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Mr. Kay

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Bombs Away

“Turn your key!” yelled Mitchell.

“I can’t. I won’t,” Joshua cried. He knew the consequences of not turning his key, but he knew what would happen to everyone else if he did. Mitchell pulled out his gun and pointed it at his friend.

With tears flowing from his eyes he said, “Turn your key, Joshua.” Joshua stared at his hand holding a trigger that could kill millions in minutes.

“The innocent don’t deserve to die for the decision of one!”

Mitchell cried out, closed his eyes, and shot his friend.

Joshua woke up and found himself on his couch in a cold sweat. His breathing intensified and he could feel the pulsing of his heart through his throat. Joshua turned over and looked at his digital clock, the green light shining bright throughout his living room, 2:35 *a.m.* Joshua stood up and walked to his dining room table, he knew that if he falls asleep again the same frightening image would appear. Over the past decade, Joshua has observed the Army’s new technology evolve into something catastrophic.

Joshua rested his head in his hand and cried uncontrollably. He paid no mind to the alarm outside his bunker calling all to an assembly. Once he realized this, he quickly ran to his freezer and grabbed the cold spoons. He placed both spoons on his eyes to reduce the swelling. If others

had known he'd been crying they would view him as weak and unqualified for his position. After all, Joshua's job is preparing the nukes for launch. As he ran out the door and headed towards the assembly hall he ran into Mitchell. "Have you been crying again?"

"Is it that noticeable?"

"Yeah. What dream did you have this time?" chuckled Mitchell.

"The same one," Joshua replied while staring at his feet.

Mitchell looked at his friend with a saddened expression.

Joshua's been trained for years to prepare for a situation where he was given orders to turn his key. In 2040, he was trained as a guard of numerous war airplanes alongside Mitchell Thompson. They had grown close together but were too afraid to admit it. They didn't want to suffer if one of them was killed. However, over time their relationship had grown unconsciously and soon they realized the aching feeling they had when one was placed in battle.

It's been ten years since, and Joshua has now been placed in a room full of computers containing code that is so difficult to bypass even the programmers have difficulty. What once lay a two-man mission became a computer system incapable of understanding the ramifications of such an act. Joshua clenched the keys in his hand until he felt the sharp end pierce his skin. He realized there was no chance of changing the commands of a computer once the code was written. During the assembly he was told they had made a change in the National Military Command Center or the "War Room," but he was unaware that the change would be this extreme.

The walk back to his bunker was long. Deep in thought, Joshua didn't realize Mitchell was trying to get his attention. Joshua's mind had outrun his brain. The outside noise was now

muffled by the sound of keyboards clicking and loud thoughts piercing his mind. Mitchell noticed that his friend was unwell and grabbed him by the shoulders. “Hey! You alright?”

Joshua focused on Mitchell’s concerned face, “Yeah, I’m alright.”

“Don’t lie to me, Josh. Look at you. Your eyes are red and your face is weary.”

Joshua doesn’t reply and falls into Mitchell's arms. “What do I do, Mitch?”

Mitchell hugs his friend tightly, “About what?”

“With the new system in the War Room?”

“That’s what’s been on your mind?” Mitchell exclaimed. “You made me think someone died.”

“Someone might as well have,” Joshua replied.

“What makes you say that?”

“After those computers are installed you know there’s no turning back.”

“Turning back from what?”

“Turning back to what’s left of humanity in the Army. It’s a lot easier to kill people when you don’t see it or even make the executive decision. If we don’t have to go through that anymore we lose our knowledgeable decision-making.”

“What are you saying?”

“I’m saying that this action is going to make dehumanization easier.”

“And how do you propose you keep that ‘last bit of humanity’ in the Army?”

“I don’t know, but I know that I can’t sit back and watch.” Joshua released his grip on Mitchell and continued to walk back to his bunker. Mitchell watched his friend leave, *I fear what he may do next. Knowing Josh he will stop at nothing until he is satisfied, even if the consequence is death.*

As Joshua walked, his mind got the best of him, *I need to come up with a plan quickly before the president initiates his attack on North Korea.* Captain Lee had told him that President Edward planned to launch an attack to end Kim Jong-un's reign once and for all. This made no sense to Joshua. He believed that they should take out the leader and let the innocent escape. Joshua tried to express his thoughts, but Captain Lee wouldn't hear of them. Afraid of interfering with the commands of Captain Lee, Joshua decided to keep his thoughts and plan exclusively between himself and Mitchell.

