

"Radioactive"

I directed the radiation external beam at the spine of my patient. Its fluorescence was blinding, glaring angrily with radioactive Iodine-131, ready for combat. The new gamma ray technology had advanced in the last few years of the 22nd century. He was pale and cadaverous, with a thin, frail body outline. His hollow eyes were almost transparent with a ghastly look from his malignant, bone-devouring, parasitic cancer. I had gone into this field of radiation oncology because my best friend was consumed by this monstrous disease that victimized innocent bodies. Now I could only pray that my procedure was precise enough, targeting this amalgamating beast and would contribute to my patient's healing journey before he could return to living the quotidian life he deserved.

"How much longer until we land in Chernobyl, Ukraine?" I pestered the robo-stewardess impatiently.

"Two hours, sir. Would you care for some of our tomato sandwiches or our sweet biscuits?"

"Yes, thank you," I muttered, as I took the savory bun.

Each trip I took to study medicine abroad was my mental portal to learn about the world and look beyond my mere, small bubble world back home. To pass time, I picked up the entertainment magazine titled *Traveling to Paradise* shoved into the front pocket, glanced at the date March, 2186, and thought to myself, "This is actually a current magazine unlike my other flights with old material." Soon I quickly became immersed in the beautiful scenic palm trees and the waves reflecting the sunlight. "We have arrived at our destination," boomed the pilot over the loudspeaker.

As if on cue, people jostled each other through the packed isle and I got swept out of the airport into Chernobyl. I was there because I wanted to further study the effects of radiation and its link to cancer. I walked over to an old wood sign stating: *Welcome to the radioactive sight of Chernobyl History: While testing the turbines in the nuclear power plant there was a big radioactive leak underground, killing over 70,000 people and thousands more developed cancer.* Of course, my body had been exposed to radioactivity from my years of work, but not even close to the level of these helpless souls. Every day, I dedicate my life to treating faultless patients who have been imposed with cancer, leading to their inevitable suffering. No one could have survived, I grieved, and instantly longed to do more for the world than just in my office. As a physician, I had permission to study and scan the remains on site and go inside huts, but first I needed to put on protective clothing. While I put on the lead-lined apron, the only element resistant to the deadly radiation lingering in the grounds, I reaped the smell of musty dust that clogged my nose as I added the face mask. Scanning my surroundings, I chose a particular looking hut and trudged over jagged rocks into the abandoned, lifeless abode. *Beep beep* alarmed my geiger counter (an instrument used for detecting radiation) that meant this area had high radioactivity. *Beep-beep-beep-beep* Why was it malfunctioning?

Suddenly, I felt my heart drop to my stomach. Turning back, a grim girl with a putrid aura emitting from her glared at me. Her dirty hair was tousled, and she had dirt-crusting nails and bare cracked feet. I was bone-chilled by her sudden appearance and started to back away when I noticed something. Tangled and hidden in her mangled hair and distorted features, a touch of loneliness lingered in her piercing, arctic blue eyes as if she had no one. Hesitatingly, I summed up all my courage to ask warmly, "Where is your family?" followed by a sign language heart.

Answering my question without words, her eyebrows raised in puzzlement, confused and deprived of human affection and interaction. I could guess that her family was dead and she was lonely. I pondered this for a few seconds, the only accident that happened here was Chernobyl...200 years ago.... Could this be true!? How did she survive? The only way to find out was to search for evidence and for that I had to touch her. Stiffening my arm, I touched her and her body tensed up with my foreign interaction, but she started to relax after a few seconds. I immediately jerked my hand back, revolted in shock. Her skin turned burnt red, emanating a fuming electromagnetic energy as if she sensed it around her, possibly more so from me. Studying her face, I noticed crumbles of white and dirt around her mouth, remains of a recent meal. White was not a natural color around here, meaning that the white was coming from the dead corpse bones strewn about here by the many. Bone, I realized with a shudder. She was feeding on the radioactive bones of the dead men, women and children. Sympathizing with the animalistic creature she had become, I offered her help. "Come back to the lab with me. We will rehabilitate you and heal your body to live amongst us. We will protect you," I managed to convey.

It was as if I could see her mind processing this with all the gears whirring, maybe some of her deeply buried emotions starting to surface, her eyes turned to a deluding softness. I slowly guided her out of sight and into the undergrowth to head for the plane. Suddenly, she let go of my assuaging hand. I turned back and my heart was jolted by her penetrating, ravenous stare. It was then I realized that she had mutated into an irreversible, genetically superior immortal species, but in the absence of emotion, had de-evolved socially. She had become inhuman, beastly and the ultimate predator. My live oxygen infusing through my body plus my radioactive bones would give her molecule-splitting atomic energy. And I... was her prey.