

No-knock Raid
&
Biker

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No-knock Raid

Messenger accelerated. Lieutenant Kowalska looked at the men sitting with her along the armored walls of the compartment. Black helmets, uniforms and tactical gear. Eyes hidden behind the ballistic goggles. Weapons at the ready. She planned everything accordingly. Surveillance, done by the miniature mobile robots over the last few hours, revealed six targets, all unarmed. Piece of cake.

The crash surprised her. Maybe it was not the best idea, she thought. Fortunately, Messenger didn't seem to be damaged. Everyone got up from their seats and raised their guns. The front door opened and UTU troopers jumped outside one by one. Kowalska landed on the crushed bricks. Two targets – man and woman – were already lying on the floor being handcuffed by her men. Four more to go, she thought.

Someone showed up in the entry leading to the staircase.

"BTF!" Kowalska shouted aiming her rifle at him. "Don't move! Hands in the air!"

Target turned around and tried to run away. The lieutenant fired a short burst of tranquilizer darts into his back. The effect was instantaneous – man fell on the floor unconscious. Three to go, she thought standing over him. With one kick, she turned the man on his back. Seeing a clerical collar around his neck, she snorted and walked into the staircase.

Four troopers followed her up the narrow creaky stairs. The lights flickered and went out when they reached the upper floor. Night vision automatically turned on and Kowalska smiled – at the end of the corridor she saw a silhouette with a sharp object in the left hand. She aimed her rifle.

"Knife!" shouted the trooper on her right and target fell on the floor.

Damn you, she thought and said, "Cuff the suspect."

"Copy." The gung-ho trooper and his partner walked over to the unconscious body.

Kowalska moved left to the closest door. Two troopers took positions around her. She nodded and one of them kicked the door open.

"BTF!" She ran first into the empty room. "Clear."

Troopers moved to the next door. Kicked them in. Searched the room and the adjacent bathroom.

"Clear."

Last door.

"BTF!" shouted Kowalska. "How sweet. They know the drill."

Two men were lying on the floor with their hands clasped behind their necks. Troopers immediately searched and handcuffed them. All six targets were detained.

"Ground floor clear," Kowalska heard over the radio. "Good," she replied. "Upper floor is also clear."

She turned to the detainees, now kneeling on the floor. Looking at the man on the left, she saw a pop-up notification in her goggles.

Primary target.

* * *

They were sitting in the kitchen. Earlier, troopers brought a lamp, so there was no need for the night vision. The lieutenant's goggles and helmet were on the table; her rifle was leaning against it. She looked at the man sitting on the other side and smiled. That job was so easy.

"Hello, Edward. I'm lieutenant Kowalska, BTF Urban Tactical Unit strike team leader," she said. "You inherited this house from your grandmother, am I right?"

"Yes," said the detainee. His hands were still cuffed behind his back.

"Decent citizens are in their beds at this time, you know."

Edward looked down.

"Why did you think that cutting the power would be a good idea?" asked the lieutenant. "Did you think that you have any chance against us?"

A trooper standing behind the man chuckled.

"I didn't." Edward shook his head. "Wasn't my idea."

"Whatever." Kowalska shrugged. "We have other things to discuss. We just need to wait for..."

Before she could finish the sentence, another trooper entered the room.

"Well, well, well." She grinned. "What do we have here?"

The trooper put the thick book on the table.

"We've found the New Testament and hidden bookcase full of banned novels, ma'am," he said.

"Authors?"

"Lem, Dick, Gibson, Dukaj, Watts..." He stopped when the lieutenant raised her hand.

She looked at the captive.

"Why do you even read that crap?"

"They are... classics..." He was shaken.

"Classics my ass. Geez, can't you read something normal?" she said. "Alright, don't answer, I know. You can't, 'cause you're dumb."

"We did nothing wrong..."

"Nothing wrong? Were you born yesterday?" Kowalska gave him a hostile look. "Bookcase full of stupid shit, that's one thing. More serious crime is worshiping wrong Jesus."

