

2034

The whole world lies in ruins. Mankind is almost annihilated. Due to the high level of radiation cities became unsuitable for living. Beyond them, according to rumors, there are endless parched deserts and wilds of mutated forests.

But remnants of the civilization gradually become just memories, spin with stories and turn into legends.

From the date when the last plane left the ground, passed more than twenty years. The corroded railroads lead to nowhere. The air is silent, and the radiomen hear only the cheerless howls while million times tuning in frequencies on which broadcasted New-York, Paris, Tokyo and Buenos Aires.

Only twenty years have passed since that how *it* happened. But human yielded the supremacy on Earth to new species. Twisted radiation and other consequences of what happened a better people suited to the changing world.

The human epoch has ended.

But they do not want to believe it. They are only a few tens of thousands, and they do not know whether anyone survived something else, or they are - the last people in this world.

They live in Moscow metro - the largest anti-nuclear shelter ever built by man. In the last refuge of humanity.

Almost all of them were in the subway that day, and it saved their lives. The hermetic locks protect them from radiation and monstrous creatures from the surface, the worn out filters purify water and air. Assembled by skilled craftsmen dynamos produce electricity, in underground farms champignons are cultivated and pigs, but the poorer people are not averse rats.

The central control system collapsed long ago, and the stations turned into diminutive state, people who rallied around the ideas, religions, water filters, or simply because of the need to reflect enemy attacks.

This is a world without tomorrow. There is no place dreams, plans, hopes. Feelings give way to the instincts, chief among them - to survive. Survive at any cost.

Chapter 1

They have not returned either Tuesday or Wednesday, or Thursday, as stipulated deadline. The first roadblock was carrying on duty around the clock, and if the sentinel heard even remotely appeals for help have noticed at least a faint reflection of the beam on the wet dark walls of the tunnel ahead to Nakhimovsky prospect would be immediately sent shock troops.

Tensions mounted with each passing hour. Best fighters, perfectly equipped and trained for just such jobs do not close our eyes for a second. A deck of cards, for which always pass the time from alarm to alarm, the second day gathering dust in a drawer in the guardhouse. The usual chatter was replaced by anxious talk short, those - Heavy silence: everyone was hoping to hear the echoes of the first steps of returning the caravan. Too much of it depended.

Sevastopol has been transformed by its people, any of which - from a five-year old boy to an old man - was able to handle weapons, in an impregnable bastion. Bristling with machine-gun nests, barbed wire, spikes, even welded rails of the anti-hedgehog, this station is a fortress - seems to be completely invulnerable - could fall at any moment.

Her Achilles heel was a constant shortage of ammunition.

Faced with the fact that we had to withstand the daily inhabitants of Sevastopol, the residents of any other station, and certainly never thought it would defend, flee like rats from the flooded tunnel. Even the powerful Hanseatic League, tallying all the costs, hardly dared to throw the necessary forces to defend Sevastopol. Yes, its strategic importance was obvious, and yet the game is not worth it.

Electricity was really very expensive. Enough road to Sevastopol, built one of the largest hydropower station, the proceeds from its supply Hansa ordered ammunition boxes, and still remain in profit. However, many of them had to pay not only the patrons but also for its crippled, broken lives.

Ground water, the blessing and the curse of Sevastopol, wrap it from all sides, like the water of Lethe - fragile barge of Charon. They have rotating blades dozen water mills, built by local self-taught in tunnels, caves, underground channels - wherever she could get engineering and reconnaissance groups, giving light and warmth of the station and a good third of the Rings.

They relentlessly undermined support, corroding cement adhesions ubayukivayusche gurgled quite close outside the walls of the main hall, trying to lull inmates, finally, was not allowed to blow up the excess, unused stretch, from Sevastopol on incessantly, like an endless poisonous centipede, crawl into a meat grinder, move the hordes nightmarish creatures.

Residents of the station, the team of rushing to Hell ghost frigate, were forever doomed to seek and to plug the new holes, because their boat sprang a leak long ago, but the pier, where he could find peace, just do not exist.

And while they were supposed to reflect the attack after attack coming on to the boarding monsters with Chertanovskaya and Nakhimov Prospect - crawling out of ventilation shafts, seeping with swift muddy streams through sewage, bursting from the southern tunnels.

It seemed the whole world is against Sebastopol, not sparing any effort to wipe them shelter from the map of the metro. But until recently they clung to their station, but it seems they have nothing in the universe is no choice - yes it is, in general, and it was.

But no matter how skilled local engineers may be, any experienced and ruthless men nor brought up to Sebastopol, they could not save his house empty, with no lamps for projectors, without antibiotics and bandages. Yes, the station to generate electricity, and the Hansa was ready to pay him a good price, but the rings were other suppliers, and their own sources, but without makeup outside Sevastopol hardly would have lasted a month. And worst of all was left without ammunition.

Well-guarded caravans went to Serpukhov each week to the open of the Hanseatic merchants credit to buy everything you need and not stopping even for an hour, go home. And while the rotating earth, yet flowing underground river and held metrostroevtsami erected arches, the order should not change.

But this time the convoy was delayed. Impermissibly detained for a long time, so that is already becoming clear: there was something terrible, unforeseen, from which failed to protect either battle-hardened heavily armed guards, nor the years to build relationships with the leadership of the Hanseatic League.

And all would do, if acted connection. However, with the ring held telephone wire that had happened, the message is discontinued as early as Monday, and sent in search of breaking team returned empty-handed.

* * *

Lamp with a broad yellow shade hung very low over the round table, illuminating the yellowed sheets of paper with a pencil drawn graphs and diagrams. Light bulb was weak, Watt forty or more - but not because it had to save electricity - just with this for a long time Problems Sevastopol was not, but because the cabinet that the owner did not like bright light. Ashtray overflowing with cigarette butts crappy local samokrutok, oozing pungent bluish smoke, built on low-ceilinged room in a lazy, sticky clubs.

The station master rubbed his forehead, throwing his arm, looked at one eye on the clock - the fifth time in the last half hour. Then he snapped his fingers and rose heavily.

- We must make a decision. Further delay makes no sense.

Tough old man in a dappled jacket and worn the blue beret, sitting across the table, opened his mouth, but coughed and waved his hand to disperse the smoke. Then, frowning with displeasure, said:

- Come on, I'll say again, Vladimir Ivanovich: from the south we can not remove anyone. Roadblocks under such pressure that barely holds. Over the past week there three wounded, one seriously - and this despite the consolidation. Loosen the south I'm not the ladies. There is still always needed and two triples scouts - to patrol the mine and mezhlineyniki. Oh, and the north - except for those soldiers from the host of the brigade is not free, I'm sorry, look where you want.

- You are the commander of the perimeter, and you look - the head snapped. - And I'll deal with their affairs. But an hour later the group already has come out. You must understand, we're in different categories of thought. You can not only solve immediate problems! And if there's something serious?

- And I think Vladimir Ivanovich, you decided to do a fever. 5.45 in the arsenal of two full boxes, and a half weeks just enough. And I have lying around the house under the pillow yet - the old man smiled, revealing a large yellow teeth - a box just get enough money. The trouble is not in cartridges, and in humans.

- Let's better I'll tell you what the problem is. After two weeks, if not adjust the supply will have to drop the hermetic locks in the southern tunnel, because without the ammunition we do not retain. Hence, we can not inspect and repair the two-thirds of our mills. A week later they will fail. Power outages in Ghanzi anyone not be happy. At best, they will look for other suppliers. At worst ... Yes there electricity? The tunnels have been empty for almost five days, no man! And if there is failure? And if a breakthrough? If we cut now?

- Stop! Power cables are the norm. Tsiferki on the counters are running, the current goes, Hansa consumes. It would collapse, you would immediately recognize. Even if, say, a diversion - we would not have the phone cut off, and our wire. And about the tunnels - who here goes? To us the best of times nobody zahazhival. Then one Nakhimovsky prospect alone is worth ... there is no break, and foreign merchants to us will not agree well. Well, the bandits, of course, heard, not for nothing that every time we let go of one alive. I say, do not panic.

- Well you talk - Vladimir Ivanovich growled, picking up a bandage over an empty eye socket and wiping his forehead with sweat.

- Three women. While no longer true, - has softly told the old man. - And stop smoking, you know same as me it can not breathe, and he himself herbs! Let's cup of tea or something ...

- It's always please - Head rubbed his hands. - Istomin at the device - he muttered into the phone - tea and me, Colonel.

- And the officer on duty call, - asked the commander of the perimeter, taking off the head takes. - I give orders about three.

Tea at Istomin was always his own, with ENEA - and special, a perfect grade. Few could afford it - delivered at the other end station, three furred Hanseatic duties favorite tea of the station became so expensive that he himself would not indulge their weaknesses, if not for old ties to Dobryninskaya. With someone there he once fought together, and since then once a month, the head of a caravan returning from Hansa certainly brought a smart package, followed by Istomin always came by himself.

A year ago, it began with tea disruptions to Sevastopol came a disturbing rumors about a new and terrible threat that hangs over the ENEA, and maybe have the whole orange twig: on the surface of it down the unknown and unseen before mutants were rumored, who could read minds, almost invisible, and also virtually indestructible. It was rumored that the station had fallen, and that the Hanseatic League, fearing invasion, has undermined the tunnels for the Mira. Tea prices have soared, then he was quite gone, and Istomin was not a little alarmed. However, after several weeks of passion themselves subsided, and the caravans returning to Sevastopol with the cartridges and tubes, again drove the famous sweet tea. What could be more important?

Commander of the broth poured into a china cup with a gold border cleaved sites and inhaling the fragrant steam, Istomin pleasure even shut his eyes for a moment. After you draw some and myself sat down hard on a chair and rang a silver spoon, stirring saccharin tablet.

Both were silent, and about half a minute it was the only melancholy tinkling sound, echo in the tightened environmental tobacco smoke darkened room. And then it cut off, almost hitting the beat, flying out of the tunnels hysterical alarm bells.

- Alert!

The commander of the perimeter with incredible for its years of rapid jumped up and rushed from the room. Somewhere in the distance a lone gunshot slapped, then he picked up the machines - one, two, three, rattled down the platform savvy soldiers' boots, and already from far away came a stentorian bass Colonel, thrower orders.

Istomin was also reached for hanging in closet shiny foldable machine gun to police, but then grabbed his lower back, gasped and waved his hand, returned to table and prihlebnul tea. Opposite him was smoking, cooling down, thrown Colonel cup, and lay forgotten in a hurry blue beret. Head of the station he made a wry grimace and in a low voice had a dispute with the commander who had fled, returning to the old themes with new arguments, which are not thought to remember during the altercation.

* * *

At Sevastopol hodilo many grim jokes about why the neighboring Chertanovskaya so called. Although the mill power plants were scattered far in the tunnel between two stations, nobody even thought about that for the convenience of take and learn a vacant

Chertanovskaya. Engineering Group, under the guise gets to her for the installation and inspection of distant generators, did not dare to approach the platform is closer than one hundred meters. Going into this campaign, almost all except the most notorious atheist, secretly baptized, and some just in case even saying goodbye to their families.

The station was not good, and felt that anyone who approached her at least half a kilometer. Heavy shock troops, which Sevastopol unknowingly sent earlier on Chertanovskaya, hoping to further expand its territory, returned battered, opolovinennymi, but most did not return at all. Seasoned soldiers, scared to hiccup before falling under the chin with saliva, can not cope with the chill, even sitting so close to the fire, which started smoldering clothes, with difficulty remembering what they had to endure - and never their memories did not look like one to another.

It was believed that somewhere beyond Chertanovskaya lateral branches from the main tunnels dived down, woven into a grand labyrinth of natural caves, rumored to be swarming all sorts of evil spirits. This is a place on the station conventionally called "the Gate" - conditionally, because none of the living inhabitants stations have never seen him. The truth is known there was a case when at the dawn of development through its seemingly found a great scout, has overcome Chertanovskaya. Group brought with it the transmitter - something like a wired phone: radio in the local tunnel has never worked because of the inexplicable and unavoidable noise. On this communicator and handed the phone to Sevastopol, that the scouts are at the entrance to the passing almost straight down a narrow corridor. More he did not have time to report, but a few more minutes, until the cable broke, crowded around the negotiating unit commanders Sevastopol listened as one after another, break off heart-rending, full of terror and inhuman screams of pain fighters reconnaissance. Shoot one of them did not even try, though each of them that perish, it was clear that conventional weapons can not protect them. The last commander of the group fell silent, a mercenary, a thug with a China-town, gather a collection of little fingers of their enemies. He apparently was at some distance from the tube uronenny radio operator, and therefore understand what he said was not easy, but, listen to his dying sobs, the station learned prayer - from simple, naive, believing that parents teach young children.

After this incident, all attempts to break through for Chertanovskaya submitted, even going to leave Sevastopol, and retreat to the Hanseatic League. However, the damn station seems to have been thus the boundary pillars, which measured out in the metro limits of human possessions. Penetrate beyond his creation procedure plagued the inhabitants of Sevastopol, but at least it can be killed, and well-organized defense reflect these attacks could be relatively easy and almost bloodless - as long as enough ammunition.

Occasionally crept up to the checkpoint, these behemoths, which managed to stop only with the help of exploding bullets and traps with high-voltage discharge - the invention of local Kulibin. But more often patrol still had to deal with creatures not so scary, though extremely dangerous. Called them up here once in Gogol's home: ghouls.

- There is one more! Above, in the third trumpet!

Top spotlight, tore the mount, pull as hanged, hanging on one wire, pouring harsh white light of the space outpost before - then snatched lurking in the shadows of gnarled figures sneaking mutants, then hid them again in the darkness, then glanced blindly, in the eyes sentinel. Walked around, cowering and immediately springs distorting, krivlyayas, wrong shade: people threw animal, monsters - human.

The checkpoint was very conveniently located: tunnels in this area came together - just before the Apocalypse Metrostroj started the reconstruction, which was never finished. On this site Sevastopol built this small castle: two machine-gun point, half meter thick cover of sand bags, hedgehogs and barriers on the rails, high-traps at close approaches and carefully thought-out system signaling. But when the mutants were such a wave, as in the day, it seemed - a little more, and the defense collapses.

... Heavy is something boring drums, blowing his nose bloody blisters and amazement looking at my wet crimson palm. The air around his jammed "Pecheneg trembling from the heat. Then, a brief snort, he confidently buried his face into the shoulder of his neighbor, the mighty warrior in a closed titanium helmet, and fell silent. After a second front came a bloodcurdling scream: a ghoulish attack.

A soldier in a helmet raised above the parapet, pushing fell on his bloody machine gun, raised his machine gave a short burst. Nasty sinewy beast, covered with dull-gray skin, have rushed forward, squaring knotted front paws and planning down to the skin folds. Moving ghouls with absolutely unimaginable speed, leaving hesitated slightest chance, so watch this patrol carried only the most agile and skillful.

Lead whip broke squeal, but the inertia of the already dead ghoulish

inertia continued to drop: стопятидесятикилограммовая carcass bump into the parapet, knocking out sandbags cloud of dust.

- Like all ...

Seemingly endless stream of creatures, a couple of minutes ago, gushing from the hanging from the ceiling of huge felled pipes, and in fact, exhausted. Sentinel steel carefully chosen because of the fortifications.

- Stretcher here! Doctor! At the station it urgently!

Who killed the last vampire burly attached to the barrel of machine bayonet and slowly set off a round scattered on the area of fire killed and wounded creatures, pressing toothy jaws of each boot and causing a short, balanced attack with a bayonet in the eye. Then he leaned back wearily to the bags, turned his face to the tunnels, raised, finally, the helmet visor and lit it.

Reinforcements from the station arrived, when everything has already been decided. Got hard to breathe, cursing their sores, and the commander of the perimeter in an unbuttoned jacket soldier.

- Well, that's where I'll get him a triple? From the heart of Wild Child?

- What are you, Dennis M.? - Just not looking commander of the mouth, said one of the lookouts.

- Istomin requires urgently send three scouts to Serpukhov. Worries for the caravan. And where I'll take him another three? And because it is now ...

- About the caravan so personal and can not hear? - No turning back, asked smokers.

- No, - has confirmed the old man. - But time and yet so much has passed. What is more dangerous in the end-all? If we exposed the south today, a week later, this caravan will be no one to meet!

A soldier shook his head and fell silent. Did not answer it, and when the commander, grumbled a few minutes, asked for the remaining post of sentinel, to see if someone volunteered to enter into the very three that still have to detach to Serpukhov, - otherwise, the station agent, that he was wrong, proest old full baldness.