In the middle of the night, Joshua showed up at Mitchell's bunker. "We need to talk. I have a plan."

"A plan for what?" Mitchell replied mid-yawn.

"A plan to save millions of lives."

"Oh no! Please don't do this. Why did you join the military if you are just going to plot against it?"

"I joined the military to save innocent lives, not take them."

Mitchell sighed and led Joshua into his dining room so no one could eavesdrop on their conversation. "What's this plan of yours?" He reluctantly asked.

"Before I joined the Army I was a nerd when it came to programming."

"No seriously, why are you even in the Army?" Mitchell murmured.

"What was that?"

"Oh, nothing."

"Okay. Well, if my next position is manning the War Room that contains all the software for the nukes then all I have to do is try and reverse the code somehow."

“You say that like it’s going to be so easy. Yet you fail to ignore that there is still someone else in the room with you managing the computers.”

“Not unless I get there before them.”

“That’s a risky assumption.”

“Whatever, better risking my career than so many lives.”

“I don’t think you understand. Your life could be in danger too,” Mitchell told his friend with tears in his eyes.

“I’d rather risk this than live with regret eating away at me.” Joshua understood Mitchell’s fear for him, but he couldn’t live with himself if he didn’t go through with it.

The next morning, Joshua went to the War Room early. He had been catching up on his code all night. As he walked he noticed the pistol placed on the right side of his uniform. He’s never acknowledged its existence before, but suddenly, when he feels in danger, it screams his name. His hand slowly caressed the barrel of his gun and he realized the power that such a small device contained. With each waking moment, Joshua’s fear of what this world’s devices are capable of terrified him. He doesn’t think this type of power should be held within a small group of people who have dehumanized civilization making it easier and easier to kill with each passing day.

Once Joshua finally reached the doors leading into the War Room, he held onto the keys he once needed to launch a death machine. He didn’t want to lose the last bit of hope he had about what the military once was and can be again. As he walked through the doors he saw Captain Lee sitting at the computer typing effortlessly. “What are you doing here, sir?” Joshua asked in a broken voice.

“Adding some last-minute code to the computer.”

Joshua's body trembled with every click of the keyboard.

"And what are you doing here, soldier."

"Just came to add a little bit of code as well."

"Oh really. Would that happen to be the code to prevent our launchings?"

"What lead you to that assumption?" Joshua laughed nervously.

"Don't play dumb with me Joshua! I know what you are trying to do!"

"How would you know anything?"

"You're on the military's property, son. I have eyes and ears everywhere."

Joshua clenched the keys in his hand as he grit his teeth. He could feel his hand slide down his side until he felt the cold metal. "Do you have no sympathy for the innocent who you and your country are killing?"

"Our country! You decided to be a part of this! You should have read your terms and conditions before signing up. I never trusted a man like you. So weak, manipulative, and gullible." Captain Lee exclaims with one finger slowly moving to the trigger.

Mitchell watched outside the cracked doors. Without Joshua's knowledge, he had followed him. He couldn't let him go alone. When he saw that they both had a hand on their guns he pulled out his. It all happened so quickly. Joshua had pointed his gun at Captain Lee, but Captain Lee was already prepared. When shots were fired Mitchell ran in and aimed at Captain Lee and took the first shot he could. It felt like an eternity as they watched him slowly fall to the floor into a river of blood. Joshua fell to his knees as he stared at the warm blood on his hands. Mitchell ran towards him and held Joshua tightly. "It'll be okay."

When the others heard gunshots they came running. They saw Captain Lee on the floor and saw Mitchell and Joshua. "Let's leave this the same way we started, together," Mitchell said

as he smiled while tears flowed down his face. Joshua looked at his friend and at that moment he was the happiest man alive. He knew nothing would stop the Army from making it easier to kill. So, he calmly accepted his fate in his friend's arms. The soldiers aimed their guns at Mitchell and Joshua as if they were a firing squad. Joshua and Mitchell held on tightly to each other with complete content.