"How can you say that?"

"Shut up, dumbfuck! You could easily get a free copy of the catechism, but no, you had to get the New Testament. Geez. And you were hiding a priest of that cult of yours in your home." She sighed. "You'll have a lot of time to think about what have you done."

"Please, we didn't hurt anyone..."

"I told you to shut up!" She slammed her fist down on the table. "You're under arrest for crimes against the Republic of Vistuland and the Church of Vistuland. All your computers and filthy books are confiscated by the Bureau of Threats to Faith, so help me God."

"What do you want from us? You took over our churches. What else do you want?"

"I didn't give you a voice, did I?" She looked the detainee in the eyes. "I did not. Give you. A voice."

She stood up, grabbed her gear and walked to the door. There she stopped, turned her head and looked at the troopers.

"Teach him a lesson, boys," she said and left the kitchen.

The troopers looked at each other and reached for their batons.

* * *

Kowalska exited the building and caught the first rays of the sun. The air temperature was still bearable but it was relentlessly getting hotter. Two men and one woman were sitting on the sidewalk, cuffed behind their backs and guarded by the two troopers.

"Fuck you!" screamed the woman seeing her. "Rot in hell, bitch!"

Shaking her head, the lieutenant turned around and walked over to the irate detainee.

"You must be confused. I represent the government. And the government represents the nation. By insulting me, you're insulting the nation." She kicked the woman in the chest, knocking her over. "The great nation which suffered so much throughout its history."

The detainee curled up weeping quietly.

"You people must have some genetic predisposition to disloyalty and betrayal," said Kowalska and crouched beside the hurt woman. She leaned over her and whispered to her ear, "But we'll fix that."

Two male detainees dropped their heads and closed their eyes.

"Pathetic," said the lieutenant looking at them with disapproval.

She stood up and went to the communications van, parked nearby. A sergeant sitting inside saluted her and got out of the vehicle. She called the headquarters and after a while major Górski looked at her from the screen.

"You've done well," he said.

"Thank you, sir," replied Kowalska. "We've got two birds with one stone – Catholics and nerds. They had a lot of paperbooks. And they were meeting in the house at the end of the street."

"Yes. Good job." Major Górski was looking at something outside the camera's field of view.

"What's the deal with these people?" The lieutenant shook her head. "I wonder who is worse to reeducate – I mean, atheists negate the existence of God but Catholics have their own image of God ingrained in their minds which is hard to erase. And the other faiths..."

"That's not your problem," said the major. "Also, that was your last no-knock raid on the low level offenders. I want you in a more serious business. Report back to the HQ and see me in my office."

"Yes sir!"

"One more thing – you better pack up quickly. The updated weather reports show that the rainstorm will hit the city sooner than previously thought. Strong winds and flash floods expected."

"Copy that, sir."

"Out."

Kowalska switched off the screen and got out of the van. She reached for her radio and ordered her men to pack up. Pleased with herself, she walked to Messenger. The front of the giant armored personnel carrier was still inside the house.

"Ready to move that thing?" she asked a trooper standing nearby.

"We're waiting for the inside crew to clear the building, ma'am," he said. "All unconscious detainees have been revived and placed with the rest in the prison-van but we still have some stuff inside."

"Alright."

The lieutenant observed the troopers running back and forth, carrying boxes with confiscated goods and UTU equipment. It did not take them long to put everything inside the BTF vehicles. Finally, the trooper standing on the street looked around and said to his radio, "Clear."

As Messenger backed away slowly, the front wall of the house collapsed.

"Booyah!" shouted someone as the dust was settling down. More voices joined, "Booyah!"

Kowalska laughed.

"Good job, boys," she said looking at the damaged house. "Now, get your asses on the rigs and we're leaving this shithole."

As she was walking to the black unmarked SUV, she spotted a writing on the wall of one of the surrounding buildings. Simple letters, no fancy font. *RISE*. She got into the car and slammed the door. Not saying a word, the driver started the engine.