But without wishing to difficulties in recruitment have arisen - many sentinel sat at the station, and imagine anything more dangerous than the defense of the southern tunnel, it was not easy.

Of the six volunteered in this campaign Colonel selected those in whom, in his opinion, Sevastopol on the hour needed the least. The thought was quite successful because of the Serpukhov sent three to the station are never returned.

* * *

For the past three days, ever since came in search of a caravan triple intelligence, the commander felt that behind him whispering, and everywhere met sidelong glances. Even the most lively conversation died down as he walked past talking, and in a tense silence reigned everywhere, wherever he went, he seemed an unspoken requirement: to explain and justify.

He is just doing its job: providing security perimeter defense of Sevastopol. He was a tactician, not a strategist. Where every soldier was on his account, the Colonel had no right to just toss them, sending in all sorts of dubious, if not a mindless job.

Three days ago the Colonel was sincere in this conviction. But now, when everyone frightened, frowning, doubting eyes lashed by his self-righteousness, he hesitated. Running light scouts would not be required and hours to do all the way to the

Hanse and back - and this is subject to possible fights and waiting at the borders of independent halts. Means ...

Ordered one for myself not to let the commander was locked in his room, rested his head against the wall, flushed and muttered under his breath, for the hundredth time going over the options of what could happen with traders and intelligence.

People in Sevastopol are not afraid - of course, with the exception of the army of Hansa. The notoriety of the station, repeatedly distorted the history of several witnesses about what price is given by its inhabitants survive, caught a shuttle and fans listen to their stories, spread over the subway, doing their job. Quickly realized what a benefit from this reputation, the authorities station has attached to its strengthening their hand. Informants and caravan, travelers and diplomats have been officially blessed lie, so terrible, of Sevastopol, and the entire beginning of the Serpukhov line segment.

Discern behind this smokescreen of appeal and the true significance of the station could only be one. Just a couple of times in recent years by ignorant thugs tried to force to break through the roadblocks, but the Sevastopol military machine, perfectly oiled former military, without any complications were ground scattered detachments.

In any case, pushed the triple was clearly instructed in case of any threat in any way engage the enemy in a clash, and as soon as possible to come back.

There was, of course, and Nakhimovsky Prospect - the place is not as bad as Chertanovskaya, but still quite dangerous. A stuck upper hermetic locks can not completely protect them from intrusions from the surface. Undermine the outputs Sevastopol did not want: Nakhimovsky "lift" to use local stalkers. Alone through the prospectus, as he was called at the station, nobody dared to go, but there are also cases to triple could not repel vodivshimsya there creatures.

Collapse? Breakthrough of the groundwater? Sabotage? Undeclared war with the Hansa? Now he, and not Istomin, was obliged to respond to the wives of the missing scouts who come to the colonel, to sad and looking like abandoned dogs, look into his eyes, hoping to see to find in them the promise comfort. He had to explain everything is not defining too many questions, still believing in his garrison. Reassure all worried that gather in the evenings after work at the station hours zasekshih time-caravan to be silent or quietly discuss, as we now have.

Istomin said that in recent days he is increasingly asked why the station dimmed lighting, and demanded to be included on the old lamp power. In this case, reduce tension and no one thought the lights were burning, and so in full force. The darkness deepened not at the station, as human souls, and even the brightest mercury lamps could not overclock it.

Restore telephone service to the Serpukhov and failed, and for the week, which took place since the publication caravan, a colonel, like many other Sevastopol, have lost a very important, rare for the inhabitants of metro feeling of closeness to the people.

While working relationship until the caravans went regularly to the Hanseatic League had fewer days' journey, each one living in Sevastopol was free to stay or go, everyone knew that only five spans of their station started now underground, civilization, humanity, a part of which he himself felt.

So, perhaps earlier felt abandoned in the Antarctic explorers, for the sake of scientific research or high wages voluntarily doomed himself for months to combat the cold and loneliness. Prior to the mainland - a thousand miles away, and yet she is somewhere nearby, while operating the radio, and once a month over their heads hear the roar of engines aircraft dropped on parachutes boxes of canned meat.

But now the ice floe on which stood their station, broke away, and every hour was carrying farther - into the icy blizzard, a black ocean, the emptiness and the unknown.

Waiting dragged on, and a vague concern for the fate of the colonel sent scouts to the Serpukhov gradually turned into a grim certainty: these people he would never see. Withdraw from the defense perimeter of the three new fighters to exactly the same throw them toward some unknown danger, it is quite possible - certain death, and not finding in this case out of the situation, he simply could not afford. Omit germovorota, overlapping the southern tunnels and collect a big shock group he still seemed to be premature. If only someone took the decision for him now ... The decision is bound to be wrong.

The commander of the perimeter of breath, opened the door and, looking around furtively, and he called the sentry.

- Cigarette not to treat? But this is extreme, the more I do not give, no matter how welcome! And do not tell anyone, okay?

* * *

When Nadia, thickset talkative aunt in holey downy shawl and covered in his apron and brought a hot pot with meat and vegetables, sentinel brightened. Potatoes and cucumbers, tomatoes were considered here the most exquisite delicacy: besides Sevastopol, vegetables could regale except in a couple of the best restaurants in the Ring or the Polis. It was not only a complex hydroponic installations needed for the cultivation of saved seeds by botanists, but also the fact that few people in the metro could afford to burn kilowatts of electricity, to diversify the soldier's menu.

Even on the table to the boss vegetables fell only on holidays, usually as their pampered only children. Istomin had to compete fairly with the cooks, to convince them to add one hundred grams of boiled potatoes and tomatoes to the relying on odd-numbered pork - to maintain morale.

Idea worked: a cost Nadia, in Babskii awkwardly off his shoulder machine, lift the pan lid, like wrinkles on the faces of sentinel became smooth. Under such a dinner to continue their trite conversations about sginuvshem caravan and it is delayed, the scouts do not like.

- Today is the day that's why some of the Komsomolskaya remember - he said, stretching in its aluminum bowl of potatoes with a spoon, a smiling old man in a quilted jacket with metropolitenovskimi stripes. - That would go and see ... What is a mosaic there! For my taste, the most beautiful station in your Moscow.

- Come on, Homer, you just lived out there, here and love her until now - immediately said an unshaven man in a fur hat. - And on Novoslobodskaya stained glass? And on Mayakovsky - these air columns and frescoes on the ceiling?

- I always liked the Revolution Square - shyly confessed to the sniper, a quiet serious man in years. - Sam know that stupidity, but here's all these tough sailors and airmen, the border guards with dogs ... With Children love this station!

- And that nonsense? There's a pretty even peasants depicted in bronze - support his Nagy, scraping the remains from the bottom of the pan. - Hey, the team leader, look no dinner stay!

Sitting alone high, broad-shouldered fighter slowly approached the fire, took his drink and returned to its original location - closer to the tunnel, away from people.

- It generally appears at the station? - Whispered the fat man, nodding at his drowning in the darkness very broad back.

- More than a week bezvylazno sitting here - as quietly replied sniper. - Spends the night in a sleeping bag. As he had only kept my nerves ... although maybe he just likes this thing. Three days ago, when little ghouls Rinat not bitten, he then went and sought them by hand, about fifteen minutes. Returns - boots all krovische, automatic, too ... enough.

- No man but a machine ... - put the lanky gunner.

- I agree with him, even sleeping beside feared. Saw that his face?

- And I, on the contrary, only with him at ease and feel - the old man shrugged his shoulders, called Homer. - What are you attached to him? This is the beauty of plants is important. A Novoslobodskaya your way, a complete lack of taste! These stained glass sober look impossible to me ... Also, stained glass windows!

- A mosaic on the theme of collective farms in polpotolka - not bad taste?

- And where did you find on the Komsomolskaya such panels?

- Yes, all this devilish Soviet art, or of collective farm life or pro-pilot heroes! - Sold fat.

- Serge, do not touch the pilots - has warned a sniper.

- And Komsomolskaya - trash, and Novoslobodskaya - shit - there was a husky low voice.

The unexpectedness of fat harvested choked words and stared at the foreman. Others, too, immediately fell silent, waiting for the sequels: one almost never took part in their conversations, even to direct questions answered very briefly, or not answering at all.

And so he sat back on them, never taking his eyes off the vents of the tunnel.

- The Komsomolskaya arches are too high, slender columns, the entire platform with ways to sweep - both on the palms, and transitions to block uncomfortable. And on Novoslobodskaya all the walls in the cracks as they may obscure them. One grenade will suffice to bury the entire plant. A stained-glass windows there are already long gone. Burst. Fragile thing.

Although the criteria have been disputed, no one dared argue. After a brief pause, the team leader threw:

- I go to the station. Homer take with me. Change will be an hour later. Arthur is in charge.

Sniper for some reason, jumped up and nodded, although the foreman to see it but could not. The old man stood up and began hurriedly laid out to collect their belongings around in a knapsack, and not having finished up his potatoes. To the fire fighter came already in full battle dress, in his indispensable helmet and a bulky backpack.

- Good luck.

Looking at the two lit by retreating figure of the stretch - a mighty brigadirskuyu and wizened Homer, sniper chilly rubbed his hands together and shivered.

- Something is cold. Podkinte log, eh?

All the way the foreman did not utter hardly a word, just said - is it true that Homer was formerly assistant engineer, and before that - a simple crawler tracks. The old man looked at him suspiciously, but did not deny it, although at the Sevastopol he always told everyone that was promoted to engineer, but about their work crawler generally prefer not to, considering it unworthy of it.

In the office of the station foreman came in without knocking, briefly giving the honor guard stepped aside. Homer stood timidly at the door, shifting from foot to foot, watching the meet to go up in astonishment from the table Istomin and the Colonel - disheveled, tired, confused.

The foreman pulled and put directly on the paper istominskie his helmet, ran his hand over shaved bald crown. In light of the lamp was seen as terribly disfigured his face: the left cheek was blown down and plowed a huge scar, as if from a burn, eyes turned into a narrow slit, the corners of her mouth from ear crawling, wriggling, thick purple scar. While Homer and felt that already used to this person, now, like the first time when he saw him, tickled inside a nasty chill.

- I'll go to the ring - is not healthy, he was shot.

The commander of the perimeter of the exchanged glances with the head, frowned, about to protest, but only a doomed gesture.

- Solve itself, Hunter ... You still do not out argue.

Chapter 2

Zhavshiyasya old guard at the entrance: the name he used to hear at the Sevastopol was not necessary. Not even a name, a nickname - as he himself - no, certainly not Homer, but the most ordinary of Nikolai Ivanovich, the naming of Greek mifotvortsa already here at the station, for his boundless love for every kind stories and rumors.

... "Your new team leader" - the colonel said patrol, with sullen curiosity gazed broad-shouldered freshman in Kevlar and a heavy helmet. Anyone ignoring the etiquette, indifferently turned away from them: the tunnel and the building seems to have interested him far more than the people entrusted to him. Had come up familiar subordinates outstretched hand squeezed, but he submitted did not. Silently nodded, remembering another nickname, and the blaze in the face of blue cigarette fumes, denoting the distance. In the shadow of the elevated took deadly, dull eyes gleamed mutilated-loop-hole. Insist none of them neither then nor later did not dare, and now two months it was called simply "the foreman." Decided that the station is to fork out for one of those expensive mercenaries that completely dispense with the past and no name.

Hunter.

Homer silently chewed strange word on the lips. More suited to the Central Asian Shepherd Dog than in humans. He smiled quietly to myself: Wow, I also remember that there were such a dog. Where did it all in my head come from? A fighting breed, with kutsym docked tail and a cut to the very ears of the skull. Nothing more.

A name, if you repeat it to myself a long time, began to seem vaguely familiar. Where he could hear it before? Drawn by the endless stream of gossip and tales, it is once

hooked it into something and settled to the bottom of memory. And the top have already caused a thick layer of mud: the names, facts, rumors, numbers - all of these useless information about other people's lives, which Homer with such curiosity listened and tried so hard to remember.

Khan, ter ... Maybe a repeat offender, with the head of which Hansa announced a reward? The old man threw a touchstone in the whirlpool of their sclerosis and listened. No past. Stalker? It does not. Field Commander? Closer. And, like, even the legendary ...

Homer once again surreptitiously glanced at the impassive, as if paralyzed face foreman. His dog's name was still surprisingly passed.

- I need a triple. I'll take Homer, he knows the local tunnels - without turning to the old man, and without asking his consent, went on the foreman. - Still one can give at its discretion. Walker, a courier. I will go today.

Istomin nervously shook his head, approving, and then, recollecting himself, raised his eyes to the colonel. Those frowning, too growled that he has nothing against, though these days, and fought desperately with the station for each free fighter. From Homer to consult, it seems, no one was going, but he did not think to argue: despite his age, the old man had never refused such assignments. And on this he had his reasons.

The foreman pulled away from the table pood his helmet and headed for the exit. Pausing for a moment at the door, threw Homer:

- With family say goodbye. Get ready for a long time. Patrons do not take it, I'll give - and disappeared into the doorway.

The old man leaned was, for him, hoping at least in general terms, to hear, what to prepare for this hike. But when he appeared on the platform, Hunter was in the top ten of their broad steps, and catch up with his homer did not, but just shook his head, watching.

Contrary to the usual one brigade remained bareheaded: forgotten, lost in thought about something else, or maybe he is now short of breath. And when he passed a flock of lounging at lunchtime young svinarok, a rustling behind him with disgust: "Oh, girls, wow, what a freak!".

* * *

- Where did you just dug up? - Obmyaknuv relief in his chair and stretching out her plump hand to cut a pack of cigarette papers, said Istomin.

They say that leaves that are smoked with such pleasure at the station, stalkers were collected on the surface somewhere almost in the Bitsevsky park. Once Colonel joke brought to a stack of "tobacco" dosimeter, he really started badly smacked. The old man dropped precipitously, and cough, tormented him at night, straschaya lung cancer, became gradually recede. Istomin is a story about radioactive leaves refused to believe,

not without reason to Denis Mikhailovich recalled that in the subway in one degree or another "light" All that out of nowhere.

- Old Dating - reluctantly answered the Colonel, after a pause, dovesil - Formerly he was not. Something happened to him.

- Yeah, judging by his face, something definitely happened to him - the chief chuckled, and then looked back at the entrance, though Hunter could linger and accidentally overheard.

Commander of the security perimeter of sin was to complain that the foreman unexpectedly returned from a cool mist of the past. Hardly appeared on the station, he became almost a major foothold of the perimeter. But quite believe in his return to Denis M. could not until now.

News of the death of Hunter - a terrible and strange - the tunnel echoes traveled around the metro last year. And when two months ago he appeared on the threshold of the colonel's closet, he hurriedly crossed himself before you unlock the door. Suspicious ease with which the risen overcome roadblocks - like going through the soldiers - forced to doubt that the miracle that was good.

In the sweaty door viewers could see the seemingly familiar profile: bull neck, scooped up the light skull slightly flat nose. But the night's guest somehow stood half-turned, lowered his head and making no attempt to razredit thickened the silence. Throwing reproachful look at the uncapped bottle of Braga, who was standing on the table, the Colonel deep breath and pushed back the bolt. Code prescribed to help her - without making a distinction between living and dead.

Hunter looked up from the floor only when the door opened, it became clear why he hid the second half of his face. Afraid that the old man simply does not know. Even navidavshiysya any Colonel, to whom the command of the garrison of Sevastopol was just an honorary pension, compared with the previous stormy years, seeing him, frowning, as if scalded, then guiltily laugh - sorry, could not resist.

Guest in response did not even smile, no smile, he never once since that night. Over the past few months brutal scars disfigured his face, had little Poggio, but the former Hunter's old, he still almost no way resembles.

Explain his miraculous escape and the subsequent absence, he flatly refused, and all questions the colonel simply did not respond, though he had not heard them. Worse, he asked Dennis Mikhailovich *anyone* about his appearance not to report - a claim under the old debt. He had to strangle savvy, demanding to immediately notify the senior and leave Hunter alone.

However, inquiries have brought the old man gently. Guest him nothing was not implicated, and no one had long mourned no longer sought. The body, however, has not been found, but survival Hunter, he certainly would have given itself felt confident the colonel said. Indeed, he agreed.

But, as often happens with the missing, Hunter, or rather, his vague and embellished image surfaced in a dozen half-truths the myths and legends. It seems that this role suited him perfectly, and buried him alive to dissuade fellow he was in no hurry.

Mindful of their unpaid bills and making accurate conclusions, Denis M. calm down and even began to play along: when strangers Hunter did not mention by name, and without going into details, to join the secret Istomin.

