

ROZDZIAŁ 4

Coyote

Bad decisions. The aftermath

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Counte-You gotta be st

"You gotta be shitting me!", that was the first thought that came to my mind when Major Rucinski ordered me to enter the radiation zone.

"I know this mission puts you soldiers at great risk. But this is the only way to see if any of our man are still alive out there."

"Sir you understand that..."

Major interrupted me at once: „Yes, I do understand that the radiation there is about 20.000 Radians but we've got the equipment which will keep you safe from this. Beside, the explosion took place about 7 days ago and the wind changed the course of the radiation cloud to the south."

I still couldn't believe that Rucinski was asking me to enter the radiation zone – the place which was probably totally destroyed by the nuclear weapon used against – what government called – terrorism. There hasn't been any message or sign of life from there since the explosion. And the radiation was so high, that if I got my anti-radiation suite ripped just a bit, I would die from leukemia within next 3 days.

"Are you listening corporal?", asked the major – sounding angry.

"Sir, yes sir. Where exactly are we going?"

"Well, the place that used to be Katowice. You will land in the city centre right next to the roundabout. If there's still such a place as the roundabout. Our station was about 10 km from that point."

"So why don't we land right there?", I asked having a strong feeling that the answer will depict some kind of extreme obstacle on the way between our landing point and the destination.

"There were lots of brigdes and underground excavations there. Basicly, the whole city is one big coal mine – and the explosion could destroy it all – the helicopter cannot land on a ground that may fall down right after. You will land on the closest safe place to your destination point."

When I was listening to him, I thought about all the people that suffered from this government's decisions. Yeah, installing those American anti-nuclear shields was the best idea but... well... who could think that one day Americans will just use them. I mean, it's obvious that some afro-american guy would care about some Poland place in the middle of Europe. And yet, they did not like having Russian atomic bomb kicking their asses. I guess people have just stopped caring about each other 7 days ago.

"I'll give you five men, corporal. You won't need more cause, let's face it – nobody's gonna attack you there. There's one more thing..."

Yeah, I love those "one more thing" speeches. It's like you wake up in the hospital and the doctor's saying "The dog attacked you – you've got no arms and no legs. Oh and there's one more thing – it ripped your balls off".

"What thing?", I asked not caring anymore about "sirring" the guy again.

"The helicopter that will transport you there, will not be waiting for you. The pilots will be wearing the suits as well, but the machine has no anti-radiation shield whatsoever. You'll call another one by the radio. And if you don't, it will come to get you anyway from the same landing point about 10 hours later. It will wait for you for about 1 hour. If you don't show up, we consider you dead. The machine will be burned right after it leaves the radiation zone."

"Oh yeah, that makes me feel like I'm coming there to visit my grandparents", I thought. But instead of saying that, I told the stupidest thing I could think about: "I'll do it, sir."

"Private Slowinski is going with you. Yeah, I know he's annoying but he's the best radio operator we have now. If something goes wrong, he'll tell some idiotic joke but then will be able to call immediate evac".

Slowinski was one of those guys, which can be funny and rude at the same time. Nobody really liked him and that's because of his way of joking around. He could tell you that your mother is being fucked by the dog as we speak but in a way that you would laugh and then add something like: "I never thought my father-in-law would have a tail and react to the name Fluffy." But he was good at what he was doing. He saved some asses in Korea and Israel and although nobody likes his company, everybody DOES respect the guy.

Major stood up, shook my hand like I just won the Noble prize and said: "Good luck, corporal. I hope you bring are guys safe and sound. But not at all costs. Remember that your suits are able to stand the radiation up to 30.000 radians. If the Geiger counter shows even one point higher – you won't be coming home for dinner, soldier. So this counter is now your best friend."

“Yeah”, I thought, “that really sounds like winning the Noble prize. Only the difference is that right after receiving this golden shit I’d be throwing up, twitching and then vomiting again till I drop dead.”

When I left and closed the door, I overheard a conversation between Major and some authority guy. Actually, I could hear only this: “No, sir. I don’t think they’ll be coming back. But we have to take that chance.”