November 2015, January 2016

Biker

Smiley shook the can and sprayed the last letter on the wall. Finished. The teenager stepped back and looked at his work with admiration. One word, no posh font, a simple message – *RISE*. He and his buddies were spraying this all over the city during the last few weeks. Nonetheless, Smiley was sure that no one before managed to leave the tag in the downtown area, not far from the *Palace*.

The short burst of a police siren interrupted his thoughts. Caught in the searchlights, Smiley turned around. A police car slowly rolled into the courtyard, almost brushing against the statue of the Virgin Mary. Boy looked around but there was nowhere to run. Surrounded by the walls of the abandoned tenement house, he was alone. Painfully alone in the middle of the night, behind the enemy lines.

Two police officers got out of the car and came up to him.

"What are you doing here, youngster?" The cop pointed his nightstick at the spray can in Smiley's hand.

The boy couldn't utter a single word.

"Answer him, piece of shit!" yelled the second cop.

Smiley dropped the can and slowly raised his hands.

"What the fuck is he doing?" the angry cop asked his partner.

"I think he's surrendering."

"Surrendering? No fucking way! He's resisting arrest!"

The first blow came without warning. Smiley was hit in the side and lost his balance. Lying on the ground, he covered his head with his arms. It didn't help much. The impassive cops were fiercely delivering further punches and kicks. Feeling pain all over his body, Smiley realized that he was going to die. Just as he thought about it, the beating stopped.

"Hey!" yelled one of the cops.

"My eyes!" screamed the other one. "Fuck!"

"Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!"

Something fell on the ground. Smiley opened his eyes, glanced up and saw someone dressed in a motorcycle suit complete with a helmet. He stared at the mysterious biker who reached out his hand. Thinking he was hallucinating, Smiley was too dazed to do anything.

* * *

Lieutenant Kowalska pressed the trigger. Standing with her legs spread and holding the revolver with both hands, she easily handled the strong recoil. Although the gun was not practical for the street use, she liked to practice shooting with it. Target was hit in the head. She aimed again and fired. Kick. Another headshot. The phone in her pocket vibrated twice. She took a deep breath in and out, and fired again. Headshot. She holstered her weapon, took off her protective glasses and earmuffs, and reached for the phone. After reading the message, she rushed out of the shooting range.

Running upstairs, she quickly got to the second floor, to the room labeled as *Real-Time Awareness Center*. There, a dozen of men and women in earsets were sitting before many computer screens. In front of them, above the video wall showing muted TV programs and feed from the street cameras, hung the plaque with the BTF motto – *To Protect the Faith and to Serve the Church*.

"You." She patted the nearest man on the shoulder.

"Ma'am." The operator turned from his two screens and looked at her expectantly.

"I've just got the notification that there was some incident which allegedly involved the individual known as Biker," she said.

"Just a moment." He tapped the keyboard. "Some... altercation with the police in downtown, ten minutes ago. Suspect is on the loose and indeed is described as a motorcycle rider. There is a video recording from the police car."

"Put it on the wall."

"Yes, ma'am."

Kowalska watched the video of the two cops beating a teenager.

"What about the sound?"

"No sound. I believe that the microphone was out of order."

"Whatever." She shrugged. "Pause."

She gazed at the freeze-frame. The man in a black motorcycle suit was coming from the left, holding something in his right hand. Having noticed him a moment earlier, the police officers were turning around to face him. The teenager, probably unconscious, was lying against the wall, curled in the fetal position.

"Play."

The man immediately raised his right hand and the lieutenant saw that he was holding a small can. Giving the cops no time to react, he sprayed their faces. All they could do was to drop their nightsticks and cover their eyes. Seconds later, using his legs, the man knocked them off their feet and the show was over. He helped the teenager get up and led him out of the

frame.

"The police officers were pepper-sprayed and are treated at the scene by the ambulance crew, ma'am." The operator was listening to the police scanner.

