

2. WAR: A Hero, One Way or Another

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Then, a thought suddenly flashed across his mind. It was the picture of his past colleague, doing a similar job like this one, many years ago. His body was shredded into pieces, charred into lumps of coals, and buried anonymously in the soil. His wife and children cried over his grave, which was just a pile of dirt without a gravestone to glorify his act. Fear of retaliation, even after his death, the military officials had his burial ground remain anonymous. Most of his friends were not notified to attend his funeral. Within a few seconds, his colleague had vanished from this world, mixed with the pile of dirt, accompanied by just the caws of crows. This was the scene of his farewell to his friend, left behind just a bouquet of flowers. Now, it was his turn. He had to act fast since the time bomb was clicking, but he could not stop reminding himself on the consequence of his action.

He was still hesitant. Jack stepped up his persuasion, “The income for being a captain of the bomb squad is simply too scanty to provide a college education of a child. Death, in this sense, would produce both a fatherless child and a wife remarried to somebody else.” “I am somewhat like you, ignored by the present government and I want to be heard through my action,” he added. However, his words did not appease the captain at all. However, these words did remind him of one thing to release Jack would make himself a fugitive as well, subject to similar consequences. Then, he smiled in a broad grin. His response had Jack surprised.

“By the way, Jack, life is somewhat like playing a game of Russian roulette. Who know what would happen in a minute?” the Captain said in a tone, as if a matter of course. “My wife is annoying, quarrelling with me over every single petty family matter, and my son in fact never loves me as a father,” he added. “Let me tell you what I am going to do after this case,” he said, with his hand slowly approached to the red wire as if to cut it off and he glanced at Jack casually. “You are a bomb expert, with

the talent to design all kinds of traps to stall us in dismantling the bomb. No doubt, our training in the camp never matches your talent but soldiers have one thing in common. We have sold our life to the government.” Seemingly, he droned on without caring the response of Jack. Time seemed to come to a standstill, and then, he switched to cutting the green one instead.

“Boom!” he shouted, but the timer of the bomb stopped with just two seconds left on the dial. Jack seemed to be crestfallen and sullen without a word. What he did not realize was that the captain was actually soaked in cold sweat even in this cold weather. “I am in luck today, Jack,” the captain said in a steady tone. “Sergeant, please escort this gentleman back to our cell, especially reserved for guest of honor,” he barked his order. His subordinates gave him a round of applause, but the captain showed no signs of excitement in this victorious moment. In fact, he looked a bit sad.

Now, snow fell, swirled by the wind gust into a shower of snowflakes. It would be a long drive back to the camp, and John, the sergeant, wanted to break the silence inside the car compartment, “Sir, how did you find out which wire to cut?” “Plain psychology which I have learnt from a friend,” the captain minced no words. “Maybe, a little bit of luck as well. In fact, I was nonplussed in the beginning, angry at him and with myself. Somehow, a lesson learnt from a friend many years ago reminds me on how to deal with a bomb expert, like Jack, who like to blab and threaten me with the power of the bomb,” he explained further. “In fact, I almost made a mistake by saying that I would get the job done one way or another. I changed my tactic, not to stir up his resentment any further, and told him that death to a soldier was a matter of course.” Maybe, talking with John, he began to release the stress built within his mind, feeling much relaxed, and he kept on with his story, “In fact, Jack cares much of his own life, or else, he would not show any sign of anxiety while I attempted to cut the red wire. His look has betrayed himself.”

Suddenly, the captain, for no reason whatsoever, ordered John to take the left and drive up a dirt lane going uphill. John complied, but puzzled for the sudden change in command of his superior. Finally, they stopped in front of a lawn and got out of the car. Shrubs grew by the sides of the lawn and in the center of

the lawn stood a rock pile. The captain stood silently for a while in front of the dirt pile and muttered to himself, "Once again, you have saved my life". Surprised, John saw tears running down his face. Now, the captain closed his eyes and said something, like a prayer, "You have saved people that don't even know you; people may not even see your grave but your bravery has deeply engraved in my memory. You have fought bravely, one way or another, but failed. Now you lie, but you always live in my heart." Now, the captain was so sad that he spoke in a stutter, "Your fortitude earns you a glory unknown to others, but not forgotten by me. You will not be lonely for I will soon stay with you – my hero." He stood straight and saluted; John followed suit. Snow fell heavily and shrouded the hilltop in white.