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I’ve always hated flying. Being about 20 meters above the ground makes me dizzy and now I have to be 2 kilometers above the surface. But today I wasn’t really paying much attention at this. 7 days ago my country was bombed by the splinters of Russian nuclear weapon and has to suffer from the radiation. And it’s just the matter of time when the radiation will spread throughout Poland. We watched the news before the flight and pictures I saw there were like a very good Hollywood production. There was no such city as Warsaw anymore. There were only streets covered with soot, people screaming to the heaven before they died. And now I have to go there, and search for some people who, if miracles happen, had survived this catastrophe. There were 3 explosions. I was lucky, Gdansk was not even touched by any of those but whole Silesia and Middle Poland were actual graveyards.

It is the time when I was ashamed of being one of the human race. I was wondering, how people responsible for that can sleep at all – being responsible for every person who’s choking to death because of the disease or whose entire family was wiped out from the face of the earth within 10 seconds. Still, those motherfuckers get up every morning, put on their fancy shmancy suites and look in the mirror without a single blink. And yet, we are the same animals – same heart beats, same brains, same needs. I had a fever – suffering from stress and anger... and from the fact that I realized how small I was. I opened my wallet with a picture of my girlfriend and my dog – before the next question – my daughter asked me to keep a photo of our dog in a wallet so I protect him by thinking of him. Its silly but who could say no to 6 year old child?

“Whooo, your girlfriend sure needs a barber“, said Smolinski, “and who’s this pretty girl on the other photo?”

I decided to play his game: “It’s your matter 15 years ago – she told me to keep it so that I remember how good humpin’ her was.”

“No it’s not her. Even now, when she’s 55, she’s way out of your league, man”, Smolinski said and wasn’t even hiding the fact that this conversation was entertaining him like hell.

“Hey guys, look! If God exists, he must be on a break now”, said Bujas with eyes glued to the window. We all joined him in watching the outside world.

It was a view we never wanted to see. Something that used to be a small city of Tarnowskie Gory. The sky was grey – everything down there was like taken from black and white movie. Hundreds of bodies on cracked streets – rotting, some twitching. Some people still running around with tissues covering their mouths – like it would help somehow. The pilot was now flying closer to the ground so we could see what are we going to deal with there. Windows were broken in all the buildings that stood their ground. But most of constructions collapsed as if they were built out of sand. Then we saw this little girl pointing at our helicopter, screaming – or rather trying to scream something. Her face was pale and her eyes were bleeding severely. Tens of people walking around like zombies, throwing up every 15 seconds, looking for God knows what – or just waiting to die. The explosion took place in Bytom – about 8 kilometers from the centre of Tarnowskie Gory. The radiation there must have been like 15.000 Radians. In that case, the strongest organisms could survive for about 10 days. And they were – 8 days after the end of the world and we were watching last men there standing.

“How this little girl survived so long?”, I asked almost proud of that child with eyes bleed.

“Must have been very healthy before this happened. Maybe she had access to food, maybe she was in some kind of deep basement or something. But this is not doing her any good. The longer she lives, the more she suffers“, Bujas said.

“I’m surprised so many people are still alive – provided that this can be called living”, added Komarninski – our medic.

“Being so close to the explosion, probably most of them have gone blind. Those choking are simply havin’ lung or larynx cancer.”

“So fast?”, asked Smolinski.

“Radiation causes severe forms of cancers or leukemia. This process can do the man even in 2, 3 days. In normal circumstances I would say those people are lucky to have been living for such a long time. But now I just pray for their quick and as painless death as possible. Remember gentleman, you get one scratch or you expose an inch of your body in the radiation zone and this is what you’ll be looking like after few days”, added Komarninski. Our medic was shaking like a jelly and couldn’t stop sweating.

“We’re about 10 kilometers from the landing point. Hope everyone’s wearing the suit”, said the pilot.

Smolinski didn’t lose his sick sense of humor even after what we had seen.

“So guys, after this lovely trip, what would you choose to grow out of your body – third leg, hand or second head? Komarninski – you might want a second head – and hope that that will be good looking for a change”, Smolinski was laughing like a baby. Komarninski didn’t even move.

“You know there’s a new song by Rolling Stones!”, he shouted out of nowhere.

“What song?”, asked Komarninski.

“It’s called Go and fuck yourself, Smolinski”, replied Komarninski.