"Shit happens."

"Ma'am?"

"Rewind a bit... Stop." Kowalska pointed at the man in a motorcycle suit holding an injured teenager. "That's him. Without a doubt, that's Biker."

"Male, one hundred sixty to one hundred seventy five centimeters, slim build, always dressed in a black motorcycle suit," the operator read from the suspect's file. "We don't have his photo without a helmet, ma'am."

"So?" The lieutenant gave him a dirty look.

"He's accused of several acts of sabotage but we don't know how does he look like..."

"We'll learn soon. What are the coppers doing right now?"

"The police are combing the area... It seems that every patrol from the left side of the city is looking for the attacker."

"Good. He can't hide for long. We'll have a show tonight," she said and grabbed her radio. "This is lieutenant Kowalska. Urgent. I need a helicopter and a UTU squad."

* * *

Smiley fought hard to remain conscious and not to fall off the motorcycle. With his arms wrapped around Biker's waist, he clung to him as the bike was speeding through the empty streets. Wearing only the sleeveless shirt and shorts, he could feel the rush of air. Everything seemed surreal. The street lights were sliding before his eyes, hypnotizing him. Smiley imagined that he was the soul flying over the dead city and looking for the lost body.

They stopped in some back alley. Biker helped the boy get off the motorcycle and led him forward. Then he banged on the door. While they were waiting, Smiley examined the green peeling paint. He didn't notice the small camera high on the wall.

Finally, the green door opened and they went inside. An obese woman, in her early fifties, scowled at them.

"My God, what happened to him?"

Biker didn't answer.

"My God, I hate it when you pull something like this." She turned to the man, around her age but much thinner, standing behind her. "Go get something to cover the bike."

"It was the police..." said Smiley.

The woman shook her head. "Come. My God."

They walked through the narrow corridor to the staircase, Smiley still clinging to Biker. The host led them to the second floor. There, in the dimly lit passageway, she knocked on one of the doors.

"Maria!" she said and led them few doors further.

They entered the room and sat Smiley on a bed. Then they were joined by a young woman. Smiley immediately focused on her straight blonde hair and pretty face.

"Look at him Maria, the police had beaten him," said the host.

"Too bad," said the young woman. She lowered her voice so Smiley couldn't hear. "If it turns out that he has the internal bleeding, he'll need a medical transport to the hospital. At least he's conscious – that's something. Anyway, I'll do my best."

Biker spread his arms.

"No." Maria took a step back looking at her face reflected in Biker's helmet visor. "You have bloodstains on your suit. And I have a job to do."

"She's right." The host put a hand on Biker's shoulder.

"Come in the morning," said Maria and walked to the chest of drawers.

"You're in good hands." The host smiled to the boy and left the room with Biker.

"How do they call you?" Maria asked pulling out the bandages and disinfectants.

"Smiley," said the teenager.

"Funny nickname." She brought all the necessary items and dropped them on the bed. Then she put on the latex gloves. "I'm Maria but thanks to my aunt you already know that."

She grabbed a pair of scissors. "Now, I need to cut your clothes."

"Okay."

"How's your head? Do you feel dizzy?"

"No... I'm just... Everything is happening so fast."

"Hmm." Maria dropped bloodied shirt scraps to a trash bag. "Do you feel pain when you're breathing?"

"No."

"Good." She sprayed a sponge with a disinfectant. "And how about the abdomen? Do you feel pain in the abdomen?"

"A little."

"Don't worry." Maria began cleaning the wounds on Smiley's torso and arms. "I'm a nurse. I work in the hospital but also volunteer here. It's a workers' dormitory."

"It stings," said Smiley.

"I know. How old are you?"

"Fifteen."

"You'll manage."

"Yeah, I'll." Smiley glanced at Maria and blushed. After a moment of silence, he said, "He must be very brave. He fought two cops to save me."

"He?" asked Maria.

"That biker guy."

