

COLD HESITATION

*Aygün Can Cengiz**

He had seen many of his fellow soldiers fell beside him. He hardly had any hair on his face. He was exhausted, could not keep holding his rifle in his right hand, he passed it to his left, gripping hard. He checked his sides and saw that they were clear.

He grabbed his belt by the right hand and pulled up his pants. He was not able to fill his uniform for a few weeks then. He crouched endeavoring to cover his head by his right hand, went to his only remaining brother in arms his face on the ground, panting. "I guess there is just one left," muttered Faris vaguely checking his sides. Looking Faris in the eye he felt like something hit him in the stomach.

"Did you see where he went?" panted Tariq. Faris raised his right index finger an inch or two and pointed to a place what seemed like a mass grave. "Over there, the very place they buried our soldiers after torturing them." Said Faris. Tariq remembered that his younger brother was also buried in that massive grave with other soldiers. He grabbed his rifle, now with his right hand "I can handle him. You look fatigue; I am not seeing another of my friends lose his life in my arms."

He knew very well that his friend would try to talk him off so he sprinted into the graveyard without giving a chance to his friend to talk him off. He checked his sides for a few seconds there, and then he saw him. He was ready to fire his rifle, the other had his rifle ready too and Tariq vaguely saw the other soldier's index finger moving. Yet there was no gunshot so he thought he was mistaken. Tariq hesitated, did not take the shot but kept walking towards his enemy. Likewise, the enemy did not engage but let go of his rifle at once, once they were only twenty yards away from each other. Tariq recognized his enemy; his name was Emil. They knew each other for a long time; they grew up in the same neighborhood.

"Get away from that rifle" bellowed Tariq, looking tense. Emil took a few steps away never breaking the eye contact and did not say anything. Every now and then, Tariq tried to pull the trigger but his finger did not seem to be following his orders anymore. Tariq frowned and briskly checked his corners. "I will not take one more life." He muttered to himself barely audible. Then took a breath still holding his rifle very tight he waited. He waited for the other

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to say something, one thing to save him from killing someone he once called "a friend". However, the longer he did not speak the more Tariq felt more and more apprehensive.

Checking his back for the last time, he slowly walked towards Emil. Every step he took made his feet feel more and more clay cold. Then he aimed at a corpse which wore a similar uniform and whose blood has not yet coagulated. He closed his eyes took a deep breath and shot the corpse on the head which was then, unrecognizable. Then he took a deep breath, unable to lift his eyes from the ground, "Change clothes with him and run away from this village. Mind you, do not let anybody see you. Do not ever come back!" Growled Tariq, tightening his teeth afterwards. Emil, who seemed taken aback, immediately did what Tariq had said. Moreover, took off without saying anything.

He could not hold his tears anymore and he felt as if something cold was dissolving in his stomach. He wiped his tears on his left sleeve and walked back to his fellow soldier. Now holding his rifle on his left hand loosely. Faris looked relieved, even thrilled if possible, to see his friend. After a few silent seconds past, Faris grabbed Tariq on the shoulder and said, "I heard the gunshot, the last one is now in slumber, is he not?" vaguely and not making an eye contact. Tariq who seemed very pale did not say anything for a couple of seconds and eventually "Yes, fast asleep." He muttered, his eyes fixed on the ground. They both remained silent for a couple of minutes and eventually they went to a safehouse nearby to report the news to their commander on the phone.

After a few days, although the village was still almost completely deserted, Tariq went walked to his house armed with nothing but a pistol, wearing casual clothes. He did not see anybody on his way home yet he knew that his mother would be home waiting for him. "By now, at least a couple of people should have heard the news and returned to their homes." He thought. He did not feel well that day; he had a headache about which he did not care much. He kept his eyes on the ground on his way home feeling slightly apprehensive.

He still felt like he was on the battlefield, he had to check his clothes every now and then in order to acknowledge that it was all over, at least in their village. By the time he came to the gate of house's garden he felt a little peaceful, at least for a couple of seconds, when he touched the gate with his left hand, it felt cold. He pushed the gate and went for the door. He knocked the door three times in a row but nobody seemed to be coming. Then he heard the creaky sound of the gate opening behind him. He did not look back; his eyes were still on the

ground. Then he heard a loud noise behind him and felt like his headache became more painful, he closed his eyes and sank into cold darkness.