybe someday we'll be able to predict these things long before they happen so people will have a chance to get to safety. Until then, though, we just have to try to build safer homes and buildings and do our best to educate people about earthquake safety."

Prentiss shook his head and scuffed his shoe along the gravel of the path. "Great. Just what I need—more stuff to learn."