"Oh, the biker... guy," she said. "Yes... he is brave. Unluckily, sometimes it's more trouble than it's worth."

* * *

Heading south, the helicopter flew high over the brightly lit downtown. Lieutenant Kowalska looked at the giant structure surrounded by the aged skyscrapers. The *Independence Tower*. She secretly dreamed about living there, although she knew she was too low in the Republic's hierarchy. The nearly self-sufficient structure was perfectly protecting its inhabitants from the extreme weather and natural disasters while at the same time providing a comfortable lifestyle. Bearing in mind these advantages, however, she noted one drawback. The Independence Tower was sitting above the railway and subway tunnels bringing all sorts of people to downtown. Naturally, they were needed to keep the city running and to serve the elites, but many of them were unpatriotic and ungrateful. Every so often she could hear the proles using that disgraceful name *Palace* when describing the Independence Tower. Eradicating that term from everyday speech will be a tough job, she thought.

Message from the RTAC came as the helicopter left the Tower behind, still heading to the crime scene.

"Biker reappeared and is chased by the police," the lieutenant heard in her headset. "He's heading back downtown..."

The operator named the street and she passed it to the pilot. Shortly thereafter, she spotted the blue lights of many police cars racing through the major thoroughfare.

"Gentlemen," she said to her crew. "Let's get this party started."

* * *

A single police car, sirens wailing and emergency lights flashing, was riding at a high speed. Still, it had quite a distance to travel to join the chase.

"Faster, faster, faster!" inspector Nowak was yelling at the police officer behind the wheel.

"I'm doing the best I can, sir," said the cop trying to stay on the road.

"Then do better."

The inspector was determined to oversee the arrest. The attack on the two police officers in one of his precincts was a personal matter for him.

"BTF is on our frequency and wants us to call off the pursuit," said a voice over the radio. "Shall we comply?"

"Negative," said inspector Nowak. "Stay on the suspect. Stop him by any means necessary and disable him if he resists arrest."

"Copy that, sir. Suspect just turned east, to Victory Road." The voice paused for a moment. "He's probably heading to General Mering Bridge."

"Then he's really dumb," said the inspector and called the dispatch to order a few road blocks.

After a while everything was set up.

"That son of a bitch is ours." Nowak grinned looking at his driver. "He has nowhere to go."

* * *

The helicopter was flying east, slowly decreasing the altitude. Down below, a narrow stream was flowing through the wide riverbed. On the bridge, a convoy of police cars was following a lone person on a motorcycle. Further away, the roadway was blocked with just two patrol cars. Lieutenant Kowalska was infuriated – the cops ignored her earlier order to call off the pursuit. She also suspected that Biker would be able to break through the blockade. Maintaining composure, she turned to her gunner.

"Aim for the Biker's gas tank. Use small caliber."

The gunner selected the target and a turret under the helicopter's belly started tracking it.

"Ready," he said.

"Fire."

The motorcycle swayed but Biker kept balance. However, he immediately started slowing down and soon came to a halt. The police cars also stopped and blocked the roadway behind him. At once, the cops got out of their vehicles and drew their weapons. Kowalska had to act quickly.

She switched on a loudspeaker.

"This is lieutenant Kowalska, BTF," she said. "Police force – fall back. BTF will handle this incident. I repeat – police force, fall back."

The cops were still aiming at Biker. One of them shouted something. Then he fired his pistol and the bullet grazed the asphalt centimeters from Biker's feet.

Accidental or intentional?, wondered the lieutenant as she grabbed a grenade launcher.

The gunner gave her a surprised look.

"They leave me no choice," she said and opened the side door.

Feeling warm wet air on her face, she aimed her weapon and fired four smoke grenades.

* * *

Biker stood still, gazing at the scene. The cops were aiming at him from behind their cars and seemed unlikely to take orders from the black helicopter hovering above the bridge. That lack of cooperation comforted Biker, as he was desperately trying to find a way out of the situation.

"Get on the ground!" shouted one of the police officers. "Now! Now!"

