

## The Last Light of Autumn

“There’s only four of them over there,” Mitchell ducks back down below the level of the roof, “I can drop two if you lot can get the other two.”

“It won’t just be four of them,” I look at Mitchell and load the last four shells into my rifle, “They wouldn’t leave something like that unguarded.”

“Maybe,” Mitchell shrugs, “Tell you what I *do* know, I know that they’re warm in there and we’re out here, I’ve got no intention of spending another night out here when I could be spending it in there.”

“It’s a couple of hours before the sun goes down,” I look up at the shining white star in the sky.

“Like It’ll make a difference,” Mitchell looks at me.

“It’ll be dark when the sun goes down,” I glance upwards, “The temperature won’t change, but it’s easier to sneak up on things when they’ve all been looking in the light for hours.”

“Good point,” He slumps back against the edge of the roof and sighs, “Sorry, this close to being warm all night without ten layers of blankets, I can almost taste it.”

“There’s time,” I nod, “Come on, we wait for everyone else to get here then we take care of it.”

“Or we take it now and keep it for ourselves,” He grins.

*There’s an edge of insanity in that grin, too many years without hope...*

“And that’s exactly what they thought,” I glance over the side again, “And now the whole area is saturated with the bodies of those they had to kill to keep it theirs.”

“Yeah, but we know what we’re doing.” He glances over the side again.

“Which is exactly what everyone else down there said when they had a go,” I nod, “We wait, when everyone’s here, we make a go of it.”

The sun is down when the rest of the gang arrive, Denise, James and Richard only...

“Where’s Johnny?” I look over at Denise.

“Still running to the south I’d have said,” Denise looks tired, moreso than usual, her face gaunt with the lack of sleep and food, “He decided that it wasn’t going to be a good idea to take on the power and made a strike out for the river.”

“The River?” Mitchell looks incredulous, “That’s over fifty miles from here.”

“Yeah, but they’re still taking people on and they’ve got a functioning Hydroelectric there.”

“Suppose,” I nod

“So what’s the plan,” Denise glances over the side, “I mean the place used to be a bunker didn’t it?”

“Closest thing to it,” I take a look down through the binoculars, “It’s a nuclear power station and the core went active only a few months ago, there’s enough power in there to keep us running for centuries if we’re careful.”

“How’d they manage to get an unused core and get it installed, *and* get it started without any other power...?” Denise sits against the edge of the roof next to me. “Surely everyone would have heard about it.”

“We did,” I smile

“Point, Reckon they’d want to share?” Denise raises an eyebrow

“Would you?”

“Point...”

“Time’s wasting,” Mitchell takes his rifle and moves close, “I’ll take the two on the roof, you just make sure you get the two on the ground.”

“And then what?” I look at him, “The gates still got a few million volts running through it, how are you planning on getting through that?”

“No guards outside make it a lot easier,” He smiles and lines up on the first target.

I line up on the guard standing outside the door to the left as Denise lines up on the right. Mitchell nods and three rifles spit bullets without noise at the targets, I see Mitchell shift and fire again. He raises his head from the scope and then looks back down it again.

“What’s wrong?” I ask

“I definitely hit them,” he doesn’t take his eye from the scope, “But they’re still standing.”

I sight down the rifle at the one I shot, still standing. I adjust the magnification to see that there’s a huge ragged hole in the neck where I hit them, but the body is still standing. Looking to the rear of them, it looks like there’s a framework of some sort keeping them up.

“Already dead,” I say, “What about yours?”

“Yep,” Denise nods, “Been dead a while from the looks of it.”

“Why would anyone stack cadavers outside the building,” Mitchell brings his rifle down.

“To make everyone think there were more people in the building than there are?” I look at each of them in turn, “And if they have to staff the outside with dead people, there can’t be that many live ones in the building either.”

“Come to think of it,” Richards looks from one end of the building to the other, “I can’t see any lights on inside either.”

“Don’t want to advertise they’ve got power?” Denise looks at him, “I wouldn’t.”

“What if they don’t have power?” I muse, “What if they only said they did, I mean, all we’ve got to go on was the guy that told us, and he was going the other way...”

“One way to find out,” Mitchell looks down at the gate, “I’m going to take a look.”

“We’ll cover you from here,” I lean out over the top of the roof, “Denise, you take the left side, James the right, Richard cover the main doors, and I’ll stay focussed on Mitchell.”

It’s ten minutes before I sight Mitchell on the road leading in, he’s got his rifle slung over his back so as not to get anyone worrying when they see him.

“Anything?” I don’t take my eyes off Mitchell

“Nothing,” Denise says.

“Nothing,” James and Richard speak at the same time.

Mitchell gets close to the gates and I see him take the tester from his pocket, pressing it to the fence. He’s too far away for me to see what he’s doing or the results from the tester, but he looks back up at me and raises his thumb, then pushes at the gate, sliding it open without any resistance and walking up to the front door. There’s no resistance from that door either and he motions for us to come down to him.

*Fastest building descent ever...*

We gather at the door and push inwards, the insides of the plant are dark, no sign of any light anywhere. I wind up the torch I’m carrying and strap it on to the underside of my rifle, turning back to the door and pushing the bolt closed on the inside. I advance into the darkness with the others following, everyone in close formation. We make our way to the middle of the plant and see the control room high above. I look all around and then turn back to the others.

“What’s going on here...?” Denise turns to look at me, her face underlit by my torch, “This place was supposed to be active...”

“Don’t know,” I nod up, “I think we need to take a look up there before we write the place off.”

“I...” Denise shakes her head and looks around, “I feel a bit...”

James turns to face me and pitches forwards to land on his face. I look around the room as Richard drops down to his knees and then falls sideways.

“Gas...” Mitchell looks at them, then up to me before falling backwards, landing hard on the deck.

I turn as my limbs feel heavier, looking upwards as I see lights from above, the ground rushes up towards me.

I wake with the others laid next to me, all of us tied down with thick ropes. I realise with a shock that it's still dark outside and the light above us is coming from the overhead sockets.

"Oh yes..." A man's voice from the gantry above the lights, "This place definitely works."

The sound of footsteps coming down the stairs and Denise strains to look at him.

"You..."

The face comes into view above me and I try to angle my head.

*The guy fleeing from the station...*

"Why are we tied up?" I look up at him

"Easier to handle people when they don't get ideas about running around," He says, "Besides, you wanted heat and light didn't you?"

"All we were after," I nod, "You were the one that told us about this place."

"There's a few of us here," he says, "We take it in turns to go out there and tell people about this place, it's easier than waiting for people to find out."

"But why...?"

"Well, we're not going to run out of power anytime soon," He nods, "and most people are put off by the 'guards' we leave out there, so we have to get attention somehow."

"Looks to me like you don't really want the attention," Denise looks up, "I mean if you wanted people to come here, you wouldn't be gassing them when they got here."

"You misunderstand why we want people here," The man looks down at her, "You see, the rest of the world is out of power, so we have what they need. Our problem...?"

He turns his back to me and picks up something metal from the desk behind him, turning back, the light reflecting off the blade as he raised it above Denise...

"We ran out of food..."