Tom was, in general, all the same: his soup brigade practiced with a vengeance, dnyuya and sleeping on the front line in the southern tunnels. At the station, it almost was not noticeable: to come once a week, in your own bath day. And even if he got into the thick of it only in order to hide it from unknown pursuers - Istomin, never disdain the services of foreign players with a dark background, it is not embarrassed. If only fought, but really, it was all right.

After the first combat patrol grumbling, unhappy with the arrogance of a new commander, silent. Once he saw as he methodically, prudently, with an unearthly cold ecstasy destroys all tolerated the destruction of each of them something for themselves about him understood. Make friends with the reclusive brigadier no one else tried, but obeyed him implicitly, so that your deaf, strained voice, he never raised. It was in that voice is something of a hypnotic hissing boa, and even the chief of station was accepted meekly nod whenever Hunter turned to him - even without hearing it through, just like that, just in case.

For the first time in recent days the air in istominskoy office has become easier - as if there had just broken out and passed soundless storm, bringing a welcome relaxation. Argue more was not because of anything. A better fighter than Hunter did not exist, and if he perish in the tunnels of Sevastopol will be only one.

- I make arrangements for the preparation of the operation? - First suggested the colonel, knowing that the station master still talk about it.

- For three days you should be enough - Istomin flicked a cigarette lighter, narrowed his eyes - more we can not wait. How many people need, what do you think?

- A strike force waiting for orders, loans from other, there's still twenty people. If the next day for them, - the colonel shook his head toward the exit - nothing will be heard, declare mobilization. Will break.

Istomin, raised eyebrows, but instead argue inhaled deeply barely audible crackling-rolled cigarette. Denis M. Zagreb a few lying on the table ischerkannyh sheets and short-sighted bowing to the paper, he began to draw on them any one he understood the scheme, writing in the circles of the names and nicknames.

Break? The stationmaster looked over the gray Starikovskiy neck, floating through the haze of tobacco on a large metro, which hangs behind the Colonel. Yellowed and a greasy, spotted with ink markings - arrows forced marches and sieges of the rings, asterisks and exclamation marks checkpoints restricted areas, this scheme has been a chronicle of the last decade. Ten years, of which neither of the day was not without bloodshed.

Down from Sevastopol mark broke off just behind the South: the memory Istomin there is not no coming back. Long, branched rhizome creeping down the line remained pristine, like white spots on maps conquistadors first land on the West Indian coast. But Conquista Serpukhov Sevastopol line was too tough, here are unlikely to be enough and all the strained forces toothless from radiation sickness of humanity.

Now whitish mist enveloped the uncertainty and the stump of their God-forsaken branches that persistently stretched up to Hansa, to the people. None of those to whom the Colonel will order tomorrow to prepare for battle, not give up. On the Crimean War to destroy a man, which began almost three decades ago, did not end for a minute. When you live side by side with death, fear of death gives way to the indifferent fatalism, superstitions, amulets and animal instincts. But who knows what awaited them in front, between Nakhimovskom prospectus and Serpukhov. Who knows whether you can do it to break through this mysterious barrier, and it was there whether to tear.

He recalled his last trip to Serpuchovskaya: bazaar trays, couches tramps so dilapidated screen, followed by sleep and love each other, those residents that posostoyatelney. Its nothing had grown, there were no greenhouses, or pens for cattle. Thieving, brisk serpuhovchane fed speculation, reselling stale goods for a song bought from late, caravan, and to provide the citizens of the Ring services, which are the homes of those waiting for a court. Not the station, and the fungus-parasite outgrowth on the trunk of the powerful Hanseatic League.

Union wealthy trading stations Circle Line, Hansa aptly christened last memory of her German preimage, remained a stronghold of civilization plunging into a morass of barbarism and poverty subway. The regular army, electric lighting, even in the poorest small station, a guaranteed piece of bread to anyone with a passport was a coveted stamp of citizenship. Passports are on the black market were worth a fortune, but if the owner managed to catch the fakes Hanseatic border guards had to pay him his head.

Wealth and power Hansa was obliged, of course, its location: The ring beam line encircled the remaining branches, and interchange stations providing access to each of them and spryagaya them together. Shuttles, carrying tea and Exhibition Center, and the trolley, delivering ammunition from weapons yards on Bauman, preferred to unload their goods at the customs post near the Hanseatic and go home. It's better to pay less than in the pursuit of profits to venture across the metro journey that could end at any moment.

Adjacent stations Hansa sometimes join, but more often they were on their own and turned, with her connivance, in a gray area, where people were those cases involvement in the Hanseatic bosses who did not want to be caught. Radial station, of course, have

been inundated its spies and standing dealers bought it, but formally remain independent. Such was, and Serpukhov.

In one of the leading thereto spans ever stayed structure that failed to reach the neighboring Tula. Popular among sects and so marked on the dry circuit istominskoy Catholic cross, the train became lost in the middle of a black barren countryside. If it were not prowl the nearby stations of missionaries, avid for the lost souls, Istomin against sectarians and do nothing would have had. However, before Sevastopol God's sheep did not get a pass by travelers are specific obstacles have been repaired - except that slightly delayed their own soul-saving conversation. In addition, a second tunnel from Tula to the Serpukhov was clean and empty them and enjoyed the local caravan.

Istomin again glanced down the line. Tula? Gradually the village run wild, which fall to the crumbs from marching past the Sevastopol of convoys and ushlyh Serpukhov shopkeepers. Live, what a god send: Who mending various mechanical stuff, who goes to work to the Hanseatic border, sitting all day on his haunches in anticipation of the next superintendent of slave manners. Too poor live, but you do not have them in the eyes of untrustworthy slippery Serpukhov, thought Istomin, and order it a lot more. The danger, perhaps, rallies.

The next station, Nagatinskaya, his scheme was marked by a short dash - is empty. Half-truth: for a long time on it, no one was detained, but it happened, fumbling rabble of different color, leading the twilight, semianimal existence. In pitch darkness entwined escaped from prying eyes couples. Sometimes flare up between the columns of pale kosterok, who swarmed vague shadows tunnel murderers who had gathered for a secret gathering.

But the night stayed here only the most desperate or ignorant: not all of the visitors to the station were men. In whispering, jelly-like darkness, which was filled Nagatinskaya flashed occasionally, if a closer look, a truly nightmarish silhouettes. And, briefly frightening homeless, torn stale air heart-rending cry of lame duck, who drags the lair, there to eat slowly.

For Nagatinsky tramps did not dare to tread, and to the very borders of Sevastopol's defense stretched "No Man's Land". Fictitious: she, of course, were the hosts, who blyuli its borders, and even Sebastopol scout preferred to avoid encounters with them.

But now, in tunnels, there was something new. Unprecedented. Absorbing all those who are trying to pass a long time, apparently, studied the route. And who knows whether his station, even calling to arms all capable of its people, put enough army to defeat it ... Istomin rose heavily from his chair and padded to the map and otchertil indelible ink segment, which went from a point marked "Serpukhovskaya in point with the inscription "Nakhimovsky prospect. Next put a fat question mark. Wanted to paint him in the Prospectus, but it turned out exactly opposite of Sevastopol.

* * *

Homer knew that this war is not waiting for him in the northern tunnels, and at home. Making his way through a narrow corridor past the open door of office space, which housed the family Sebastopol, he trudged slower and slower as it approached its own door. We had to rethink tactics and rehearse their lines, time was running out.

- What to do? Order ... You know yourself what the situation. I did not even ask. What do you like a girl? Just ridiculous! Yes, I did not suggested itself! I can not. What! I can not, of course. Shy? The same desertion! - "He muttered under his breath, then examples of perturbations, strong tone, then disappears into minor and trying to gently persuade someone.

Reaching the threshold of his room, zabubnil all over again. No, the scandal was not to pass, but he was not going to retreat. Ruffled and ready for battle, the old man pulled the door handle down.

Of the nine and a half square feet - a great luxury, which he once waited in line for four years, mykayas their tents - two soldiers occupied a bunk bed, a meter - a dining table, laid by well-dressed skaterkoy, and three more - a huge, ramshackle pile to the ceiling newspapers. Live it all alone, one day the mountain will certainly be struck at him, and buried beneath them. But fifteen years ago he met a woman who was willing not only to tolerate the presence of so many dusty waste paper in his tiny house, but carefully straighten it without letting it turn its focus in the paper of Pompeii.

She even was willing to tolerate a lot. Endless newspaper clippings with alarming headlines such as "The arms race is gaining momentum," "The Americans tested a new missile", "Our nuclear shield gets stronger," Provocation Continues "and" patience is exhausted, as if they were wallpaper plastered walls from top to bottom room. His night vigil with Gnawed pen over a stack of school books at the electric light - a candle to such a pile of paper in their home and there was no question to go. His half-joking-polushutovskoe nickname, which he wore with pride, and the other pronounced with a condescending smile.

Much, but not all. Not his boyish desire to always get into the very epicenter of the hurricane, to see whatever it's actually - it's nearly sixty years! And no levity with which he agreed to any orders of the authorities, forgetting that just recently managed to climb almost from another world, three months lain with no jagged wound healing.

No idea that she might lose it, and again left alone.

After seeing Homer Watch - his turn to watch a once a week - she had never sat at home. Hiding from the disturbing thoughts, went to the neighbors, to work, not his shift - anywhere, if only to escape, only to forget for long that her husband was right at that moment may already be uncomfortable to lie on the sleepers lifeless, cold. And male indifference to death seemed to her silly, selfish, criminal.

At home, he found her by accident - ran to change clothes after work. Slipped his hands into the sleeves patched woolen sweaters, and so it remained - hair, dark with the

already well visible gray, though she was not yet fifty, disheveled, in a faded brown eyes - fear.

- Nicky, something happened? You have the same duty of late?

And Homer suddenly got sick right now to tell her about the decision, even though the responsibility for it lay on the other, and the wife he could with a clear conscience to lie, if it really forced. Wavered: to say immediately, or comforting her now, tell between times for dinner.

- Just do not try to lie - caught his wandering eye, she warned.

- You know, Len ... Here is the thing - "he began.

- Nobody? .. - She asked him directly about the main thing, the terrible, not wanting to even say out loud the word "died", as if believing that her evil thoughts can materialize.

- No! No - Homer shook his head. - On duty I just took off. To send Serpukhov - casually he added - and suddenly get away with it?

- But, - Elena faltered. - Because there ... Have they been returned? Ibid ...

- Come on, what nonsense. Nothing is not there - he hurried off.

The case took a bad turn: instead of having to endure a volley of abuse, and playing the scene of male pride, wait for pacifying, he had to endure something much more difficult.

Elena turned her back, came to the table, rearranged for some reason, from place to place the salt, straightened the crease in the tablecloth.

- I saw a dream - she coughed, schischaya hoarse.

- You have all the time they ...

- Bad, - stubbornly continued she suddenly pitiful whimper.

- What are you? What can I do ... It's an order - getting off, realizing that his tirades prepared a dime does not stand, he mumbled, stroking her fingers.

- Here let the one-eyed man himself and goes there! - Evil, already through her tears, she snapped, twitching away her hand. - Let the devil that there is a striped, with its beretkoy! And then they just tell him ... What's that? All his life with a gun at hand instead of the women slept! What does he know?

Bringing a woman to tears, to console her, not stepping over themselves, it is impossible. And Homer was ashamed and truly sorry for her, but so easy to break now,

promising to give up the job, calm, dry the tears - then to infinite regret, sorry about the missed opportunity? The latter, perhaps, an opportunity that dropped him in life, according to current standards is already prolonged procedure.

And he said nothing.

* * *

It was time to go, collect and instruct the officers, but the Colonel still sat in Istominskoy room, paying no attention to so annoying and seduces his cigarette smoke.

While the station-pensively whispering something, running a finger on his battered subway map, Denis Mikhailovich tried to understand: why is it all about Hunter? For his mysterious appearance in Sevastopol, a desire to settle here, finally, the caution with which the foreman appeared at the station - nearly always concealed his face helmet - it could be only one thing: Istomin was right, Hunter is still on someone ran. Earning extra points, settled on the southern outpost, replacing an entire brigade, and he becomes indispensable. Whoever asked now to give him what reward nor were promised to his scalp, nor Istomin, neither the colonel, and would not have thought to be inferior.

Shelter was perfect. At Sevastopol had happened outsiders and the local caravan, in contrast to the chatty shuttles from other stations, choosing a large metro, has never disbanded language. In this small Sparta, clutching at his own piece of land on the edge of the world, above all valued the reliability and ferocity in battle. And the secrets here know how to respect it.

But then why Hunter was throwing everything himself called a campaign to request that he have Istomin did not have enough spirit, and the risk of being recognized, go to the Hansa? Colonel for some reason could not believe that the foreman is really troubled fate of the missing scouts. And for Sevastopol he fought not for the love of the station, and on his own, known only to him the reasons.

Perhaps he is on a mission? It's a lot to explain: his sudden arrival, his reticence, the persistence with which he slept in a sleeping bag in the tunnels, finally, his decision to move immediately to Serpukhov. Why did he then asked me not to advise *others* ? Whom, how not to, he could be sent?

Colonel with difficulty overcame the desire to be treated with Istominskoy cigarette. No, impossible. Hunter, one of the pillars of the Order? That man, who owe their lives were dozens, perhaps hundreds, among them - and himself Denis M.?

That man - no, "he said gently to himself. But was Hunter, who has returned from oblivion, the man?

And if he carried somebody's orders ... Can he now get a signal? Does this mean that the disappearance of weapons convoys and triples intelligence was not an accident, but part of a carefully planned operation? But then what was the role of the foreman?

The Colonel shook his head sharply, as if trying to lose adhere to and rapidly swelling of leeches suspicion. How can he think that way about a man who saved him? Moreover, until now Hunter served stations flawlessly, and no reason to doubt himself did not give. And Dennis M., banning myself even think to call that "spy" and "Saboteur", made a decision.

- Come to tea, and I will go to the boys - an exaggerated "he said cheerfully, hrustnuv fingers.

Istomin broke away from the card and smiled wearily. Stretched, was, to my old disk phone to call the orderly, but then the machine rattled strained himself, forcing both startled and exchange glances. The sound they had not heard for a week: on duty, if he wanted something to report, always knocking on the door, but no one else at the station chief can not call directly.

- Istomin listening - he said gently.

- Vladimir ... There Tula on the wire - in the tube Snuffles hurried telephone operator. - Just heard a very bad ... I think our ... But here's the link ...

- Yes, put together already! - Roared the boss, attacking the table with his fist with such force that the phone is pitifully trenknul.

Telephonist frightened verse, then the dynamics of clicked, a rustling and the sound is infinitely distant, distorted beyond recognition voice.

* * *

She silently sobbed, turned to the wall. She could do more to stop him? Why he was so glad to grasp the first opportunity to get away from the station, under cover of a hundred times pereshtopannoy story about his boss' order and punishment for desertion? What did she not let him, nor did during those fifteen years, to tame him! And it pulls back into the tunnels, though he hopes to find there is something else, but darkness, emptiness, and doom. What he lacks?

Homer heard in my head the pangs of conscience as clear as if it had just been talking out loud. Felt prepogano, but it was too late to retreat. Opened, it was, her mouth to apologize, to warm to her, but choked, realizing that each of these words just pick up sticks in the fire.

And over her head weeping Moscow - carefully climb into the frame, hung on the wall color photo of Tver under a transparent summer rain, cut from the old glossy almanac. Once upon a time, during his earlier wanderings in the metro, all of Homer property was reduced to the clothes and this here picture. Other pockets were crumpled page with nude beauties, torn from men's magazines, but Homer, they could not replace a living woman, even for a few brief, shameful minutes. And this here's a picture reminded him of something infinitely important, indescribably beautiful ... and lost forever.

Scratchy whisper "Sorry", he came out into the hallway, carefully closed the door behind him and sank helplessly on his heels. The neighbors were opened, on the verge of playing frail colorless kids - a boy and a girl. Seeing an old man, they are frozen; somehow stitched and stuffed with rags bear, which they just could not divide, lonely plopped to the ground.

- Uncle Nick! Uncle Nick! Tell me a story! You promised that you tell when you get back! - They rushed to Homer.

He could not keep a contented smile. Forgetting about what happened a quarrel, he patted the girl on the sparse white hairs, with a straight face the boy shook his little hand.

- And about what? - He winked at them.

- About headless mytantov! - Gleefully yelled the boy.

- No! I do not want pro mytantov! - Skuksilas girl. - They are terrible, I'm afraid!

- And what do you want, Tanya? - Homer nodded encouragingly.