“Yeah, I heard that one – it’s good”, I added at once. Smolinski was still laughing. Apparently, nothing could stop his sick mind.

Only one soldier was sitting quietly all the time. Actually, he was only whispering something to himself. He looked scared.

“What’s with him?”, asked Smolinski.

“Nothing, sir. I was... I was just wondering... if there’s even a small chance we’re coming back from this mission.”

Kowalski added: “Yeah, I mean, how do we know that anybody’s alive out there? Why would they send us on a mission like that? They saw the TV news, they know the risk and they know the damage. And yet...”

“Enough!”, I screamed. I just couldn’t stand this whining any longer. “They gave us an order so we do it, okay?”

“Sir, yes sir”, he replied at once, but I kept talking:

“I have no idea if anybody survived this shit. But that’s why they call us soldiers. We do all the dirty work which a regular shit eater wouldn’t even touch. They pay us for it, so we do it. If you were looking for a nice job without getting your hands dirty, you should’ve learned to

sing and go to Las Vegas or Azow City. But for now, shut the fuck up and concentrate.”

Kowalski and Janiak turned white. They looked like the radiation sickness already got them and they’re about to pass out. I decided that I should say something more. All in all, if we all don’t stay calm, we’ll all die.

“Listen, both of you. I know how scary the whole idea is. And can’t lie to you – the risk is absolutely great. But we’re wearing our suits, and we have each other. We’ve been trained to do shit like this. You know what your job is and if we all stick to our duties, we’ll turn out fine, ok?”

“Yes, sir”, the radiation sickness faded away from their faces.

“Yeah, and if something goes wrong, I’ll give you the chance to call your folks and tell them that you are engaged and her name is leukemia”, said Smolinski laughing again.

“Shut the fuck up”, I shouted. Smolinski shut his mouth like he just got punched in the face.

“I don’t fuckin’ care if you like to joke around in a situation like this. And I don’t care why are you such a sick fuck and nothing stops you from going. And if you say something like that one more time, I’ll blast your balls off, understood?”

“Yes, sir”, Smolinski replied like trying to avoid trouble. And for the first time since getting on the helicopter he stopped smiling.

“We’ll reach the destination in two and a half minutes. Get ready”, said the pilot.

“Okay guys, let’s roll. Watch your suits – one scratch and you’re history”, I said. I couldn’t worry about their morale anymore. I was too interested and too much afraid of what I was going to see.

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The helicopter landed softly, which appeared to be a good sign. I took one more look at my team. Smolinski seemed ok, Komarninski was a little scared and the remaining two looked terrified.

“It’s gonna be ok, people. Let’s move!”, I pushed the door. And what I saw behind that door was the last thing I would expect. And the thing I saw was... absolutely nothing. Thick fog was covering everything. I wasn’t sure that if I took one step ahead, I wouldn’t fall in a crater or

something. But I took it. Surprisingly, nothing happened. I looked down and saw something looking like grass. But it was black, and when I touched it with my shoe, I wiped the black thing and all there was left was a piece of dead grass. The rest of the team got out of the machine.

“Sweet chesus”, whispered Komarninski. We came to him. “What?”

“Well, look around...”, Komarninski pointed ahead. We couldn’t see much, but that was about enough. We saw a piece of concrete, and a dirt road leading to this concrete street. And this whole road was filled with dead birds, flies, bees and dogs.

“Dogs died with their mouths open”, Komarninski approached one of the dead animals and looked into their mouth. “They have some kind of green liquid coming out of their mouths. Now I have no idea what that means.”

“That by taking this dog home rather than a healthy one will save you hundreds of dollars of dog food?”, Slowinski couldn’t help it. He was silent almost 20 minutes and that was killing him. But this joke was not a dig at anyone of the team saw I just ignored it.

The helicopter left the place and headed for the base.

“Ok I didn’t tell you that earlier but the pilot got scratched while landing”, said Kowalski.

“How?”

“He got scratched by some sharp thing attached to the window.”

Kowalski was now more than steady. He gave us the news like it was happening on a planet far, far away.

“The man is dead”, Slowinski said without joking this time. “He’ll be dead by next week.”