Not waiting for his order to be executed, the cop shot once. The bullet ricocheting off the asphalt made Biker think about his chances of survival. Now it became clear to him that the police would not hesitate to kill.

A few small explosions shocked everyone on the bridge. When the white smoke started rising around him, Biker saw his only chance. Quickly, he reached to the saddlebag on his motorcycle and grabbed a big bottle. He opened it and doused his bike with the fluid. Without hesitation, he took out a lighter and set fire to the vehicle. Then he sprinted to the edge of the roadway and jumped over the railing separating it from the walkway. From there, the only way was leading down. In a heartbeat, he got on the barrier and turned around. His fingers tightly grasping the metal bars, Biker looked down at a bicycle path suspended under the bridge – covered in shadow and devoid of lighting, unlike the road above. He lowered himself and released the grip.

Biker landed heavily on the concrete surface, bruising his arms and legs. Ignoring the pain, he got up and rushed east. Knowing his chances of escaping were slim, he ran as fast as he could. The bicycle path was leading to the poor neighborhood bordering the river. There, Biker could hide in one of the safehouses and wait until the police search was over. Hoping that the fire would destroy all the possible fingerprints and DNA material, he kept running.

* * *

The cops were still standing behind their cars. For a moment, lieutenant Kowalska worried that they would shoot into the smoke but they lowered their weapons. And now a final message, she thought.

"I repeat for the last time," she said over the loudspeaker. "Regular police – fall back! BTF is taking over."

White smoke was slowly thinning. Kowalska called her UTU squad.

"Ground team, what's your status?" she asked.

"We'll be on the bridge in five minutes," came the response.

"Good."

White smoke nearly dissipated and the cops were pointing at something, talking to each other.

"What the..." Kowalska saw the burning motorcycle. "Light!"

The searchlight illuminated an area where Biker was last seen and then moved further to the blockade at the end of the bridge.

"Where is he?" asked the lieutenant. "Where the fuck is he?"

"Maybe on the bicycle path, ma'am?" said her pilot.

"What bicycle path?"

"Under the bridge."

The helicopter decreased the altitude and hovered at the bridge height. Sweeping across the path, the searchlight beam revealed nothing.

"Fucking cyclists! Shit."

"It wasn't maintained in a long time," said the pilot. "I don't know if it's really being used nowadays, ma'am."

"No one cares. Fuck this!" Lieutenant Kowalska was staring at the structure below the bridge. "East or west? Where did he go?"

Fifty-fifty. Bloody UAVs have to be out of order, she thought. After a few long seconds, she made the decision.

"East."

The helicopter headed to the end of the bridge and rose above an interchange linking Victory Road to East Riverside Freeway. The searchlight whipped the walkways and green areas around the junction. Then the helicopter flew further east above the run-down neighborhood. It circled over the area but to no avail. One thing, however, put a smile on the lieutenant's face. In the northern part of the neighborhood she spotted a house without a front wall.

* * *

The patrol car drove past the two black SUVs blocking the middle lane and parked behind the other police vehicles.

"I'm really angry," said inspector Nowak to his driver. "But not at you. Good driving."

Slowly, he opened the door and got out of the car. His eyes swept the scene before him. Everything was just like in the report he received en route. The cops waiting for orders in silence. A column of smoke from the burning

motorcycle rising into the night sky. A distant sound of the helicopter. I'm late to the game, he thought.

"Sir." The highest-ranking police officer on the scene came up to Nowak. "What are we supposed to do?"

"Stay vigilant." He pointed at the two SUVs with tinted windows behind them. "How long have they been here?"

"They arrived a few minutes before you, sir, and they're still sitting inside. They must be waiting for something. Should we get them out?"

"No. They're just the regular troopers. I need their commander," said Nowak. "And I was told that the commander is in the helicopter."

"Well..." The officer pointed eastward.

The sound of the helicopter was growing louder and soon the machine hovered above the bridge.

"Why aren't they landing?" asked the officer. "They have plenty of room."