- Then about the Nazis! And the guerrillas! - Put the boy.

- No ... I like about the Emerald City ... - Sherbatov smiling, admitted Tanya.

- But I was telling you about it just yesterday. Maybe about how Hansa fought with Red?

- About the Emerald City, about the Emerald City! - Zagaldeli both.

- Well, - gave the old man, like a real storyteller, staring dreamily into the distance, trying not to laugh at the sight widened in anticipation of children's glazenok.- Somewhere far, far away Sokol'nicheskaya line, with seven empty stations for the three metro bridge caved, for thousands and thousands of railroad ties is a magical underground city. This city was enchanted, and sign up ordinary people can not. In it live sorcerers, and they can only go outside the city gates and back out. And on the surface of the ground above it is a huge mighty castle with towers, which had previously lived wise sorcerers. This castle was called ...

- Virsitet! - Shouted the boy and looked triumphantly at her sister.

- University - confirmed Homer. - When there was a big war and the earth began to drop nuclear missiles, the sorcerers went down into the city and bewitched entrance, so that they do not get angry people who started a war. And they live ... - he choked and stopped.

Elena stood leaning against the doorpost, and heard him, and Homer did not notice how she went into the corridor.

- I gather the kitbag - hoarsely uttered it. - How much I still have time?

He approached her and gratefully pressed her cheek against her cheek. It is awkward, embarrassed by other people's children, hugged him and asked quietly:

- Tell me that you'll soon be back. What are you all would be fine.

And Homer, for the thousandth time in his long life wondering irresistible feminine love of promises - it does not matter, maybe they do or not - said:

- Everything will be alright.

- You have such little old already, and kissing as if the bride and groom - the girl made a wry a face hostility.

Homer shrugged, saying, what can you do, and pulled his wife into the house.

- A father said it was not true, no no Emerald City - harmful voice told the boy to the last.

- Maybe no - shrugged Homer. - It's a fairy tale. But how are we in this world without stories?

* * *

Heard it was really horribly bad. Voice, break through crackling and rustling, Istomin seemed vaguely familiar - seems to be one of the scouts sent to the Serpukhov triples.

- At Tula ... can not Tula - tried to convey something he said.

- You knew you at Tula! - Shouted into the phone Istomin. - What happened? Why not return?

- Tula! Here ... Do not ... The main thing is not necessary ... - the end of phrases ate damn noise.

- What should not? Repeat, it is not necessary?

- You can not storm! In any case not by storm! - Suddenly uttered clear tube.

- Why? What the hell do you have going on there? What's happening? - Interrupted the chief.

However, the voice was no longer audible; dense wave freewheeling noise, and then the tube is dead. Istomin, but do not want to believe it and could not let her out of his hands.

- What is happening? ..

Chapter 3

Homer thought that he will remember for a lifetime view of sentinel, who parted with them at the extreme northern position. So look at the body of a fallen hero, when the honor guard volley gives him the last honor: with admiration and longing. Saying good-bye forever.

Living such views were not intended, Homer felt like he climbed a rickety ladder into the cockpit addl tiny, incapable of landing aircraft, converted by skilled Japanese engineers in the infernal machine. Salty breeze ruffled radiant imperial banner, on the airfield were busy mechanics, buzzed, revived, Motors, and pressed his fingers to his cap tubby general, the puffy eyes that sparkled samurai envy ...

- What a joy? - Grimly asked daydreaming old Ahmed.

He, unlike Homer, did not try first to find out what's happening on the Serpukhov. On the platform, remained silent, his wife, left, held the hand of the elder and the right - meowing parcel, which she gently settled down to his stomach had time to grow again.

- It's getting up in growth - and a psychic attack by machine guns, such enthusiasm. We are waiting for a deadly fire ... - tried to explain to Homer.

- These attacks are your so called accidental - Ahmed muttered, looking back, a tiny light at the end of the snout of the tunnel. - Just for those loonies like you. Normal people do not volunteer to climb up a machine gun. No one such feats are not needed.

- I mean, what business - not just the old man responded. - When you feel that your time is coming, start thinking: what, after I left? Remember me?

- As for you - not sure. And after my children will. They certainly will not forget ...Senior, at least - after a pause, he added seriously.

Gomer, stung, would snap, but the last Akhmedov appendage knocked him off his militant mode. And the truth - it is to him an old, childless, it is easy to risk their moth-battered skin, but the guy in front - very long life to bake about immortality.

Left behind the last lights - glass jar with a bulb inside, climb into a grid of reinforcement and crowded charred flies and winged cockroaches. Chitinous mass swarming with little noticeable: some of the insects were still alive and tried to crawl, as if aspiring bombers dumped into a common ditch with the others shot.

Homer inadvertently lingered for a moment in the flickering, dying of a weak spot of yellow light, which is squeezed from a tube, this burial ground. Air and scored after the others plunged into the darkness of ink, spilled from the borders of Sevastopol to the most up approaches to Tula, of course, if such a station is still there.

* * *

Buried in the granite floor plate sullen woman with two young children was not alone on the deserted platform. A little distance away, watching the departed, stood the one-eyed fat man wrestling with his shoulders, and in step behind him, talking quietly in an orderly lean old man in a soldier's jacket.

- Remains to be seen - scattered chasing extinguished cigarette butt from one corner of the mouth to the other, summed Istomin.

- You wait, and I'll do my chores - stubbornly replied the colonel.

- I tell you, it was Andrew. Senior last three, which we sent, - Vladimir Ivanovich again listened to the voice of the handset continues to ring insistently in his head.

- Now what? Maybe they did under torture, was forced to say it. Experts know different ways - arched eyebrow old.

- It does not appear - shook his head chief. - You have heard how he said it. There's something else going on, inexplicable. Cavalry assaults here will not get ...

- I'll give you an explanation in a jiffy - it reassured Denis M.. - Tula captured by bandits. Ambushed, our - who was killed, who were taken hostage. Electricity is not cut, because they themselves enjoy, and do not want to spook Hansa. But the phone is switched off. What's the story with the phone, which is working, it does not work?

- His voice was so ... - as if not listening to him, bent his Istomin.

- Yes, what a voice! - Colonel exploded, forcing a delicate orderly retreat a few steps. - Pens you pins under his fingernails, you still will not like! A locksmith by ticks in general can be a bass on the tenor for life remake!

He already had all clearly, he made his choice. Allow from doubt, he again felt like a horse and a sword in his hand herself requested that there not moan Istomin.

He did not hurry with the answer, giving vskipevshemu colonel to let off steam.

- Wait - soothingly but firmly he said finally.

- Two days - the old man folded his arms across his chest.

- Two days - nodded Istomin.

Colonel spun on the ground and stamped in the barracks: he is not going to waste precious hours. Commanders shock troops already an hour waiting for him at the headquarters, located on the two flanks of a long plank table. Just empty chairs at two opposite ends: his and istominsky. But this time will have to start without the manual.

The care of Denis M. stationmaster paid no attention.

- Funny how we have changed roles, right? - Whether to him, whether for himself turned Istomin.

Without waiting for an answer, turned and ran into a confused look orderly, waving his hand, let him go. Colonel who flatly refused to allocate at least one extra fighter not know, I thought the chief. Something feels old the Wolf. But here is not whether it brings the scent?

Istomin himself his own prompting quite different: hide. Wait. Strange call only strengthened the bad feeling: the Tula Sebastopol heavy infantry were to meet face to face with the mysterious, invincible enemy.

Vladimir rummaged in his pockets, found a lighter sparks. And while over his head raised ragged smoke rings, he did not budge and did not take his eyes from the dark throat of the tunnel, staring in fascination at him like a rabbit in a boa enticing palate.

Finished his, shook his head and walked to him. Emerging from the shadows at a respectful distance behind him followed by an orderly. And on the platform were only two stark shapes - dumb mother and her hushed frightened child.

* * *

Deaf-click - and ribbed tunnel vaults lit by a good three dozen meters ahead. Hunter lantern size and power more like a searchlight. Homer silently gasped - at the last minute he could not get rid of the silly little thoughts that the foreman would not put the light on because his eyes are completely cmogut without it.

Joining the dark stage, he is even less has come to resemble an ordinary person, and, perhaps, the man at all. His movement gained beastly grace and impetuosity. Lantern, he seems included only for his companions, he also relied more on other senses. Taking off the helmet and turned his ear to the tunnel, often listened, and even Homer strengthening suspicions from time to time froze to pull the nose rusty air.

Silently gliding a few steps ahead of the rest of it did not look back, as if oblivious of their existence. Ahmed, rarely on duty at the southern gate, and not accustomed to the eccentricities foreman, an old man in bewilderment poked in the side - what is it with him? He just shrugged his shoulders: is there in a nutshell explain that?

Why do they do it needed? Hunter seemed to be felt in the local tunnels to confidently Homer, for which he himself had prepared, and the role of native-conductor. But the old man, ask him, could tell a lot about these places - and tall tales, and the truth, sometimes far more terrifying and bizarre than most incredible stories of bored with the lonely fire lookouts.

In his head he had a subway map - unlike istominskoy. Where the scheme of the station gaping emptiness, Homer could cover their notes and explanations of all the free space. Ventilation shafts, open or canned premises, cobwebs interlinear compounds. On his scheme for the South - through a single down of Sevastopol - a line branched off the branch, growing into a giant jar metrodepo "Warsaw", braided veins dozens of dead ends-tanks. Depot Homer, with its sacred awe before trains, was a place dark and mysterious, like the elephant graveyard. About him the old man could talk for hours - there would be students who are ready to believe him.

Land Sebastopol-Nakhimovsky Homer considered very difficult. Safety rules and common sense here required to stay together, move slowly and cautiously, carefully survey the walls and floor in front of him. And even in this stretch, where all the hatches

and the cracks have been bricked up and sealed three times Sevastopol engineering teams, in any case it was impossible to keep undisguised rear.

Vsporoty lantern beam darkness coalesce immediately behind them, and something invisible but palpable from the bad attention watched triple insolent, disturbing its fragile peace. Fragmented echoes of steps, reflecting from the walls of countless tubing, and somewhere in the distance howled miserably trapped in the mine ventilation air. Slowly going in the crevices of the ceiling, fell down the large viscous drop - maybe just water, but Homer was trying to dodge them. So, just in case.

* * *

In ancient times, even when swollen on the surface of the city-monster was alive his feverish life, and the subway still seemed restless townspeople just heartless transport system - even then still quite young Homer, whom everyone simply called Kolya, with a lamp and an iron box tools wandered its track.

Mere mortals the way there has been ordered, they were allotted only one hundred and fifty well-polished to a shine of marble halls and pasted colorful advertising close wagons. Every day, spending two to three hours a buzzing and swaying compositions, millions of people were unaware that they are allowed to see only a tenth of an incredibly vast underground kingdom, stretching under the ground. And so they did not reflect the true size of his, that are imperceptible to the door and the iron barriers, the dark side branches and tunnels closed for repairs perpetual transition, they diverted to the shiny rubber in the eyes of the pictures, defiantly silly slogans and wooden voice advertisements do not give to relax even on escalators. So, anyway, it seemed very Kole, after he began to penetrate the secrets of this state within a state.

Frivolous rainbow metro map that hangs in the cars, was designed to convince the curious that in front of them - purely civilian object. But its fun colored lines were entwined transparent branches of secret tunnels, which hung heavy clusters of military and government bunker, and the span were connected to a tangle of catacombs dug under the city still pagans.

In times of Kolya youth, when his country was too poor to compete with others in power and ambitions, and Judgement day seemed so far away, bunkers and shelters, built in anticipation of it, hoarded dust. But with the money returned and former arrogance, and along with it - the detractors. Already podernuvshiesya rust multi-ton iron doors have been opened with grinding, food and medical supplies updated, air and water filters - alerted.

And it's very handy.

Hiring in the subway was to him, non-resident and needy, is akin to joining a Masonic lodge. From outcast unemployed he turned into a member of the powerful organization, lavishly paying those humble service he could give her, and promises to give communion to the innermost secrets of the world order. Earnings, which promised handbills on the hiring, Cole seemed very tempting, and requirements for future crawlers tract was not made hardly any.

Far from reluctant, he at once an explanation of his new colleagues began to understand why the Metro is forced to entice employees higher salaries and allowances for the harm. It was not a busy schedule and not a voluntary waiver of daylight. No, they talked about the dangers of a different kind.

Ineradicable gloomy rumors about the hell he is a man of skeptical turn of mind, he did not believe until the bypass of a short blind ferrying never returned his friend. Look for it for some reason did not - Shift doomed gesture - and after him also disappeared and all the documents proving that he has ever worked in the subway. Kohl - the only one who in his youth and naivete could not come to terms with his disappearance, some of the highest in a whisper, looking around, finally told his friend "took". Therefore, who, if not Homer, to know that bad events occurred in Moscow's vaults long before the metropolis became extinct, parched breath of Armageddon ...

Having lost a friend and touched the forbidden knowledge, Kohl could get scared and run away, quit this job and find another. However, it so happened that since his marriage of convenience to the metro has grown into a passionate affair. Satiated foot wandering in the tunnels, he passed the initiation rite as an assistant engineer, took a more lasting place in a complex hierarchy of Metro.

And the closer he got acquainted with this unaccounted wonder of the world, this nostalgic for the ancient labyrinth, unclaimed Cyclopean city upside down and reflected on its prototype in Moscow brown earth, the deeper and more fervent in love with him. This man-made tartare was unconditionally worthy of this poetry of Homer, at worst, a sharp pen of Swift, who would have found him to be stronger than a piece Laputa ... But his secret admirer and clumsy singer was just Nick. Nikolaev, Nikolai Ivanovich. Funny.

It would seem, can still love the Mistress of Copper Mountain, but love itself Copper Mountain? However, this love was mutual jealousy, till, in his hour had robbed Coley family, but saved his life.

* * *

Hunter stood on the ground so suddenly, that Homer, zaryvshiysya a quilt of memories, did not have time to get back at full speed and flew into the foreman's back. He made no noise, threw away the old man again and stood with his head bowed and turned to tunnel his mutilated ear. Like a bat, drawing a blind yourself room, he intercepted him alone audible wave.

Homer also felt otherwise: the smell of Nakhimov prospectus, the smell, which can not be confused with anything. Quickly as they came ... Whatever had to pay for the ease with which they have missed here. As if hearing his thoughts, Ahmed pulled from his shoulder and flicked the machine guard.

- Who's there? - Suddenly turning to him, sounded Hunter.

Homer chuckled to myself: who knows whom it has brought the devil? In helplessly open gate Nakhimov top as a funnel delayed the most unimagined creatures. But there have been at this station and their guests. Although they were considered benign, the old man to them harbored a special feeling - a sticky mixture of fear and loathing.

- Small ... hairless - tried to describe their foreman, and Homer was enough: they are.

- Flesheater - he said softly.

From Sevastopol to Tula, and perhaps in other lands Metro is a formulaic oath now had another, a new value. Literally.

- Predators? - Asked Hunter.

- Scavengers - hesitantly replied the old man.

These hideous creation, while similar to the spider and the primates, did not venture into the open to attack people and fed carrion, who was pulling on them popular among the station from the surface. At Nakhimovskom nest large flock, and all the surrounding tunnels were impregnated with the sickly-sweet stench of decay. In fact, the Prospectus under his weight began to feel dizzy, and many, unable to bear, put on gas masks already on its way.

Homer, perfectly aware of the features of this Nakhimov, hastily pulled out of camp bags muzzle mask and pulled it over. Ahmed enviously looked at him and covered his face with his sleeve: creeping away from the station miasma gradually enveloped them, spurring, wind from the spot.

Hunter as if nothing was felt.

- Something is poisonous? Controversy? Two months ago, everything was clean - he said in Homer.

- Smell - mumbled through a mask and he winced.

Brigadier searchingly looked at the old man, as if trying to determine whether he is laughing at him, then shrugged his shoulders very broad.

- Normal - and turned away.

He caught a short comfortable machine, beckoning them away, and, treading softly, moved on first. After another fifty paces to made horrible smell joined volatile, indecipherable whisper. Homer wiped his brow sweat profusely speaking and tried to lay siege to his heart galloping. Very close.

Finally a ray felt something ... Stehr darkness with broken headlights, stared blindly into nowhere, with dusty windshields at the network of cracks, with stubbornly unwilling to rust blue shell ... Ahead was the first wagon train, the giant tube zatknushego mouth of the tunnel.