“No, he won’t”, Komarninski stood up and looked at us. “They will shoot him before he gets out of the helicopter... oh, come on... you know this shit. We all know that we will not be able to come back if we’re contaminated.”

The last sentence hit everybody like they heard it for the first time. But they all knew that the risk of infection is too great to even think about treating the poisoned.

“Shut up, can you hear this?”, Slowinski asked “It’s comin’ from those bushes.”

After few seconds everybody could hear some noise coming from the grey bushes. The bushes started to move faster and faster. Me and my squad took our weapons and pointed them at the grey plant.

Out of the sudden, some man came out of the bushes. He was bleeding severely from his eyes and nose and mouth. He had his clothes torn apart. And he was screaming or trying to scream but was coughing the whole time.

"Sir, stop... don't move", Smolinski said and loaded his machine gun.

"Hee... hee... me...", the man tried to say something but he was choking...

"Sir, don't come any closer or I'll be forced to shoot you", Slowinski had his gun pointed right at the man. But the man did not stopped. He was trying to run or walk very fast. He spread his arms like he was going to give Slowinski a hug.

"Sir, this is the last warning, don't come any closer."

The man did not react. He was about to touch Slowinski when he shot him. The man collapsed like a dead tree and hit the ground with his head. And when that happened, a stream of blood mixed with a green liquid came out of his mouth.

"Shit, oh shit, oh my fuckin' God", Kowalski was screaming and walking around like he was chasing his own tale. "We just killed a man that needed help. What the fuck did he do to you!", Kowalski was screaming like a mad man.

"Nothing, man. But he could rip my suit and then ask for help. And then we both wouldn't be comin' home, would we?"

Bujas was silent during the whole situation. He got scared more and more because of the whole surrounding. Slowly but surely the fog was coming down and soldiers could see more and more. And what they saw, stopped the argument and every other thought that was in or was about to be in their heads.

"Chesus fuckin' christ", thought Bujas while looking at what seemed to be Katowice.

There in fact was a roundabout. But now it was like 5 floors down in the tunnel that was under the roundabout. Tens of cars were still on the street with their doors open, some of them crushed by a concrete elements of the tunnel. Some bodies were lying on the street, many of them in their own vomits. The whole area was covered in a soot and dust. All the buildings had broken windows, shops were wide open. Few police

cars were parked right in front of some shops. It looked like a frozen moments from some police operation.

We couldn't resist the feeling that the time stopped here many, many years ago. And all this happened just 8 days ago. In a range of about 300 meters we could see some silhouettes but we all agreed not to approach them anymore. Still in a light fog, we could see those people collapsing; we could hear their awful cough. Some of them were already crawling on the ground trying to get God knows where. I had this terrible feeling that I could do nothing about it. Here I am in my anti-radiation suit, walking around like it was some kind of a museum. Nothing could happen to me. And yet, I watch some people coughing their lungs out, vomiting, choking and being strangled by polluted air.

One man saw us and shouted: "Oh Good, soldiers! We're safe!" And started to run towards us. He looked silly. He was running like a shot duck, falling each 10 meters. He had vomit all over he's face and clothes, and yet he looked happy. He was convinced that the salvation is here and the moment he shakes our hands, this whole sickness and nuclear madness just takes its stuff and walks away. And I knew how much his world is going to collapse as soon as he is close enough to point our guns at him.

"Sir... sir... thank God... I... I thought...", he was now walking, but Slowinski and Komarninski were holding their guns like that guy was a 1939 Nazi soldier.

"Sir, stop walking in our direction", Slowinski ordered.

"What? I mean, you came to save us, right?"

"Look around, man. Does it look like there's anybody to safe?", Slowinski was just using his nicest voice.

"Slowinski, shut the fuck up."

I took 3 steps forward, stopped.

"Sir, the whole area is contaminated. The only people who could have survived are soldiers and we're here to check if they're ok", I hated myself for things i had to say.

"What about us? My whole family died, I'm alone but I'm still alive. I mean, You can help me right?", he's eyes were full of hope. Now I'd rather disappear or die than say anything more. But I didn't have a much of a choice.

"Sir, I'm afraid there's nothing we can do. This area is so contaminated that nobody here will stay alive."

"You mean, you let me die down here?", he was about to cry. But instead of tears, little drops of blood were coming from behind his eyelashes.