Then both men spotted a single person rappelling down.

"Oh come on." Nowak shook his head. "Showing off, that's all they can do."

After touching the ground and unhooking from the rope, a trooper in tactical gear walked to the barrier separating the roadways, while the helicopter flew back east. Nowak observed the woman jump over the obstacle. Seeing his uniform, she came up to him.

"Lieutenant Kowalska, BTF" she said. "We need to talk."

"Inspector Nowak, metropolitan police." He looked at the rank insignia on her shoulders. "Alright then, let's talk. Maybe you could explain to me why did you interfere with my chase and let that scumbag escape?"

"Oh. I've told your men three times to withdraw and let me do my job – yet all of you are still here. And no one even tried to extinguish that burning bike."

"I'm glad to hear that you admit to overstepping your jurisdiction. Who do you think you are, to give orders to my men? And they're not paid to put out fires."

"I think you misunderstood something. It was the BTF action and your men interfered with it. We've been hunting for Biker for a long time."

"That son of a bitch attacked the two police officers! We've almost got him." Nowak pointed at Kowalska. "And then you started firing smoke grenades and now he's gone, and his motorcycle is on fire!"

"First of all, I had to stop your men from shooting Biker to death. Second, that two police officers had beaten the shit out of some teenager." The lieutenant smiled. "Do you even know if that kid is still alive?"

"What's your point?"

"My point is, if the public sees the video, it will demand justice. Some heads will roll. Maybe even yours."

"Are you threatening me?"

"Of course not."

"You think you can talk this shit to me, you Church henchman?"

"Ah, ta ta ta." She shook her finger. "Watch your words."

"This isn't over."

"Surely. As God is my witness, you'll regret getting in my way."

* * *

Yawning, Maria sat down in a couch and turned on the TV. The morning news just started with an obligatory dose of propaganda of success. A newscaster proudly announced new accomplishments which strengthened the national economy and military. Despite the fatigue, Maria listened patiently trying to notice any subtle signs of a looming crisis or war.

The door opened and her aunt stepped inside.

"How is the boy?" she asked.

"He made it through the night so he should be fine," said Maria. "Anna is with him now."

"Wonderful. You're indispensable." The aunt smiled. "Go to bed, you should rest. I'll deal with the kid's parents and everything else."

"Yeah, yeah." Maria waved her hand. "Wait." She sat up straight.

The newscaster moved to the local stories. With an intent face he was describing the events which unfolded on General Mering Bridge last night. Leaning on the counter, he was talking about how a terrorist evaded the police which hesitated to call the BTF for assistance.

"That individual, known only as Biker, is extremely dangerous. Anyone who has any information about his whereabouts is required to contact the BTF immediately," said the newscaster and recited a phone number also shown on the screen.

"Oh God," said the aunt.

"That's not the end of the world," said Maria. "She managed to escape."

"No. It has to stop. She'll get herself killed!"

"She knows how to take care of herself. She'll keep a low profile."

"She better not come here."

The aunt walked out of the room. Alone, Maria felt an urgent need to hug the person now known as Biker.

January – February 2016

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February 2016

¹Which, obviously, one day will be lost in time, like tears in rain... and brought back when the Singularity happens.

²I don't even know how that genre is called but it has become my soundtrack for writing. It just sounds right because it sounds like cyberpunk. You know: *Carpenter Brut*, *Perturbator*, *Magic Sword*, *Night Runner*, *Danger*, *Mega Drive*, *M.O.O.N.*, *Trevor Something*, etc. That music makes me see scenes unfolding in my mind. For example, take *The Way Home* by *Magic Sword* – I can see a protagonist walking straight ahead after finishing an epic quest and then the credits roll. Of course, sometimes one needs to add some metal. Just in case. By the way, isn't that footnote getting too long?

³Thankfully, it's not the *surplus Russian heart, implanted in a POW camp during the war* (W. Gibson, *Neuromancer*, 1984).