The train was long and hopelessly dead, but every time his form of Homer as a boy wanted to climb the ruined cab, caress the keys of the dashboard, and his eyes closed, imagine that he is racing again at full speed through the tunnels, carrying a garland of bright lit carriages full of people - reading, dozing, glazeyuschimi advertising or silyaschimisya talk through the roar of engines ...

"In the event of an alarm" Atom "to move to the nearest station, there to stand up and open the door. Contribute to the forces of civil defense and army to evacuate victims and sealing underground stations ... "

Instruction that the Day of Judgement do machinists, was clear and simple. Wherever it was possible, it has been implemented. Most of the compositions, frozen at the station platform, forgot lethargy, and have gradually been stolen by the parts people meters, which instead of the promised several weeks had to stay in this shelter for all eternity.

In some places they have preserved and obzhili, but Homer, who always saw the trains some animate being, it seemed sacrilegious - it's like that stuff a scarecrow from a corpse favorite cat. In areas unsuitable for habitation, such as Nakhimovsky prospectus, the compositions were gnawed by time and vandals, but still intact.

Homer could not distract the view from the car, and in his ears, drowning noises and hissing louder drifting from the station, a phantom siren wailing alarm, and Basil tone, displaying never heard of until the day the signal: a long one - two short: Atom!

... Lingering clang brakes and bewildered by the announcement of the car: "Dear passengers, due to technical reasons, the train would go no further ..." Neither bubnyaschy into the microphone driver nor the homer, his assistant, can not even realize what despair emanates from these official word.

The hermetic locks strained rasp, scrape off a new channel of Lethe, forever separating the living world and the world of the dead. According to the instructions, the

gates were finally shut up no later than six minutes after an alarm, regardless of how many people were on the other side of life. In those who tried to prevent the closure was recommended to shoot.

Will the sergeant guarding the station from the homeless and drunks, to shoot in the stomach a man who tries to hold huge iron colossus that managed to reach his broken heel wife? Will the turnstile impudent aunt in uniform caps, all of its thirty-year experience in the metro improved in the two arts - not to start and whistle - do not miss the breathless old man with a plaintive sash strap? Instruction will only be given six minutes to transform from a man - in the mechanism. Or a monster.

... Screech women and indignant cries of men, selfless child sobbing. Pistol claps and thunder bursts. Relayed by each speaker, a metallic dispassionate voice read out appeals to stay calm - read, because no one person who knows what's going on, could not control myself and just say so ... indifferent. "Do not panic ..." Lamentations, pleas ...

Again shooting.

And just six minutes after the alarm a minute before the Armageddon - the sonorous, funereal alarm interlocking sections germovorot. Savory clicks constipation. Silence.

As in the crypt.

The car had to crawl along the wall - the driver braked too late, perhaps distracted by what was happening at the moment on the platform. On the iron ladder they climbed up and stood in a moment already surprisingly spacious hall. No columns, a single semicircular arch with ovoid indentations under the lights. A set of huge, embracing and platform, and both ways along with standing on their compositions. Incredible elegance design - simple, sky light, concise ... Just do not look down, not feet, not in front of him.

Do not see that, in what turned into the station now. This grotesque graveyard, where you can not find peace, these terrible meat ranks bitten piled skeletons, rotting carcasses, detached parts of someone's trunk. Vile creation eagerly dragged here everything what could reach within its large holdings, more than they could eat at once, as a reserve. Stocks of these rotten and decayed, but in this form they are probably even better absorbed, and hoarded, hoarded indefinitely.

Heap of dead meat against all the laws were moving as if breathing, and heard from anywhere around the nasty rasp. This Flesheater scrubbed from the slippery bone razmyakshuyu fetid flesh with his teeth-edges. Beam caught one of the strangest, unclaimed pieces: a long gnarled limbs, flabby, hanging folds, hairless gray skin, distorted spin ... bleary eyes sighted lens, huge ears move, live their lives.

Creature issued a hoarse cry and slowly trotted to the wide open carriage doors, turning all four legs, hands. On the other heaps as lazily began to climb down the other Flesheater displeasure sipya and sobbing, scheryas and snapping at the Travelers.

Upright, they are unlikely to reach the chest, even a low Homer, besides, he knew that cowardly creatures do not need to attack the strong, healthy man. But the irrational fear that Homer had before these creatures grew out of his nightmares: he weakened, abandoned, lay alone on a deserted station, and beast were chosen closer. Like sharks in the ocean for miles hear smell a drop of blood, so these creatures feel someone else's approaching death, and hastened to examine it in time to sink their teeth into another warm body.

Senile fears contemptuously said to myself, Homer, in his time after reading books on applied psychology. If only it worked.

Flesheater same people were not afraid of: spending bullets on the repulsive, but seemingly harmless eaters fell in Sevastopol would be dismissed as a criminal waste. The passing caravans tried not to pay attention to them, although sometimes Flesheater behaved provocatively.

Here they bred a great multitude, and as the trio moved deeper and deeper, with a nasty crunch boots crushing someone's small bones scattered on the floor, more and more new creatures reluctantly broke away from the feast, and wandered to the shelter. Gnezdovischa they have placed in the corpses of trains. And for that, Homer hated them even more.

The hermetic locks on Nakhimovskom avenue were open, as Homer himself remembered. It was believed that if we move quickly through the prospectus, received radiation dose was small and did not threaten the health, but forbidden to dwell there. And so it happened that both of the relatively well preserved: the glass intact, visible through the gaps of doors crap seats, blue paint was not going to peel iron sides.

Middle of the room stood a real mound, composed of tangled skeletons of unknown creatures. Having caught up with him, Hunter suddenly stopped. Ahmed and Homer looked at each other uneasily, trying to determine where the danger may come. But the reason for the delay was given.

At the bottom, juicy and fragile humming, two small Flesheater stripped canine skeleton. Hide, they did not have time: whether too carried away by the meal, they did not heed the signals of their relatives, or were unable to overcome its greed.

Squinting in the light of brigadirskogo cutting torch, they are continuing to chew slowly began to retreat to the nearest car, but suddenly, one after another kuvyrnulis and dull as two bags of tripe, flopped on the floor.

Homer astonishment looked at Hunter, which removes the heavy army pistol, an elongated cylinder of the silencer in podplechnuyu holster. His face remained the same impenetrable, lifeless, as usual.

- Hungry, probably, were very, - muttered under his breath, Ahmed, with fastidious interest in looking at the dark pools, spreads of crushing the skulls of dead creatures.

- Me too - suddenly vaguely replied the brigadier, forcing Homer flinch.

Without turning to the others, he moved forward, but the old man thought he again hears the rumbling stihshee was greedy. With how hard each time he overcame the temptation to release these vermin bullet! Persuade myself soothed, and eventually prevailed, proving to himself that he is a mature man who knows how to rein in their nightmares, do not let them bring themselves to mind. Hunter, apparently, was not going to fight their desires.

But what were these needs? Homer thought: the foreman did not shoot out of fear and not out of disgust. This senseless murder was necessary for him just to have fun. And for some reason the old man for a moment ceased to want to follow him further.

Silent death of two members of the pack spurred other Flesheater: smelling fresh death, even the bravest and lazy of them were removed from the platform, barely audible wheezing and whining. Nabivshis in both trains, they stuck to the window, and crowding in the doorway of cars fell silent.

Anger or revenge, repel these creatures are not displayed. Worth squad leave the station, they immediately devour their dead relatives. Aggression typical of hunters, thought Homer. Those who feed on carrion, it is unnecessary, as there is no need to kill. All living things eventually die by itself. Dying, it will still be their food. You just need to wait.

In light of the lantern through the dirty greenish glass could be seen stuck to him from the back side of the muzzle vile, crooked-tailored body, clawed hands, anxiously groping this satanic aquarium inside. In complete silence, hundreds of pairs of bleary eyes relentlessly followed the passing by the detachment and the creatures turned their heads with startling synchronicity, seeing his long careful look. So would be looking at visitors locked cabinet of curiosities in the formalin flasks freaks if they were careful not stitched up his eyelids.

Despite the approaching day of reckoning for atheism, Homer could not bring himself to believe neither in God nor the devil. But if Purgatory existed, for the old man it would take precisely this form. Sisyphus was doomed to struggle with gravity, Tantalus was sentenced to torture of unquenchable thirst. Homer is at the station waiting for his death, ironed jacket machinist and the monstrous ghost train passengers, with hideous gargoyles, a mockery of vengeful gods. And after the departure of the platform tunnel, as in one of the oldest legends of underground somknetsya a Mobius strip, a dragon devouring its tail.

Hunter, the station and its inhabitants are no longer interested. The balance of the hall unit overcame a brisk pace: Ahmed and Homer barely keep up with getting up a foreman.

Old man was tempted to turn around, scream, shoot - it's the brazen brat frighten, drive away the heavy thoughts. Instead, he trotted, head down and concentrating on how

not to step on someone's rot remains. Hung and Ahmed, occupied his thoughts. And in this they recklessly fleeing from the prospect of Nakhimovsky nobody thought look around.

Spot of light from the lantern Hunter flew nervously from side to side, as if following a certain invisible gymnast under the dome of this sinister circus, but the foreman did not pay attention to what it clings.

In the beam flashed for a split second and then vanished into the darkness, no one had seen, fresh bones, and not yet fully picked skull - clearly human. Near useless shell littered with steel soldier's helmet and flak jacket inedible.

At mangy green hat stenciled with white paint had written: "Sevastopol."

Chapter 4

- Dad, it's me, Sasha!

She gently eased a canvas strap, pull terribly swollen chin, and withdrew from her father's helmet. Ran his fingers through his hair vzoprevshie, counterfeit tires, pulled and drove gas-mask-like skukozhivshiysya, ashen-gray scalp. His chest heaving, his fingers scraped granite, watery eyes unblinking stare at her. He did not answer.

Placing a satchel under his head, Alex ran to the gate. Put her thin shoulders a huge flap, deep, deep breath and gritted his teeth. Multi-ton block of iron reluctantly gave in, swam and groaning into place. Sasha clanged bolt and slid to the floor. Just a minute, just one minute - take a breath, and she immediately returned to him.

Each new campaign treated her father all the more, and lean production, with which he came, could not recover the lost strength. Because of these attacks, he spent the remnants of his life, not days and weeks, months. Stimulated extravagance: if they do not

have anything to sell, they will eat only my hand a rat - the one that perished station and then shot himself.

Sasha wanted to replace her father, she many times pleaded with him to give her at least his old mask, so most go upstairs, but he was adamant. Knew for certain that the good of Leaky mask with a long-clogged filters any more than any other mascot. But she was never in it did not recognize. Lied, that he knew how to clean filters, lied, that feels good even after an hour "walk", lied, that just wants to be alone, when the fear that she would see how it vomits up blood.

Sasha's not been able to change something. Them with his father was driven into this corner and began to seek more out of mocking curiosity than out of pity. Thought, they will not last a week, but his father's will and quenching enough for years to come. They were hated and despised, but regularly fed - certainly not for free.

In between campaigns, in those rare moments when the two of them sat at the Sickly, chadyaschimi campfire, my father liked to talk about what it was before. For several years now, as he realized - it makes no sense to lie even to himself: he has no future. But already the past he could not rob nobody.

Previously, I had eyes the same color as yours, saying to her father. Color of the sky. And Sasha thought she remembers those days - days when the swelling of thyroid gland is not swollen around his neck a huge goiter, when his eyes had not yet faded and were as bright as it is now.

When the father said "color of the sky", he surely had in mind the sky, still lived in his memory, and not purple, swirling, ever-dark, under which he found himself climbing up stairs. Daylight he had not seen for a good twenty years on it and is very homesick. Sasha did not see him ever. Only in dreams, but unless you can say for sure whether she thought it imagined? Looks like if our world is the one that sees in a dream congenitally blind people? And if they see even in your sleep?

* * *

Small children, zazhmurivayas think that the darkness has enveloped the entire world. Think that everyone else around at that moment, blind as they are. Man in the tunnels - helpless and naive as those children who thought Homer. He has plenty can consider himself a master of light and darkness, snapping his flashlight, but even the most impenetrable darkness around can be filled with the sighted eye, and only he is blind ... And now, after meeting with the scavengers, this idea would not let him. Aside, we must digress.

How strange that Hunter did not know what to wait on him Nakhimovskom thought Homer. When he first appeared on the Sevastopol two months ago, none of the lookouts could not explain how a man of such mighty addition unnoticed managed to overcome all the positions of the tunnels in the north. Well, the commander of the perimeter and not demanded from the duty of these explanations.

Five years have passed, not less, since seized eaters fell vacant Nakhimovskom. Hence, for all this time the foreman here did not happen once - otherwise why would he try to identify by ear look like the inhabitants of the swollen appendix from indigestion?

Then how he came to Sevastopol? The remaining paths in a large metro had long been cut off. Abandoned Kakhovskaya line, tunnels, which for obvious reasons has been for many years was not observed a single living creature, was excluded. Chertanovskaya? Funny and believe that even such a skilled, ruthless fighter could single-handedly cut through the damn station, and getting there is not declared before on Sevastopol, was impossible.

Excluding the north, south and west, Homer could only assume that the mysterious visitor arrives at their station on top. Of course, all known entrances and exits to the surface were carefully battened down and kept under supervision, but ...He could, for example, open the locked ventilation shaft. Sevastopol was not expected that among the burnt ruins of prefabricated apartment blocks still can declare someone intelligent enough to turn off their alarm system.

Endless checkerboard neighborhoods, thinned out the debris falling on the city of warheads, long since deserted, abandoned by the last player a decade ago. Those ugly, frightening figure, which itself is now crawling on her, played a new party has its own rules. Man could not even dream of a rematch.

Short forays in search of valuable, that has not had time istlet for twenty years, these hasty and shy attempts to pillage in their own homes - the only thing he lacked strength. Encased in armor Radiation Protection stalkers upstairs to rummage for the umpteenth time Khrushchev skeletons nearby, but none of them dared to give a decisive battle their current owners. You could really snap that machine gun, sit out in the filthy rats, apartments, and once the danger has passed - headlong rush to a saving descent into a dungeon.

Old maps of the capital long ago lost any relation to reality. Where previously ran kilometer traffic jams clogged avenues, could now gaping chasm or blacken impenetrable thickets. Residential quarters were replaced by swamps or scorched bare patches. The most desperate of stalkers dared to explore the surface in a kilometer radius from their native burrows, others were content with far less.

Lying behind Nakhimovsky Prospect station Sermon, Nagatinskaya and Tula had their exits, and the people who lived in them, were too timid to climb up. From among these

wilds could take a living person, for Homer was perfect riddle. And yet he wanted to think that Hunter was at their station just off the surface.

Because there was one last option, where would welcome their team leader. Version of this came to mind the old atheist, against his will until he tried to relieve shortness of breath and catch up quickly flying forward, though never touching the ground, a dark silhouette.

Bottom?

- I have a bad feeling - Ahmed quietly handed - precisely so that Homer heard it, and a little away from them the foreman - no. - No time we went. Oh believe me, many times here with the caravans had been. On Nagorno bad today ...

Small bands of robbers, peredyhayuschih of robbery in the dark halts away from the ring long ago did not dare to approach the caravans of Sevastopol. Hearing the rumble of coherent savvy boots, heralds the approach of heavy infantry, they could only dream about one thing: as soon as possible to get out of the road.

No, not because of them and not because of the vultures with a four-armed Nakhimov prospectus, these caravans are always so well guarded. Iron skill and courage, the ability to link up in seconds in the iron fist and iznichtozhit any tangible threat of heavy fire would do Sevastopol convoys undivided lords tunnel of its own roadblocks until Serpuhovskoy ... If it were not for Sermon.

Nakhimovsky his fears remained behind, but neither Homer, nor Ahmad never once felt relieved. Sermon Station, unpretentious and homely, was the ultimate for many travelers, otnesshihsya to it without proper attention. Lame duck, found themselves accidentally in neighboring Nagatinskaya, huddled away from the greedy throat of the tunnel passing to the south, to the Nagorny. As if it could save them ... Like what comes out on the harvest of the southern tunnel, too lazy to sneak a little further to select prey to his liking.

Making his way through the Nagorny, had to rely solely on luck, because no laws, the station did not recognize. Sometimes tacitly allowed to pass, pripugivaya only bloody fingerprints on the walls and corrugated iron columns, as if someone was desperately trying to climb over them higher in the hope of escape. And after only minutes after this could be the next group of such a device, that the loss of half of the fellows seemed to survivors of victory.

She could not get enough. She had no pets. She did not give the study, and it can not be tamed. Sermon presented to residents of all surrounding stations embodiment of the arbitrariness of fate. And it was a major test for those who dare to depart from the ring to Sevastopol - and vice versa.