"Yes, you're gonna die", Slowinski said since I couldn't say a word now. "You're suffering from a severe leukemia. In about 24 hours your organism will not have any red blood cells at all and you will die from internal bleeding."

The man looked at him like he was looking at Satan coming for him in this man's lowest.

"No! You can't leave me here! It all happened because of you! You motherfuckers!"

All of a sudden, the guy was started running towards Slowinski. He took his gun immediately but it was jammed and there was no way he could shoot the guy. Komarninski just did not shoot. And we couldn't quite figure out, why.

"You take me out form here you shitheads!", the man was shaking Slowinski, started punching him. Slowinski was so afraid of his suit that he let the guy do whatever he wanted and decided not to make any sudden moves. And then one shot stopped it all.

"He's down, sir", said Bujas still holding his finger on the trigger. I thought the silence that came right after the shot, would smash my ears. The man fell on the ground without a life inside already. Slowinski was standing like he became salt.

"Ok guys, let's move", I ordered. But it sounded so stupid and so unconfident that nobody really registered this message.

"So anybody wanna tell what the fuck we are here for? To shoot those still living here? To watch this and then write a diary or something?", Kowalski was pissed off now. He looked at the sky, then on the body. Maybe he was saying some kind of prayer or something, but I couldn't tell for sure.

"Well, this will happen a lot down here, people", Komarninski added.

"But this doesn't make sense. Why would soldiers...", Bujas could not finish his thought.

"Because they had suits in the base. That's why", Komarninski seemed untouched by the course of events.

Bujas looked at him: "Then what the hell we're supposed to do now? I don't think I can..."

"Well, who wants to hear something funny?", asked Slowinski keeping his hands on his suit.

"Would you just stop...", I momentarily stopped talking and we all stopped thinking. We just stared at Slowinski. He was looking on his suit and keeping his one hand... on a hole in the suit that so far had been saving his life...

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A light wind was coming from the south. The sky got a bit darker. This wind lifted some soot and now it looked like a white curtain was about to cover this destroyed world. From time to time there was a sound of a piece of a window breaking on the pavement, or a tree branch falling on the black grass, which did not react to wind at all. There were some doors opening and closing every time the wind wanted them too. With the city now so quiet, that was an extremely loud sound – and the only sign of a movement. There were some people in their cars – but not willing to go anywhere anymore. Some of them were still holding their wheels as if even after they had died, they still had a hope to get somewhere on time. There were lots of cars on the main street of Katowice. Most of them completely covered with soot. Some of them crashed with other, some of them completely smashed by the heavier ones. The sky decided that it was the time to cry upon this silent city. Little drops started to come down from the sky. Little, black, dirty drops were hitting roofs, broken windows, pavement, dead bodies...

And there were 5 soldiers staring at one of them. They did not notice the black rain or the wind. They were just staring at one of them. The one they were staring at was still holding his hand on his suite which did not protect him from the outside world anymore. Little black drops were falling on their helmets, their masks and suits...

"Well, I tell ya, I did not see that coming", Said Slowinski.

"I'm sorry, man... I don't know why I did not shoot him. I just could not shoot other human being. But I know I should have."

"What difference does it make now? I'm dead."

"Maybe we could call the helicopter and get help before it's too late?", Bujas looked at me full of hope.

"They won't help him and you know it. They will not let any infected people out of the zone", I said. I was surprised how steady I was about this. I was boiling inside but none of this made it through my lips."

"OK, guys, let's not make this situation worse. I don't wanna hear this bullshit anymore. This is just a small crack and it didn't even reach me. So let's roll", Slowinski started to walk in a direction of the base.

"But sir..."

"Don't", Komarninski interrupted him at once. "He knows what's going to happen. He just does not want to believe it. Don't waste time on convincing him about the inevitable. He wants to make himself useful while he still can."

We all started walking.

"Shit, it's a black rain", Komarninski finally noticed the phenomenon. "We must hurry!"

"Why is this shit black?", Bujas asked.

"Did they teach you anything?", Komarninski was angered by constant, silly questions. "It's black because the stratosphere is cleaning up from the acids, soot and dust from the explosion. And this black shit is as radioactive as the air around. And that means if somehow the explosion or the radiation did not kill our people, this certainly will. Enough of this bullshit. Let's roll", Komarninski walked faster now, passing Slowinski and shouting something about how fast we ought to move now.

