

Chapter 10: A different direction

Julmargo: The Truth of the Three

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I was beyond exhausted. Julka took me by the hand and pulled me out of the tiny Tico. Marmar held the door of a black SUV open and told me to lie down on the back seat. I didn't ask any questions. I just collapsed and fell into a deep sleep.

The next time I opened my eyes, we were already moving—the tops of trees were blurring past the window. Julka was sitting next to me, still holding my hand.

"Where are we? What's happening?" I asked slowly.

"We're approaching Strzegom. We had to change our route after that incident at the station," Marcel replied from the front.

"How did they find us there?" I asked, sitting up.

"They're actively hunting us. They must have been close. And I... I made a mistake," he explained, his voice tight. "I wanted to connect Grandma's tablet to the Wi-Fi at the station, and I was a bit... careless."

"Careless?" Julka chimed in, her eyebrows shooting up.

"There was no guest internet, only the staff network. I instinctively asked myself what the password could be, and when I looked at the router, I started capturing the incoming data packets automatically. I began reading the code and intercepted the password. It took maybe ten seconds, but apparently, that was enough," Marcel said.

"That means you can read radio waves too," Julia commented, a mixture of surprise and admiration in her voice.

"And it means I can decrypt WPA security used to protect networks," Marmar added. "Maybe it'll come in handy one day, though I'd rather it didn't have to."

"How long after you cracked the password did the agents show up?" Julia asked.

"A moment. Two minutes at most. The station was in the middle of nowhere, so either they are literally everywhere, or it was an obvious location to stake out and we just walked right into it. We won't figure it out now."

"Don't blame yourself; you acted on instinct," I said, trying to reassure him. "I didn't stop to think when they grabbed me from behind, either. It's strange... in moments like that, I feel like time slows down, almost coming to a standstill, and my senses sharpen. Everyone around me becomes slow-motion, but I move even faster than usual. This time, I chose the shortest path of reaction. Instead of wasting time turning around, I scanned what was in front of me and saw the reflection of three agents in the glass of the fridge. I

pulled the two holding my wrists down until they hit the floor. I pushed the third one back. That's when the windows blew out. You probably saw the rest."

"It looks like we still have a lot to learn about ourselves," Julia summarized. She paused, looking out at the road. "But for now, we have to change our plans. They know we were trying to head west. I hope they don't know more, but we definitely need to do the exact opposite of what they expect. Grandma, please pull over here by the shop."

Grandma slowly pulled into the parking lot and cut the engine. "We basically stole this car," Julia continued. "That family having a picnic in the clearing has definitely reported the theft to the police by now. If the agents are monitoring police scanners, they're tracking it. Not to mention, we've ruined that family's trip. Look through the windows—do you see any cameras?"

We all looked around, but it seemed we had parked in front of a local grocery store on the outskirts of Strzegom. There was no visible surveillance.

"Grandma, leave the keys inside. Everyone out. We need to get away from this spot as fast as possible. Even without the agents, the police will be here soon."

We stepped out and headed east along a residential road. In that

moment, the exact destination didn't matter—the priority was moving in the opposite direction of our original plan and putting distance between us and the car. After about ten minutes, Julka pointed meaningfully toward a taxi waiting at a stand. She signaled for us to get in, promising to answer questions later. No one argued.

"Good morning. Kobierzyce, please," she said politely to the driver, gesturing the way.

"Whoa, that's about 60 kilometers. You sure? That'll be around 180 złoty," the driver replied, looking a bit surprised.

"Yes, yes, please just drive," Julia answered.

"As you wish. Let's go."

Julka smiled at us and put a finger to her lips, asking us to hold our questions just a little longer. That was our sister. She always knew what to do; she always had a Plan B, and if necessary, a Plan C!

About an hour later, we got out at a parking lot on Robotnicza Street in Kobierzyce.

"Come under the shelter, we need to settle on the next step," Julka requested, her voice calmer now. "It looks like we've lost them for now, and we've moved in a direction no one expects. However, we still need to get near Trento. At some point, we'll have to turn west again, but for now, we'll head south through Brno, all the way to Vienna in Austria. International buses pass through Kobierzyce—it's only a matter of time before we catch the right

one."

Julia paused to see if anyone disagreed. We all just nodded. No one had a better plan.

"Marcel, we need a permanent internet connection that can't be traced back to us. Any ideas?" Julia continued.

"Sure. The source needs to be brand new and independent. We'll buy a mobile router and a 20GB data pack. Since we're staying within the European Union, that should be enough—as long as Gogo doesn't binge-watch Power Rangers!" Marcel joked.

We all cracked a smile. I tucked my hands under my armpits and lifted my chin, trying to show just how serious and mature I could be!

While Julka and Marcel went to a nearby electronics store, Grandma and I stayed under the shelter.

"Ignas, I am very proud of you," Grandma said, unable to hide her emotion.

"But why? I didn't do anything extraordinary... besides wrecking a gas station!" We both laughed loudly.

"You did. Without worrying about the danger, you saved Kasia and Staś. You trusted Julia and made a decision in the blink of an eye. Thanks to you, they are safe now, and they will never forget what you did for them."

It felt good. I felt valued, and for the first time since the

disappearance, I felt ready to keep moving forward. Julka and Marcel returned, we connected the tablet to our new internet source, and we began searching for the next bus to Vienna.

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