- Hardly a Sermon could do it - the superstitious, as many other Sevastopol, Ahmed preferred to talk about this plant as a living being.

Homer did not need to ask again, to clarify - he himself now, thinking about how could the Sermon absorb the missing caravans and all the scouts sent to find them.

- anyway, but that so many people just lost ... - He assented. - Feeding would be ...
- Why did you say that? - Ahmed evil hissed at him, or clasp hands in frustration, or barely restraining cuff to which the garrulous old man apparently asked for. - Thee, then certainly do not choke!

Homer is silent, holding resentment. He is not believed that the Sermon could hear them and harbor. At least not at this distance ... Prejudice, all prejudice! Read all the idols of the dungeon - it doomed, someone so you'll crush my corn. On this occasion, Homer no longer worried, but Ahmed had his own ideas.

Prying into his pocket jacket beads made from blunt pistol bullets, he whirled in the dirty hands of the carousel and the idol lead zashlepal lips zamalivaya before Nagornaya Homer sins in his own language. But it seems that the station did not understand him, or apologize it was too late.

Hunter, catching something to his uncanny instincts and waved his gloved hand, quenching rate, and gently lowered to the ground.

- There's fog - he dropped, pulling the nostrils air. - What is it?

Homer, exchanged glances with Ahmed. Both understood what it meant: the hunt is open, and reach the northern borders of living Nagornaya going for them is now an extraordinary success.

- How do you say - Ahmed responded reluctantly. - That she breathes ...
- Who? - Dryly asked him foreman, and shook off the shoulder bag, apparently hoping to pick up in its arsenal of appropriate caliber.
- Station Sermon - moved to whisper that.
- Let's see - a contemptuous grimace Hunter.

But no, Homer just seemed that the disfigured face of the foreman came to life; but in fact it remained immovable as ever - just as the light fell.

After a hundred yards the rest also saw this: crawling toward them on the ground hard whitish haze, first tasting of their boots, then entwine their knees, flood tunnel for

the belt ... They seem to slowly entered the shadowy sea, cold and cold, with each step down deeper on the deceptively gentle bottom, until it plunged into the muddy water with his head.

It was plain bad. Rays of Light sank in the strange fog, like flies in the web: breaking through just a few steps ahead, struggled to become soft and hung in the void - to catch, sluggish, docile. Sounds came the hard, as if through a feather bed, and even more difficult given the movement, though no team really stepped over the sleepers, while the bottom mode of silt.

Breathing became too difficult - but not because of moisture, but because of the unusual tart taste, which appeared here in the air. Let it into the lungs did not feel like: do not leave feeling that truly incorporates the breath of someone great, someone else's, stretched all the oxygen from the air and nourish it with their toxic fumes.

Homer just in case again buried in a respirator. Hunter, slipped on his eyes, ran his fingers through his canvas podplechnuyu bag, pulled the tow and stuck on top of their usual masks a new rubber. Without the mask was only Ahmed, who was given only just twenty minutes, and they went to prepare for a hike ...

The foreman stood again, pointing his torn ear on Nagorno but curdled white haze prevented him from reaching it is to disassemble the station snatches of sounds out of them the whole picture. Like, collapsed near something bulky, boomed drawl someone to be too low for humans, and for any animal note. Hysterically grated iron, as if a hand folded host one of creeping along the wall of thick pipes.

Hunter shook his head as if free from adhering dirt, and place a short sub-machine gun in his hands took the Army Kalashnikov with dual horn and grenade launcher.

- finally - he muttered under his breath.

They did not even realize that entered the station itself. Sermon was flooded with thick fog as pork milk, and Homer, peering at her through the misted glass slides respirator, it seemed that he - a scuba diver, has penetrated the victim on board an ocean liner.

The similarity of complement decorating walls engraved panel: sea gulls, squeezed in a metal harsh and unsophisticated Soviet stamp. Above all, they were like fingerprints fossils found in cleaved rocks. Fossil - that is the inheritance of both man and his work, flashed the thought of Homer. Only here who dug out?

... Standing around mirage lived - spilled over, trembling. Sometimes it stood out dark clusters - first seen: twisted wagon or a rusty shack duty, then - scaly torso or head of mythical monsters. And Homer was afraid to even imagine who could capture the cabin and take a fancy to first class cabins over the decades have passed since the crash. He heard a lot about what happened to the Nagorny, but never come face to face with ...

- There it is! There, on the right! - Ahmed yelled, pulling the old man's sleeve.

Slapped a homemade silencer muffled shot.

Homer spun with unaffordable for his rheumatism, playfulness, but sodden light flashed only a piece of metal encased in a ribbed column.

- back! Vaughn, in the back! - Ahmed gave a short burst.

However, it bullet just crumbled remains of the marble slabs that were once lined the wall station. Whose shape would be Ahmed or spotted in a shaky wraith, it is dissolved in it unscathed.

Breathed, thought Homer.

And then most corner of his eye caught something ... Giant, buckling under too low four-meter ceiling station, incredibly agile for his gigantic growth vnyrnvshee of fog on the border of visibility and sunk back before the old man managed to put on him machine.

Homer looked helplessly at the Brigadier ...

Togo was not there.

* * *

- Nothing. Nothing. Fear not - stopping and resting between words, comforted by her father. - Do you know ... Somewhere in the subway, there are people who are now much worse ...

He tried to smile - came out terribly, as if a skull jaw dropped. Sasha smiled back, but at an acute cheekbone, smeared in soot, salt popozla dewdrop. At least, my father came to himself - after several long hours for which she had been all change your mind.

- At this time, quite unsuccessfully, you forgive me, - he said. - Decided to still reach the garage. Turned out to be far away. Found one untouched. Locking stainless steel in oil. Break did not work, tied a charge last. I was hoping the car will be spare parts. Tore, open - empty. Nothing at all. Why are locked up, you bastards? A roar of many ... Prayed that no one heard. I came out of the garage - around the dogs. I think all ... I thought, everything.

The father closed his eyelids, and was silent. Alarmed, Sasha grabbed his arm, but he was not opening his eyes, shook his head, barely noticeable - do not worry, everything is in order. Forces are not even enough to say, but he wanted to report, he had to explain

why he came back empty-handed, why next week, until he stand on his feet, they will have almost nothing to eat. Did not, forgotten dream.

Sasha checked imposed on his broken leg bandage already sodden from the black blood, replaced the hot and compress. Straightened up and went to the rat house, opened the door. Animal suspiciously looked out and hid it, but then, Sasha is doing me a favor, yet got to the platform a little exercise. Rat instinct never failed: the tunnel was quiet. Reassured, she returned to the stove.

- You must get up, you will walk again - she whispered to her father. - And you will find the garage, which will be a whole machine. And we will rise together, sit in it and go away far from here. In ten, fifteen stations. To where we do not know where we'll be strangers. Where we are no one will hate. If such a place where anything is ...

She retold his fairy tale, which many times I heard from him. Repeated word for word, and now she saying that the old mantra of his father, believed in it a hundred times stronger. She leaves him, she would cure him. In this world there is a place where all of them will not care.

A place where they can be happy.

* * *

- That does it! Here! Looking at me!

Ahmed screamed as if it had been seized and dragged off, as has never allowed himself to cry. Again came in and choked off machine; Ahmed, finally changed his Gorsky calm, shaking, trying to insert into the groove of a full horn.

- It chose me ... I ...

Somewhere nearby busily sniffed another machine, ceased for a moment, and again barely audible zastrekotal chopped by three shots bursts. Hunter was still alive, hence, they have remained a hope. Claps then retreat, then approached, but it was impossible to tell whether the bullets found their targets. Homer, who was expecting to hear the angry roar of a wounded beast, nothing strained to hear. The station was immersed in painful silence, and her mysterious hosts seemed either disembodied or neuzyavimymi.

Brigadier now led his strange battle on the other side of the platform - there flashed and quenched the fire dotted tracer bullets. Intoxicated battle with the ghosts, he condemned his players.

Homer took a deep breath and threw back his head. The desire to do so retreated for several long moments, and he finally succumbed to it carefully. Leather top, with hairs on his neck, he felt only too clearly on his mind - the cold, oppressive - and could no longer resist his apprehension.

... Under the ceiling, high above their heads in a haze hovering another head. So huge that Homer did not immediately realize even what he sees before him. Body giant remained hidden in the darkness of the station, and only his monstrous face, swinging, hung over the tiny, paltry people, bristling with his useless arms slowly to the attack, for some reason, giving them a little leeway.

Speechless with horror the old man humbly knelt; sorry tinkled on the rail fell out of the hands of an automaton. Yelled, tearing the throat, Ahmed. Creating slowly leaned forward, and all visible space in front of them filled the dark, like a huge rock body. Homer closed his eyes, getting ready, saying goodbye ... And thought, and he regretted only one thing. Bored, ate consciousness bitter thought: "I do not have time!"

But then spat fire grenade launcher, the ears slapped shockwave, stunning and leaving behind an infinite thin whistle, fell lumps of burning flesh. Ahmed, the first from the right with him, pulled the old man by the collar and put him on his feet and dragged along.

They ran forward, stumbling over the ties and rising again, tearing into the blood knees and elbows, but not feeling the pain. Held for each other, because through the whitish haze could not see anything even in step. Raced as if they were threatened not just death, but something far more terrifying - a final, irrevocable disincarnation, destruction and the bodies and souls.

Invisible and almost inaudible, but lagging just a stone's throw away, the demons relentlessly followed them, accompanied, not by attacking, as if playing a game, giving the illusion of salvation.

Then crushed marble walls replaced tunnel tubings: they managed to get to the Nagorno! And the guard station, as if pulling the chain up to the limit, at which have been planted, behind us. But it was too early to stop ... Ahmed walked first, touching wall pipes nasharivaya way forward, and urging halting now and then contrive to sit down old man.

- What's wrong with a foreman? - Homer croaked on the go tearing his soul mask.
- Fog over - get up, wait. Soon have to be, very soon! Two hundred meters left ... Get out of the fog. The main thing - to get out of the mist - Ahmed insisted his spell. - I would take steps ...

Neither the two hundred or three hundred paces of their enveloping haze does not become less frequent. What if it has spread to most Nagatinskaya thought Homer. What if it had already devoured and Tula, and Nakhimovsky?

- can not be ... Must ... Few left ... - For the umpteenth time, Ahmed mumbled and suddenly froze in place.

Homer is on the move flew at him, and both fell to the ground.

- The wall came to an end - Ahmed stunned stroked sleepers, rails, crude and rough concrete floor, as if fearing that the earth is about the same treacherously away from him from under their feet as soon as that has failed to nowhere other supports.
- Yes here it is, what is it? - Homer felt bias tubing, grabbed it and gently lifting.
- Sorry ... - Ahmed paused, gathering his thoughts. - You know, there at the station ... I thought I had been with her will not go away. It is so looked at me ...Looked at me, you know. It decided to take me. I thought forever it will stay.And do not be buried.

Words given to him hard, he did not want to release them, ashamed of his babih yelling - and tried to justify them, and knew that justify them can not be. Homer shook his head.

- Come on. I have some pants all wet, and that to me now? - Gave his friend an indulgence he said. - Come on, now and in fact should be close.

They knew: the pursuit revoked, you can catch your breath. Yes, they could no longer run and now wandered, as well sighted clinging to the wall, step by step closer to deliverance. The most horrible was behind us, and let the wraith so far refused to retreat, but sooner or later, predatory tunnel drafts bite it and tear uvolokut to shreds in the vent wells. Sooner or later they will go to people and will wait there is a delayed commander.

This happened even before they could hope - perhaps because in the fog and the time and space are warped, distorted? Popozla along the wall of cast-iron stairs - climbing onto the platform, a circular section of the tunnel was replaced by a rectangular, between the rails there was depression in the ground-cover for the fallen in the way of passengers.

- Look ... - Homer whispered. - It seems the station! Station!
- Hey! There is someone here? - That it forces shouted Ahmed. - Bratka!Anyone? - No point to make out, triumphant laugh.

Sallow, haggard light lanterns displayed in the misty darkness gnawed by time and people wall marble slabs, none of the colored mosaics, pride Nagatinskaya not survived. And what happened to the paneled columns? Really ...

Though Ahmad was no answer, he did not despair and continued to cry out, have fun: of course, scared of the fog and ran away, but it is something that will not take. A Homer all looking for something restlessly on the walls, licking their faint ray, turning cold on suspicion.

And finally found it - iron letters vkruchennye a cracked marble.

"Nagorno".

* * *

Her father believed: the return is never an accident. Return to change something to fix something. Sometimes the Lord catches us by the scruff and returns to the place where we accidentally slipped out from under his eye, to carry out his sentence - or give us a second chance.

Therefore, explained his father, he was never able to return from exile to their home station. He had no more strength to take revenge, to fight, to prove. He long ago do not need anyone's remorse. In the old story that cost him all his former life and nearly cost the lives of all, everyone got what they deserved, "he said. It turns out that they are doomed to eternal link - correct Sasha's father wanted nothing but the LORD at the station did not look.

Rescue plan - found on the surface is not rotten for decades, car, repair it, season and escape from the fate outlined by the forbidden circle - long ago turned into a bedtime story.

For Sasha had one way back in a big metro. When the appointed day she went out to the bridge, to barter for something repaired as appliances, jewelry darkened, moldy books on food and a few rounds, happened, she was offered much more.

Highlighting the spotlight with her little trolley angular, boyish figure, shuttles winked and smacked his lips, beckon and promise. The girl seemed to be wild - in silence looking at them ispodoloby, napruzhinennaya, hiding behind a long blade. Too large male overalls instead of smear her boldly drawn lines, disturbed imagination. Dirt and engine oil on your face made her blue eyes shine brighter, so bright that some looked away. White hair, cut, thus artlessly knife, which was always trapped in her right hand, barely covered the shapely ears, prikushennye lips never smiled.

Quickly realizing that sops lure the wolf is not possible, people with trolleys tried to bribe her freedom, but she never responded to them. They felt that the girl tongueless. So it was even easier. Sasha perfectly understood: in whatever she agreed, she did not buy two seats on the trolley. To her father at too many other bills, and pay for them is impossible, even if it becomes dirtier inside than it was outside.

Faceless and Snuffles in their black military gas masks, they were not just for her enemies - she could not find in them nothing human, nothing that could get her to fall to thinking even at night, even during sleep.

So she just put her on the phone sleepers, irons, kettles, departed at ten paces back and waited for shuttles will take away the goods and throw in the way of a convulsion with dried pork, and in spite scattered handful of patrons - to see how it will crawl, collecting them.

Then slowly put off the trolley and went into the real world, and Sasha unfolded and went home, where she waited for a mountain of broken appliances, a screwdriver, soldering iron and turned into a dynamo old bike. She saddled him, closed his eyes and sped away, far away, almost without thinking about that, never will begin to move from their seats. And the fact that she decided not to pardon, gave her strength.

* * *

What the hell? How does it again drifted here? Homer frantically trying to find explanations of what happened. Ahmed suddenly shut up - to see where Homer shines his lantern.

- She does not let me ... - Shrunken, almost inaudible voice, he drawled.

Their gloom surrounding the thickened so much that they barely saw each other. Rescued in the absence of people, now awakened Sermon: heavy air responded to their words subtle vibrations, and vague shadows in the wake of its depth. And no trace of Hunter ... Essence of flesh and blood can not win the battle with the phantoms. Once the station tired of playing with him, she enveloped him with his pungent breath and digested alive.

- You go, - hopelessly squeezed Ahmed. - That I needed. You do not know you were here rarely.

- Throw the grinding stuff! - Unexpectedly to himself loudly barked at him the old man. - Just in fog zaplutali. Come back!

- We can not leave. As no run, back come back to me if you will. One proveshsya. Go away, please.

- All that's enough! - Homer Ahmed grabbed by the wrist and pulled behind him, to the tunnel. - Within an hour you will thank me!

- Give my Goulet ... - Start one.

And the incredible, enormous strength wrenched his hand from Homer - is sharply up into the mist of nothingness. He had no time to cry - just disappeared, as if in a moment fell apart into atoms, as if never existed. For him, a heart-rending yelled the old man - like a mad, spinning around its axis, wasting precious ammo horn for horn.

Then on the back of his head struck a crushing blow to what could cause only one of the local demons and the universe shlopnullas.