We were walking very fast now. We were passing the city which now looked like a construction yard, where something had gone wrong. There was a piece of a poster with a child missing on it.

"Yeah, everybody's gone cause they're lookin' for the kid I'm sure", Slowinski said. Bujas looked at him like that was the first cruel joke Slowinski told. But it did not surprise me. There was absolutely no situation so untactful that Slowinski would keep his mouth shut. The difference was that now nobody had said anything about it. Everybody just thought "let him go" and moved on.

We were walkin along Korfantego street, which must have been a pretty busy place. Now it was just a place with two wrecked buses and tens of bodies inside those machines. Some passengers were already

half-rotten. I thought that nothing is worse than having no choice – no way to escape, no time to decide and they only could meet what was coming to them.

I looked at the Geiger counter. It read 10 degrees – which is 10.000 Radians. The radiation was decreasing but we knew that it will not disappear in many, many years. We saw a marketplace, billboards which were about to fall apart or already did. Tons of fruits and vegetable lying on the street, police cars with doors open.

“Fuck!”, Slowinski shouted and started taking off his helmet.

“What the fuck do you think you’re doing?”, Bujas was approaching him.

“I’m dying you shithead! So if you don’t mind...”, Slowinski took off his helmet and took a deep breathe. The scene scared us all. We could not believe he did it.

“OK guys, it smells like a hamper in here. And this wind does not feel very good. Hey wouldn’t it be funny if this gave me cancer? Oh... right.”

We were staring at him like if he was dying already. And yet, he was making all those jokes without caring. Then he went down on his knees and threw up so badly, we thought he was pulling his lungs through his mouth.

“How much time do I have Komarninski?”, Slowinski asked in a cold manner.

“Depends on your system. It may be week, it may be 48 hours. But it’s been 3 hours and you’re already having some symptoms so I guess the contamination is spreading really fast in your body.”

Komarninski served him all those facts like he was talking about some kid in Africa. But he was talking about his mate, about his brother in arms.

“Well then everybody listen! Don’t take your helmets off. If you do, I’ll be able to see your faces – ergo, I’ll be vomitting twice more often so before you do it – think about me – This radiation is killing me. But do not support it.”

Bujas couldn’t help it. He started laughing. Then we all did. This whole situation scared the shit out of us but we could not stop laughing. Slowinski was telling those jokes while dying and we were still laughing. I guess, everybody was happy that they’re not Slowinski. They were not going to make any jokes – but if he did, and he’s the one dying, then let

him enjoy himself. But first and foremost, we were all glad we were not him.

“Thank you”, said Slowinski. “You were a wonderful audience. But it’s now time for me to find some soldiers and suffer from internal bleedings! Good night New York!”, and he started moving.

We all got used to the situation. Slowinski was throwing up every hour, he walked slower and slower. But he was still funny like he did not care about what was happening to him. We all knew he’s not coming back with us. And we knew that the moment would come, when somebody would have to do him.

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The structure seemed intact more or less. Military buildings were built to survive such catastrophes. It looked like this base was built there day after the end of the world. It was facing destroyed streets, broken windows, rotting corpse, raw sewage, dead trees and plants.

Slowinski fell on the ground and threw up again. We looked at each other. We knew the moment is coming. The Geiger counter showed now 12.000 Radians. The Radiation was much higher here.

“Is he dead?”, Bujas looked at Slowinski.

“You wish, bitch...”, Slowinski mumbled through his vomit. “OK, gentlemen, it doesn’t seem like I’m going to make it any longer.”

We suddenly all felt like in a clumsy American movie.

Slowinski took out his gun. “The radio is perfectly ok. You’ve got 3,5 hours to check for our people and get back to the landing area. And for the record, You’re all assholes”.

Then he just pointed his gun at his head and pulled the trigger. His head blew like a bomb, he collapsed immediately and twitched for about a minute. His blood was on the ground in a range of about 50 meters.

“What the fuck!”, Bujas screamed and started to shoot in the air. “What the fuck was wrong with the guy! Why now? We could do something!”

