

Tick tock. Tick Tock. The percussion of my heavy, shod shoe on the floor of my... our "home" was echoing from the walls. The rats, or rather what left from them, were running from time to time between the cracks in the walls. Five hundred meter. Bright, warm, yellowish light of "dawn" was greeting me. Just as if it was awaiting my comeback. The truth is, this light was always on. it gives people returning to station from their paths, hope. It gives us delusive uplift. But nobody complains, everyone wants just to feel a little bit safer.

- Only four hundred meters to go. Four hundred fucking meters to go and the station will be visible. And there humans, probably humans.

No one was walking alone in those tunnels. No one was brave enough. Everyone values their lives above others. Even family. Such are the times, after nuclear war in human has awakened the worst and the best at the same time, instincts. Only those let this few just like rats run to the underground just to protect themselves from radiation.

First few years passed like nothing ever happened. We had just enough food and water. Nobody wanted to talk about what took place back then. Everyone was nice to each other just to avoid any kind of conflicts. Just to vegetate, here, 20 meters under our real home. I didn't want that, I wanted to go above our new home. It was tight and uncomfortable here. I felt like a fish in aquarium. That's why I was one of the first who forged the first squad of stalkers.

Idea of something like this sparked when those from above have noticed that something is not working as it was intended. It was a miracle that people have been waiting for so long in silence before the first act of insubordination.

-Fuck, I again lost myself in my thoughts. two hundred meter, I'm close, just a few meters more and the light of the first and the last outpost will be visible.

In spite of appearances, our station wasn't big. Marianska, from the sculpture of Maryja standing before the entrance. Entrances. Entrances are now the worst nightmare of every stalker. You never know if there is a tetra or other fucker who didn't want to die after the explosion of the bomb, behind it. Yet, they are our best friends too, especially when working as a barricade, keeping us safe from everything which wanted us dead.

-Stop! Who are you?! From where?! Tell me or you will end as a bag of meat.

-Marianska! Tell suchy that the dead one is back. - I shouted to man standing near the CKM.

-This "dead one"? Hold on, the captain will be here in a moment, but before that, come.

The outpost wasn't something special too. Just a few barricades made out of bags full of dirt. Old, yet deadly CKM and the campfire and few bullets lying on the floor.

-Here, sit, now. Tell us. How it is up there? Is there still so fucking cold like they used to say? Have you found something interesting?

-As cold as they say? It's not even close! When I was outside, it was something around -20°C! But, luckily, the radiation level is stable. Oh and yes. I've found some cola caps and few photos. - My started to break - Anyway, tell me. How about...

- The dark ones? - said Michael. The dark ones. Our worst nightmare. We discovered their existence when Artem told the world that they have problem with them, via radio. But he never answered our questions. One month after that, they found us.

They weren't humans, normal human isn't completely black and they were. From the beginning they weren't coming close to us. They were just behind the line of visibility while watching stalkers do they job. I saw them only twice. - If you really want to know, then yea. They were here, two days ago. Three people are dead. He's coming. We will leave you both alone.

-You're finally here. The dead one.

-You wouldn't take your ass through half of the station. What now? - I say without any doubts that something big is coming.

- If you put things that way.. As you may know, we have a little problem w librarians, to be more accurate, with one of the things they're protecting.

-Why to hire me? I'm pretty confident that one of your boys could handle this!

-The problem is not in there. Of course, the reward will be high! How about one thousand bullets?

-Sounds good, I'll take it. two thousand and I'll go there and get what you want.

-Fine, come tonight to my house, I'll tell you more.

...

-I will regret this. I will fucking regret this. But I need this money. Not for me, someone else needs it more than me - I was thinking loud while walking in the dark as night corridor leading to the first trapdoor. So called emergency exit. After the the dark ones appeared, we prefer not to risk using the main entrance.

- It's so quiet here. - said my companion. I didn't know him. he was new, young, well built. It would be real shame if he'd die. - too quiet.

-How about you? Do you have a goal? Kids? - I asked him just to kill this silence. Stupid idea and even more stupid questions, but it's still better than this silence. Everything is better than silence.

- Goal? To not die here with you. You know how deadly are librarians, don't you?

- Yea, those bastards are pretty hard to kill. And to be honest with you, if I wasn't in this kind of situation, I wouldn't take this.

- You know, maybe I don't have as much experience as you do, but I have my own mind so I better won't be asking. It's not my business. - he said it like he was trying to avoid any kind of needless confrontation.

-Hey, you hear that?! There! In the corner! - I whispered it to my shield brother right after something made a little rustle there. - We better check it. I still value my life!

-Go and check it then - I heard his quick and accurate as hell answer. I could feel the fear in his voice.

- Why the hell it's always me? Eh, but you're staying right after my back, is that clear? And remember, if I die here, I'll be haunting you in your dreams, forever! - I was trying to make this situation a little bit less frightening. None of us wanted to die at this moment. You don't even know what I would give back then, just to take everything I needed and get the fuck out of there as fast as possible.

I started to slowly approach the corner. The hustle was becoming louder and louder.

I felt there like a psychopath shooting everything which seemed alive. It was another stupid idea but what I had to do? Stay there and wait till something kills me?

- Here, quick! - I shouted to my companion - I think it's dead.

- It doesn't look like librarian to methought. More like a rat! - he started laughing .

- What the hell are you talking about?! - I slowly moved to the heap of paper from which those rustle was coming out. I brushed away the jagged pieces of paper. It really wasn't librarian. It just a fucking rat. A rat which scared us death. - Ugh, we should forget about that.

- Yea - My comrade in misery nodded.

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The rest of the journey was not as easy as we thought it'll be. Oh no, it was real hell. Full of creatures with no name. Every single one of them wanting to only have us on their dinner. They were nameless. Everyone who tried to name them, died. Besides, we didn't have time for such little things. It wants me dead? Then I kill that first, To survive we have to be strong. This is not our world anymore.

- Finally here. Now what? - I said to him.

- I thought that you will know. In the end, you were talking with him. He should have told you everything! My job was to only cover you and to keep an eye on you.

- What do you mean by "keep an eye on me"?

- My job was to not let you die here. We know that you're good and so on but even the best entities can fail. We didn't want that to happen and thus they sent me with you. Don't worry, I don't want to kill you. You are worth more alive than dead. - He went to the other side of the room after saying that.

The room itself wasn't too big, Just a plain and simple cabinet, which probably belonged to the old director of the library, The appearance of this room was grim. Here and there were touched by the tooth of time wallpapers. In the middle was desk. Pure wood. Ebony!

-The desk - I whispered with happiness in my voice.

-The desk? What desk? - He said it with a note of irritation in his voice. - Wait, you don't think that...

-Indeed- I started moving towards the desk. I grabbed the first locker. Empty. Then another and another. Finally - I got it!

- Are you fucking kidding me?!

-Shut up! Or you will make them come to us and then it won't be a nice meeting. Don't you remember how many bullets do we got? Only two hundred. It's too little for a fight like this and just enough for transport.

-Wait, aren't you curious what's inside?

-No. And you know what? I got that in my ass. Let's go home,