Chapter 5

Sasha ran to the window and threw open the shutters, letting in fresh air inside and the timid light. Wooden sill hung directly over a bottomless chasm, filled with a gentle

morning mist. With the first rays of the sun it clears, and the window will be visible not only to the gorge, but overgrown with pine trees distant mountain spurs, and outspread among them the green meadows, match boxes scattered in the valley of the village houses and bell sleeves.

Early morning was her time. She felt the rising and ahead of the sun, waking up half an hour to catch up on the mountain. For their hut, a small but licked to a shine, warm and cozy, uphill zmeilas rocky path, bordered by bright yellow flowers. Tiny feet slid down, and within a short ten minutes prior to the summit of Mount Alexander sometimes manage to fall several times into the blood chafing elbows and knees.

Conceived, Alex wiped her sleeve dress sill, moist breath on the night. She dreamed that a dark, nasty, cancels all her carefree present life, but remains troubled visions vanished with the first touch of her skin a light, cool wind. And now she was too lazy to remember that so upset her in a dream. We had to hurry to the summit to greet the sun, and after slipping down the trail, hurry home - to make breakfast and wake his father to collect a bundle in his way.

And then the whole day, while he will hunt, Sasha turns to its own devices - and before supper will be able to drive the hulking dragonflies and flying cockroaches among the meadow flowers, yellow as linkrust in cars.

She crept on tiptoe through a minefield creaky floorboards, opened the door and laughed softly.

For several years, as Sasha's father did not see her face so happy smiles, and he badly wanted not to wake her. Leg stiff and numb, blood does not stop. Say, the wounds from the bites of stray dogs will not heal ...

Call her? But it was not at home more than a day - before heading to the garage, he decided to get into the panel mound is two blocks from the station, climbed on the sixteenth floor, and there unconscious. All the while, she never for a moment closed my eyes - it never fell asleep until he returned from the "walk". Let rest, he thought. Lie all.Nothing has happened to him.

I would like him to know that she now sees. He somehow did not work forgotten even in his sleep. Only occasionally let him unconscious for a couple of hours on leave in a tranquil childhood. Usually, however, he had to wander among the familiar houses of the dead with scraped guts, and good sleep is the one in which he suddenly managed to find a pristine apartment full of miracle survivor equipment and books.

Falling asleep, he asked in the past. Wanted to get at least a time when only met with Sasha's mother when he was only twenty, but he already commanded a garrison station. Station, which then seemed to all its inhabitants only a temporary abode, and not the general barracks on hard mines, where they are serving life sentences.

But instead, it tossed in the thick of things five years ago. On the day that defined his destiny - and that even worse, the fate of his daughter. Mind, he humbled himself and with his defeat, and with reference, but when to nap, how my heart was taken to demand a rematch.

... Once again he stood before the ranks of their fighters with Kalashnikovs at the ready - in that situation put him in the order of an officer's Makarov would be amiss perhaps that put a bullet in the forehead. In addition to two dozen submachine behind him at the station no longer remained loyal people.

The crowd seethed come, dozens of hands swinging boom; tune polyphony, obeying an invisible wave of his baton, grew into a harmonious chorus. While they are required only for his resignation, but within minutes they will need to have his head.

It was not a spontaneous demonstration, then acted mishandled outside provocateurs. Trying to calculate and eliminate them one by one it was too late. The only thing he could do now to stop the insurgency, to retain power - ordered to open fire on the crowd. It was still not too late.

His fingers curled around an invisible arm, eyes anxiously ran under the swollen eyelids, lips moved, giving unheard orders. Black puddle in which he lay, grew with each minute. As if fueled by its departing life.

* * *

- Where are they?

Plucked from the dark lake of oblivion, Homer flicked like a spoon caught perch, convulsive breathing, and staring at the foreman opoloumevshy look. Muddy masses twilight Cyclops, held Nagorny, still huddled in front of him, pulled him long, mnogostavchatye fingers can easily lift his leg or push the edge. They surrounded the old man every time he closed his eyes and slowly, reluctantly dispersed, when opened again.

Homer tried to jump up, but someone else's hand, nearly grabbing his shoulder, turned back at the steel hook that pulled him from the nightmare. Gradually dying breath, he focused on the excised face, dark, oily engine reflective shine eyes ... Hunter! Alive? The old man shook his head gently to the left, then right again, fearing to find himself on an enchanted station.

No, they were in the middle of an empty, clean the tunnel - the fog, frozen approaches to the Nagorny, there was almost invisible. Should be, Hunter pulled it out for yourself at least half a kilometer, puzzled figured Homer. Reassured, he went limp, and repeated just in case:

- Where are they?
- There's nobody there. You're safe.
- These creatures ... They attacked me? Stunned? - Old man frowned, rubbing his bruised mound on top.
- I hit you. We had to stop a tantrum. You could hurt me.

Hunter finally loosened his grip tightly straightened up and slid his hand across a wide officer's belt. On the other side of the holster with Stechkin on it hung a leather case an unknown destination. Brigadier clicked the button and pulled out his flat copper flask. Vzboltnul, opened, and is not proposing to Homer, took a big gulp. Closed his eyes for a moment, as if with pleasure - and the old man felt a slight chill, seeing that his left eye from the foreman can not even really close.

- Where's Ahmed? What with Ahmed? - Homer and remembered it again began to tremble.
- Died - indifferently brigadier said.
- Died - dutifully repeated after him the old man.

When the monster threw up his hand, comrade in his arms, he realized: these claws can not wriggle out of a single living soul. Homer was just lucky that the choice fell Nagornaya not at him. Hunter did not know how to joke, but the old man still looked again - to believe that Ahmad had disappeared forever, just did not go. Homer stared at his hand - skinned and bleeding. Not pinned. He did not have enough air.

- But Ahmed knew that he was doomed - he said softly. - Why he was taken away, not me?
- It was a lot of life, - said the brigadier. - They feed on a human lives.
- It is not fair - the old man shook his head. - He has small children, it holds so much here! Keep ... And I - tumbleweed.
- And you'd be the moss to eat? - Cut the conversation Hunter, abruptly raising Homer on his feet. - Everything will go. Can not manage.

Simon followed crosser on the trot Hunter, an old man racked my brain: how could it be that they returned to the Nagorny? If prey orchid station drugged them with its miasma, and lured back into itself. Ago, they never turned - for that Homer could

vouch. He was ready to believe in the curvature of space, of which he was so fond of telling gullible mates watch, but it was much easier. Stopping, old man slapped his forehead: posherstny Congress! A few hundred meters over Nagorno between the trunks of right and left of the tunnel evolved one-track line for turning trains. She went right at a small angle, and going blindly along the wall, they just got out first on a parallel path, and then - when the wall was gone - by mistake again turned to the station. No mystery, uncertain thought Homer. But it was necessary to clarify something else.

- Hey! - He called Hunter. - Wait!

However, he seems deaf, continued to march forward, and the old man had to be struggling with shortness of breath, quickened his pace yourself. As they passed, trying to look into the eyes of the foreman, Homer blurted out:

- Why have you abandoned us?

- I - you?

In impassive, metallic voice was heard old grin, and he bit his tongue. Indeed, it's they Ahmed fled from the station, leaving the team leader alone with demons ...

Recalling how furiously and fruitlessly as Hunter fought in the Nagorny, Homer could not get rid of the impression that the inhabitants of the station simply did not have a fight, which he tried to impose on them. Afraid? Or feel it mate ... Well, not the same soul ... The old man picked up the spirit: there was still one question, the most difficult.

- Tell me, Hunter, there to Nagorno ... You a reason they have not touched?

It took several long, painful minutes - insist Homer did not dare - before he barely audible gave him a short, sullen answer.

- disdained.

* * *

Beauty will save the world, joked her father.

Alex blushed and hid her painted bag from under the tea-crumbs into the breast pocket of his overalls. Plastic box, in spite of all the distant echo of the treasured aroma of green tea, was its chief treasure. Reminder that the universe was not confined headless torso of the station with four stumps tunnels, buried at a depth of twenty meters in the city cemetery, Moscow. Magical portal that can endure through the decades, Sasha and thousands of kilometers. And something else far more important.

Cheese in the local climate, any paper, as a consumptive, is rapidly fading. Dust and mold izedali not just books and magazines - they destroyed the past itself. No images, and chronicles how, without crutches, limping human memory stumbled and confused.

But the bag was made from a plastic mold and the time eludes. The father once told Sasha that may take a few millennia, before it starts to decompose. Hence, its descendants will be able to transfer by succession, she thought.

It was a real picture, albeit tiny. In a golden frame, such as bright as the day when the bag off the line, was made a breathtaking view. Cliffs, recessed in a dreamy haze, spreading pine clinging to almost vertical slopes, the scarlet glow of the sun soon podnimuschegosya ... Sasha is nothing more beautiful in my life have seen.

She could sit for long periods, spreading a bag in her hand, admiring her eyes and inhaled the same pre-dawn haze that enveloped the distant mountains. And though she swallowed all of his father procured books before selling them for patrons, it lacked a subtracted there words to describe him, what she feels when she looks at centimeter rocks and breathes drawing needles of the pines. Unfeasible this imaginary world - and because of his incredible appeal ... Sweet melancholy and eternal expectation that first saw the sun ... Infinite perebiranie - what can hide behind a stupid sign with the name brand of tea? Unusual tree? Eagle's Nest? Clinging to the slope of the little house where she could live with her father?

It was he who once, when Sasha was not a five, brought her the bag, still full - a rarity!Wanted to surprise his daughter in this tea, but she drank it bravely, like medicine, but the plastic packaging it for some reason, really impressed. He then had to explain to her and that is depicted in popular print unpretentious. Conditional Chinese landscape mountain province, just fit for printing on tea packs. But Sasha and ten and fifteen years later, looked at it the same fascination as the day when only received a gift.

And for father fucking bag was the only miserable ersatz everything you ever lost a daughter by his fault. And when Sasha fell into a blissful trance, contemplating something like a failed daubed fantasy artist, her father seemed: she upbraids him for his kutsuyu, bloodless lives. He always tried to calm the itch, but could not hold back a long time. Bad hiding irritation, for the hundredth time he asked Sasha what she found in a scrap of packaging from the grams of tea dust.

And she, hastily concealing a small masterpiece in the pocket of the overalls, awkwardly replied: "Dad ... I'm so beautiful! ".

* * *

If it were not for Hunter, not for one second stop more until Nagatinskaya, Homer would have spent on this road three times as much. He never dared to be so arrogant to

rush through the recently seemed familiar tunnels, which suddenly began to indiscriminately devouring all of passing.

Their squad had to pay a terrible toll for transit over Nagorno - but two of the three survived. Have survived and all three, they will not get lost in the fog. The board was not higher than normal, nor Nakhimovskom prospectus or on Nagorno with them since we had that would not happen there before.

Hence, the matter spans, which led to Tula? Now they are silent, but the silence was not good, tense. Yes, Hunter sensed danger for hundreds of meters, I knew what to expect at the stations, which never happens, but does not betray whether these places his intuition, as she led before the dozen experienced fighters?

Perhaps it Nagatinskaya to which they were approaching with every step, hide answer to the mystery? Had difficulty keeping thoughts to stray too quick step, Homer tried to imagine what might await them at the station, which he had so loved. The old man, indulge in collecting myths could easily imagine, and what unfolded on Nagatinskaya legendary Satanic embassy, and that its sgryzli rat, migrating in search of food on its own, inaccessible to the people and tunnels.

Yes, it appear old in these spans one, he would move much slower, but that he did not turn back no matter what. Over the years spent at Sevastopol, he forgot how to be afraid to die. Homer went on this trip, knowing full well that it could be the last of his adventure, and was quite prepared to give him all the remaining allotted time.

Barely half an hour after meeting with the monsters on Nagorno he did not remember with horror. Moreover, listening to himself now, he would pick at the bottom of his soul vague, half-hearted stir: somewhere in its infancy - or wake up - something he had waited, as requested. The fact that he was looking at the most dangerous expeditions, finding the house.

Now he had a very important reason of all forces to delay his death. He could afford it only after it completes its work.

The last war was fiercer any of the preceding, and therefore ended in a matter of days. Since the Second World has had three generations of her past veterans have fallen asleep forever, and living memory no more genuine fear of war. Of the mass insanity, depriving millions of people around the human, it again became a standard political tool. Rates have grown too fast to make good decisions is simply not enough time. Taboo on the use of nuclear weapons was overcome between the case in the heat of: just a gun hanging on the wall in the first act of the drama, still a shot at the penultimate. And it does not matter who pulled the sacral button first.

Almost simultaneously all major cities of the Earth turned into ruins and ashes. Those few that were covered by an anti-missile shield, too, gave up the ghost, though in appearance and remained almost untouched: the hard radiation, chemical agents and

biological weapons exterminated their population. Fragile radio, was steady between the handful of survivors, we finally broke off after only a few years, and for the inhabitants of the metro is now the world ended at the border stations inhabited lines.

The land, formerly seemed studied and cramped, so once again become the boundless ocean of chaos and oblivion, as it was in the early Middle Ages.

The tiny islands of civilization, one after the other went into his abyss: devoid of oil and electricity, the person rapidly running wild.

Came the era of stagnation.

Scientists of the century carefully restored the fabric of history from scraps found papyri and parchments, scraps codes and folios. With the invention of printing, with the emergence of newspapers continued to weave a web of newspaper chronicles the printing presses. In the annals of the past two centuries, there was no deficiencies: every gesture and every interjection of those who committed a destiny of the world, carefully documented. And suddenly, overnight printing around the world have been destroyed or abandoned forever.

Looms stories arose. In a world without a future very few people cared about the past. The matter ended, leaving a whole only one thin thread.

In the first few years after the catastrophe, Nikolai Ivanovich scoured the crowded stations, desperately hoping to find one of them my family. Hope is gone, but he orphaned and lost, continued to wander in the darkness underground, not knowing what to do with themselves in the afterlife. Ariadne clew meaning of existence, which might indicate his true path in the unending maze of tunnels, fell from his hands.

Yearning for the old times, he began to collect magazines, which allowed him to povspominat, fall to thinking. Wondering whether it was possible to prevent the Apocalypse, became fascinated chronicles and newspaper analytics. Then he himself began to sling ink, in imitation of news bulletins and talking about events in those stations where there before.

And so it happened that instead of his lost clue Nikolai picked up another, the same: he decided to become a chronicler. The author of the recent history - from the end of the world and to its own end. The indiscriminate and aimless gathering made sense: now he had to painstakingly restore the damaged fabric of time and hand it to continue.

The rest of enthusiasm Nikolai Ivanovich treated as a harmless eccentricity. He readily gave their rations to the old newspapers and re-equipped its angle at each station, where he recorded the fate of the original archive. He went to watch, because it was the fire at three hundred meters stern men are like boys veer tales, of which Nikolai Ivanovich could extract nuggets of reliable information about what was going on in other ends of the

subway. Compared the scores of gossip, to isolate them from the facts that are neatly filed in student's notebook.

This work allowed him to escape, but Nikolai Ivanovich no feeling that he does it in vain. After his death, dry news reports, carefully collected them in a herbarium notebooks, just crumble to dust without proper care. If he does not return one day off duty, his newspaper and his chronicle will kindle a fire, and they do not suffice for long.

From the darkened over the years the paper will be smoke and soot, the atoms form new connections, will find some form. Matter is almost indestructible. And here's what he wanted to preserve for posterity, that elusive, ephemeral, that nestled on the paper sheets, will disappear forever, finally.

That's how a man: the content of school textbooks is living in his memory sharp until the final examinations. And forgetting serrated, he feels genuine relief. Human memory is like sand in the desert, I thought, Nikolai Ivanovich. Numbers, dates and names of minor government officials remain there no longer than a recording made with a wooden stick on the dunes. Enters without a trace.

Miraculously saved only what can capture the human imagination, to make the heart beat faster, prompting the finish thinking, experience. The fascinating story of the great hero and his love can survive the entire history of civilization, the virus has been introduced into the human brain and transferred from fathers to their children through hundreds of generations.

When the old man finally figured it out from the self-styled scientist, he was deliberately turned into an alchemist of Nikolai Ivanovich - in Homer. And he devoted his nights no longer compilation chronicles the search for a formula of immortality. Plot, which turned out to be tenacious, as Odysseus, the hero, who would have equaled longevity with Gilgamesh. On this plot Homer would try to string the accumulated knowledge to them ...And in a world where all the paper has been translated into heat, where the past can easily sacrificed for a single moment in this, the legend of such a hero could infect people and save them from rampant amnesia.