Komarninski looked at Bujas: “Yeah? Like what? The guy did not have a family, and now he was dying. You sure you would wait till the very end?”

Bujas looked at him and decided to say no more.

“Let’s roll”, I said. I was shocked like hell but we had about 3 hours to complete the mission and I knew I could not afford a time to be spared on mourning.

We entered the building. The outside stairs were cracked in half. We had to be extremely easy not to damage our suits. The door were open – actually burned and open. There were bodies, there were some clothes loose on the floor before the door. There was a woman’s body hanging from the window.

“Well, I certainly did not expect to see this. Why would...”, Bujas could not finish his sentence.

“Because people were seeking help. And there were like half a million people living here, so the door would not fit all of them coming inside.”

“Let’s get in. They don’t pay us per hour”, I said and pushed the burned door.

I walked inside. There was a long corridor going straight forward and a couple of doors on left and right. We kept our guns loaded. And that was another stupid thing to me – that I was doing this, without even thinking. Why? Because we were ready to shoot someone. We learned our lesson and now... we would shoot anyone who would try to ask us for help. We learned our lesson as soldiers – and as people who came here to save some lives. And basing on this lesson, we would have to take a life of a person who seeks help to have his/her life saved.

“I check the room one, Bujas – you take number two, Komarninski – three and Kowalski number four.”

The corridor looked awful. There were some paintings lying on the floor, there was an actual human hand ripped from the body. There were lots of papers which just 8 days ago meant something in this place. I opened the first room. It was a small office. A nice carpet, some pictures, many books about how good is it to kill people who are not Polish. There was a nice wooden desk with a pile of paper work on it. There was a picture of a smiling man, woman and two children – and there were some trees and some picnic blankets behind those smiling people. And there were some birds flying in the sky behind those smiling people. And there was a dead man with his head on the desk behind the picture of those smiling people. I did not know where the smiling woman and kids were but this man was not coming home to smile for the picture

anymore. He had a white-black liquid coming out of his mouth and he was holding a probe in his dead hand. I guess, just like Slowinski, he would not wait till the every end of this nonsense. I checked Geiger counter. It read about 9.000 radians. That meant that the building was thick enough to keep some of the radiation outside. But did people know about that? Or maybe they just considered army people to be their last ray of hope?

“Sir! Here! Number three”, came to my ears. I left immediately and entered the room Komarninski was supposed to check. And he was there with a woman. The woman’s head was on his knees. She was choking, her eyes were covered with blood. She was trying to blink just if she woke up in the morning. But blood cloths surrounding her eyelashes made it impossible. She was spitting some soot out, coughing heavily. I took some water out of my backpack – I did not know why I took it since I could never use it for myself. At least, that did something good to someone else. She was swallowing water like it was gonna save her life. She started to move her lips and hiss. I went down on my knees and put my ear against her lips.

“Hoooo... Hyyyy... Why... why you... help us... why didn’t help...”

Me and Komarninski looked at each other but I could not say a word.

“Easy, don’t try to speak right now. Everything’s gonna be okay. Just try to breathe.”

“I’m... shhooo... soo... afraid...”, the girl was trying to cry but her eyes were not able to produce anything but blood. She couldn’t see us, she probably hardly heard us. So I just took her hand and kept holding it for another 30 seconds... After that, the girl took a very deep breathe, hissed one more time. Then her hand became so light and ran out of life.

Komarninski looked at me and said: “There’s no time to answer that question, sir. It just happened and we gotta keep moving.”

I felt like a lightning hit me right in the heart. All I could think about was the girl who needed help. And she wanted help from men, who were more or less responsible for the fact that she needed help. And the help did not come. And the world just let her die because she was not a soldier and because it was better for this world.

"Fuuuck!", I screamed as loud as I could. Could not control myself – I started to shoot at everything in that place. Komarninski took me from behind and held my hands so I could not hold a gun.

"You think I don't care? You think I want to see this? That we all do? No but the reality is that we are still alive and they are not. And if there's anybody we can help, we gotta keep the cold blood and keep moving so shut the fuck up and stay with us... sir."

Those words did not affect me at all. But I stopped.

"Rooms two and four clear, sir", Bujas entered the room. He left right after the report. He did not want to see anymore of this.

There were steps at the end of the corridor. And about 10–15 bodies were on the stairs. We now pushed them like heavy sacks. They stopped meaning anything – or they meant so much we could not hold such thoughts.

"Let's go, let's go. No time to waist!", Komarninski was screaming all the time, trying to make things as quick as possible. But all I was thinking about was that one girl with bloody eyes.

We reached the first floor. The corridor here was very dark. We were moving slowly, feeling hands, heads and legs below our feet. I thought I saw someone at the end of the hall but after seeing so many dead people, I did not believe it at all. But those person was real, was alive, and... was shooting...

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I opened my eyes. I felt like somebody had been kicking me in my shoulder for 5 hours. I blinked a few times to get a clear vision. I was lying on the floor in the dark corridor. There were three men staring at me.

"Sir, are you all right?", one of the men asked. I did not know that voice.

"Sir, I'm so sorry – lots of people... there were lots of people coming here, shooting, I thought no help was coming... I'm so sorry sir."

I did not get what he meant. All I could think about was this awful pain in my shoulder. But I put myself together and looked at the three man. Bujas was terrified, Kowalski looked like death coming for me, and the last man was just shaking. He was wearing a suit as well.

"Where's Komarninski?", I asked very much afraid of the answer.

Bujas did not reply – he just pointed on my left. Komarninski was lying on the floor just like me. But he was not going to wake up. His mask was covered in blood and there was a bullet hole on the back of his head.

“What the fuck happened?”, I asked, trying to get up but my shoulder was now killing me.

“Sir, I thought that there were some dying people trying to get something or trying to take my suit”, the third man told.

“I did not think. I just reacted. I thought nobody but me was alive and I thought that nobody was coming to get me out of here. So I defended myself.”

“And you shot my man? You fuckin’...”, I stopped and then looked at my shoulder. A stream of blood was coming from inside the suit. There was a huge crack in it.

“I’m so sorry sir. But we can help you. We’ll take you on the chopper and then...”

“Drop it, Bujas”, I said. I wanted to think for a moment.

And then I thought about the time I was safe – and was about to save some people. And then I thought about the girl, who were asking for help. I realized, that I was now really looking for the answers to my questions. Now, being a victim of nuclear weapon use. I no longer belonged to a healthy world. I was now a product of what my authorities had decided to do. Then, I recalled Slowinski’s last moments. And suddenly I understood his way of talking and behaving. He must have been so afraid of dying, of the next day, that this was the only way for him to stay focused. I now had a strong need to do things the way he did.

“Well, anyone knows any new jokes about Jewss, Germans and Black people?”, I asked and I really did not know what came over me.

“Sir?”, Bujas thought I was crazed.

I stood up and then took my helmet off. The air was kinda clear, but smelled bad and I could almost feel the radiation coming through my nose, ears and lips.

“Are you the only one here?”, I asked.

“Yes, sir. My people were either shot or died from the poisoning”, the man looked at me like at a mad man.

“Okay, you’ve got an hour left. Bujas and Kowalski, you’ll take this man back – don’t stop even for one second. Oh and tell the major, he’s a piece of shit“, those words were coming out of me like a river.

There were some opened door. Inside the room there were some hot-dogs, some cookers, and a bottle of Jack Daniels.

“Oh yeah. Even in the time like this, God will not leave you empty-handed” I thought and took a bottle.

“What are you waiting for? Till I drop dead? Move!”, I shouted.

“But sir...”, Bujas did not know what to do at all. Kowalski left his brain somewhere else and just stared at me with his mouth open.

“But what? But the fuck what? I’m not coming back, it’s kinda obvious isn’t it? Move the fuck out and be careful!”

“Sir, yes sir. It was an honor to...”

“Yeah, yeah, I know. Now move!”, I did not let Bujas finish the sentence. I just wanted to be alone.

I sat on the stairs, opened the old Jack and started drinking. I looked in the window and watched the three soldiers coming home. And then I thought that it would not make much sense for me. I could not stand this world any longer – so maybe that was the way for me to understand?

I finished my whiskey, and broke the bottle on the floor. I heard a thunder outside.

“Yeah, yeah, I’m coming”, I thought. Then I looked at my gun...