However, the cherished formula was not given to him. The hero does not want to emerge into the light. Rewriting of newspaper articles could not teach the old man lay down myths, breathe life into golems, make fascinating fiction of reality. Torn and crumpled sheets with incomplete first chapters of the saga of the future, with a flimsy and unsustainable characters made him look like a desktop abortary. The only result of the night vigils were dark circles under the eyes and bitten lips.

Yet Homer did not want to abandon their new designation. He tried not to think that simply was not born for this, that for the creation of universes requires talent, which he cheated.

Just no inspiration, he told himself.

And why would he take on the stuffy station, including routine family teas, agricultural work or even watch, where he took over the age less and less? Needed a shake-up, adventure, the passions. Perhaps, then sealed the ducts in his mind will break through, and he can do?

Even in the darkest times, people have never left Nagatinsky altogether. It was of little use to dwelling: nothing here has grown, and outputs the top were closed. But many of the station in good stead to temporarily disappear from sight, to sit out the disgrace, alone with his beloved.

Now it was empty.

Hunter flew silently by incorrigibly creaky stairs to the platform and stopped. Homer, puffing, followed him, warily looking around. The hall was dark, the air hung in the dust, silver shimmering in the glow of lanterns. Rare heap of rags and cardboard, which is usually located Nagatinskaya guests were dispersed across the floor.

The old man leaned against a pillar and slowly slid down. Once Nagatinskaya with its elegant color panels drawn from different varieties of marble, was his favorite station on the line. But the dark and lifeless, it looked like a still greater than ceramic photo on gravestone - on the man that shot a hundred years ago for a passport, without assuming that looked not at the camera and into eternity.

- No soul - distractedly handed homer.
- One is, - said the foreman, nodding to him.
- I mean ... - Began the old man, but Hunter stopped him with a gesture.

At the other end of the hall, where the colonnade ended and where hardly have done even spotlight the foreman on the platform slowly crept out something ...

Homer rolled over on its side and resting his hands on the floor, rose heavily. Hunter lantern went out, and the foreman if evaporated. Sweating with fear, old guard and fumbled going into the shoulder of beating in a fit of rifle butts. Barely audible in the distance slammed two shots. Homer, emboldened, leaned out of the column, and then hurried forward.

In the middle of the platform, flatten, stood Hunter, and at his feet koryachilas vague figure snikshaya, pathetic. Though composed of boxes and tattered, it bears little resemblance to humans, but they still appear. Bezvozrastny and sexless, so messy that his face was clearly distinguishable only the eyes, slurred, he whined and tried to crawl away from towering over him foreman. Apparently, both his legs were shot through.

- Where are the people? Why is no one here? - Hunter put the boots on the trail of smelly tattered rags, dragging his bum.

- Everybody's gone ... Abandoned me. Only one left - he rasped, paddling with his hands over the slippery granite, but without moving from their seats.
- Where to go?
- At Tula
- What's going on? - Butted Homer came to the rescue.
- How do I know? - Grimaced homeless. - Who is there left there and was gone. They ask. And I have no strength to wander through the tunnels. I'm here I'll die.
- Why left? - Did not depart from the foreman.
- It is terrible to them was the chief. Station is empty. Decided to break out. No one has returned.
- More? - Hunter raised his trunk.
- Not at all. Only one - recovered a tramp, noting induced muzzle and sezshivayas like an ant under the lens. - On Nagorno walked. I was asleep. Maybe it seemed.
- When?
- I do not have hours - he shook his head. - Maybe yesterday, maybe a week ago.
- More questions have not - and before Homer had to figure out what's going on, the team leader twice pulled the trigger.

Black blood from a hole in his forehead flooded the wide-open eyes for the Homeless, and nailed with bullets to the ground, he again turned into a pile of rags and cardboard. Without raising his eyes, Hunter joins clip Stechkin four rounds and jumped on the road.

- Soon it out for yourself - he called the old man.

Homer leaned over the body, forgetting about the disgust, took a piece of cloth and covered their heads chopped bum. His hands were still trembling.

- Why did you kill him? - Poorly articulated it.
- I have it put to sleep, - an evil voice said Hunter.

The old man straightened up, looking attentively at his companion, thinking it strange answer, and suddenly realizing that - and anyone - that might be borne in mind, faintly asked him:

- For how long?

* * *

Now, even collecting all the will in a fist, he could only raise and lower eyelids. It is strange that he is awake ... During that hour, while he was in a trance, numbness, covered with ice all over his body. In the language of pounds hanging weight, and the second is the same crushed his chest. He could not even say goodbye to her daughter, and yet it was the only one for which the cost to recover and has not been brought before the end of one long battle.

Sasha was no longer smiling. Now her dream is something disturbing, she curled up on his couch, hugging himself with his hands, frowning. From childhood, my father would wake her when he saw that his daughter nightmares, but now his powers only enough to slow blink.

Then it became too tiring.

To wait until Alex woke up, he had to continue to fight. He never stopped fighting for twenty years or more, every day, every minute, and he is damn tired of it. Tired of fighting, tired of hiding, tired of hunting. Prove, hopefully, to lie. Tired of fighting.

In the dusk of his mind there were only two desires: he wanted more time to look though Sasha's eyes, and he longed to find peace. But not out ... Interspersed with the reality before his eyes again flashed images from the past. We had to take a final decision. To break or broken. Punish or to repent.

... The guards closed ranks. Each of them was put to him personally. Every now and was ready to die, torn crowd and shoot at unarmed. He - the chief of the last undefeated station, the president of defunct confederation. For them, his authority unquestioned, and he is infallible, and any of its orders will be executed immediately, without reflection. He takes responsibility for everything, as he always did.

Away he is now, the station will absorb the anarchy, and then her to join the inflationary eyes red empire, boiled in their original boundaries, press down at all the new territories. Command to open fire on demonstrators, the government will remain in his hands - at a time. And maybe, if he does not hesitate to mass executions to torture, and for all.

He raised his automatic, and after a moment of operation synchronously repeated his motion. In a hollow sight raged crowd, not hundreds of people gathered together, and faceless human mush. Bared teeth, bulging eyes and clenched fists. A human right?

He klatsnul gate, and the structure to respond in kind.

It was time to finally take the destiny of the collar.

Lifting the trunk up, he pulled the hook, and the ceiling crumbled lime. The crowd fell silent for a moment, and giving the men the signal to drop their weapons, he took a step forward. It was his final choice.

And finally let go of his memory.

Sasha was still asleep. He made a last breath and tried to wink at her goodbye, but never managed to lift his eyelids. However, instead of eternal, everlasting darkness, he saw an impossible blue sky - clear and bright as the eyes of his daughter.

*** * ***

- Whoa!

The unexpectedness of Homer almost jumped on the ground and raised his hands, but then he pulled himself. Nasal megaphone shout, the spacecraft ever from the depths of the tunnel, caught off guard him alone. The foreman also was not surprised: curled up like a cobra before throwing, he pulled a barely noticeable from behind a heavy machine.

Hunter not only made no answer to his question, but in general stopped talking to the old man. Half kilometers from Tula to Nagatinskaya seemed interminable to Homer as a way to Calvary. He knew that this stage would almost certainly lead to his death, and force yourself to walk more quickly has not been easy. At least now it was time to get ready, and Homer took himself memories. Thought of Helen, lashed himself for selfishness, and asked for her forgiveness. The bright sadness came back that magic day in Tver under a light summer rain. Sorry that did not order before leaving their newspapers.

He prepared to die - to be torn monsters devoured huge rats poisoned emissions ...What other explanation could he give that Tula was transformed into a black hole, sucking in all the outside and nothing is letting back?

And now, when the approaches to the mysterious Tula he heard the voice of an ordinary man, he did not know what to think. Just grab the station? But who could grind to dust a few Sevastopol assault groups who would destroy all the polls tramps, which stretched to the station from the tunnels, not letting go of any women or the elderly?

- Thirty steps forward! - Heard a distant voice.

He was strikingly familiar, and give time to Homer, he could determine whom it belonged. Someone from Sevastopol?

Hunter, lulling in the hands of a Kalashnikov and began humbly count steps: the thirty-brigadirskih old man did all fifty. Could see a barricade in front of vaguely like a pile of random items. Light of its defenders for some reason did not use ...

- Pay off lights! - Ordered someone because of the dam. - One of you two - twenty more steps forward.

Hunter flicked the switch and moved on. Gomer, alone again, do not dare disobey. In the darkness of harm's way, he sat on the sleeper by gently felt for the wall and pressed himself against her.

Steps Brigadier subsided at measured at a distance. Voices:

someone indiscriminately questioning him, he abruptly barked in response. The situation escalated: restrained, though tense tones were replaced by insults and threats. It seems that Hunter something demanded by the invisible guards, but they refused to obey.

They are now almost in a voice shouting at each other, and Homer thought he was going to begin to distinguish words ... However, he managed to hear only one last thing:

- Kara!

But then, interrupting people, knocked machine, and he rumbled toward hard part of the army "Pecheneg. The old man threw himself to the ground, distorting the bolt, not knowing whether to shoot him, and if so, to whom. But it was all over before he had to overcome a jammed cartridge.

Fill in the brief pause in the morse code machine gun, the womb of the tunnel has issued a long-drawn screeching that Homer would be confused with anything.

The sound of closing germovorot! And, to confirm his guesses come resoundingly boomed, becoming in the groove, tons of steel, once tightly cutting off screams and the roar of gunfire.

Blocking the only exit in a large metro.

Depriving Sevastopol last resort.

Chapter 6

After a moment, Homer was ready to believe that all it seemed: the fuzzy outline of the barricade at the end of the tunnel and like a familiar voice, distorted by an old megaphone. Following the light went out all other sounds, and he now felt condemned, who before his execution, put bag over his head. In pitch darkness and silence suddenly

collapsed world seems to disappear. Homer just in case touched his face, making sure that he he has not yet faded into the blackness of space.

Then, recollecting himself, fumbled for the flashlight and put a trembling ray ahead of itself - where minutes earlier an invisible battle erupted. Thirty meters away from where he waited bout, the tunnel ended in a deadlock. Blocking the passage in its entire width and height, like a fallen knife guillotine, the stage cut a huge steel door.

He had not heard right: someone actually brought into effect hermetic locks.Homer knew about it, but did not think it can still be used. It turned out well.

His slack from the paper of the eye is not immediately discovered a human figure, leaning to the iron wall. Homer put forward gun and backed away, deciding that this is one of the people *on the other side* in the confusion left behind, but later found a man Hunter.

He did not move. Becoming covered with sweat, the old man hobbled to the foreman, expecting to see blood stains on the stainless metal ... But no. Although him and shot at point-blank machine-gun in the middle of the bare tunnel, Hunter was unhurt. Priniknuv his ear fused to metal, he absorbed him alone audible noise.

- What happened? - Homer asked cautiously, approaching.

The foreman did not notice it. He whispered something - but whispered to himself, repeating the words of those who remained behind closed the gates. A few minutes passed before he pulled away from the wall and turned to Homer.

- We're back.

- What happened? - He repeated.

- There are bandits. Need reinforcement.

- Bandits? - Bewildered old man asked. - I thought I heard ...

- Tula occupied by the enemy. Must be taken. Need flamethrower.

- Why flamethrower? - Homer utterly confused.

- For safety. We're going back - Hunter turned and walked away.

Before you follow him, the old man carefully examined germovorota and clung to the cold steel, hoping to overhear a scrap of conversation, too. In vain: Through the half-meter armor could not penetrate even the roar of the explosion.

Homer found himself does not believe the foreman. Whoever is an enemy that took the station, he led a completely inexplicable. Who would have thought to use the hermetic locks, only to be saved from two people? What are the gangsters would enter

into long negotiations with armed men at the border checkpoint, instead of just another riddle their approaches?

In the end, that could mean an ominous word "kara", dropped by the guards?

* * *

There is nothing more precious than human life, said Sasha's father. To him they were not empty words and not a truism. When a father does not think so, no wonder since he became the youngest commanders on the line.

When you're twenty, and the murder, and death to treat flippantly, and indeed the whole life seems to be a game that, if anything, you can start anew. It is no coincidence all the armies in the world manned yesterday's students. And here is disposed of play war youths who could see thousands of people fighting and dying - the blue and red arrows on the maps. Anyone who could forget the severed legs of vyvorochennyh guts and collapsing the skull, making a decision to donate his company or regiment.

Once her father with disdain, and his enemies, and to himself, and hits all easily took on the job, which would have cost him his head. He was not reckless, and in all his actions always present a rigorous calculation. Clever, studious, and, moreover, indifferent to life, he did not feel its reality, not thinking about the consequences and not bored by his conscience. No, he never shot the women and children, but personally executed deserters and first went to the bunkers. For pain, he too was almost insensitive. By and large, it was generally all the same.

Until he met Sasha's mother.

She caught it, got used to winning, his indifference. His only weakness, ambition, which is before throwing it on the guns, now led him to a new desperate assault, suddenly turning the long siege.

Earlier in the love he did not have to exert much effort: women themselves put their banners at his feet. Corrupt them pliable enough of another friend, he always had time before falling in love with her, and after the first night, lost its seduced by her interest. Its onslaught, and his fame froze girls eyes, and few of them even tried to apply the good old strategy - make a man wait to have time to meet him.

But it was boring. She was not impressed with awards, ranks, military, and love triumphs. She does not respond to his views, shaking her head in response to his jokes. And win it he began to seem more serious challenge than the conquest of neighboring stations.

Soon he realized that intimacy with her, which was to be just fresh notches on his butt, extended farther - and over time and by importance. She put herself in such a way that the opportunity to spend with her a day at least an hour already seemed an achievement. And even on this it was only a little to his torment. She doubted its merits and made fun of his principles. Criticized for callousness. Shook his confidence in their abilities and goals.

He suffered. Even there - he loved it. With it he began to wonder. Fluctuate. And then and feel: helpless - because he did not know how to approach the girl, sorry - those minutes are not spent with her, and even fear - of losing her, and not finding. Love. And she gave him a sign: a silver ring.

Finally, when he was completely forgotten how to live without her, she yielded to him.

Sasha was born a year later. It so happened that has two lives he could no longer be ignored, and he now had no right to die.

When you're only twenty-five, and you komanduesh the strongest army in the foreseeable part of the world, it is difficult to escape the feeling that your orders can make even the earth to stop spinning. But to deprive people of life, do not have much power. But give her deceased is not given to anyone.

He had a chance to see this: his wife killed tuberculosis, and he was powerless to save her. Since then, there is something to be reversed.

Sasha had just turned four, but she is well remembered his mother. Remember the terrible, the tunnel void that was left after her departure. Near death bottomless pit opened up in her little world, and she often looked down. Brink fused very slowly. It has been two or three years before she stopped to call his mother in a dream.

Father, happened to call her so far.

* * *

Maybe Homer took up the case at the wrong end. If the hero of his epic, he did not want to be him, maybe you need to start with his future girlfriend? Lure him with her beauty, promising passion and bliss?

First inspired to write her lines, and then he stepped out of nowhere ready-made, finished. After all, that their love was perfect, he would be required ideally supplement each other.

Their curves, their thoughts, they will fit together exactly how the fragments of broken stained glass windows on Novoslobodskaya. After all, they are also once represented a single unit, and were therefore doomed to be reunited again ...Homer did not see anything wrong to steal this successful groundwork for long-deceased classics.

But the only solution seemed simple: to fashion out of ink and paper live girl was an impossible task for Homer. And the feelings he is hardly able to speak convincingly.

His current alliance with Helen was full of senile tenderness, but they met too late for love without looking at the past. At this age tend not to satisfy a passion, and loneliness.

The real and only love of Nikolai Ivanovich was buried at the top. Over the past decade, all the details, except one, faded and worn, and he could not write a novel in nature. And then, in those respects still had no heroics.

In the afternoon, when Moscow was covered with a nuclear shower, Nicholas offered to become a train driver instead sent to a pension Serov. Wages had almost doubled, and before the increase would give him a few days off. He called his wife, she announced that charlotte cake, and went out for champagne, at the same time taking the children for a walk.

However, the change had to be finalized.

Nikolai Ivanovich entered the cabin of his train future captain, happily married and are in the beginning of the tunnel, leaving a marvelous, radiant future. Half an hour later left her aged just twenty years, crushed, beggars all alone. Maybe that's why every time he saw before him miraculously survived a train, he was overcome by a desire to take its rightful place driver, in a businesslike stroked the dashboard, look at the web of tubing through the windshield. Imagine that the composition can still be brought into life.

That we can give back up.

... No way, the team leader created around a particular field, which relegated him from any danger. And he seems to know about it. The road to Nagornaya not taken them an hour. The line did not provide him any resistance.

Homer always felt: Sebastopol armored cohort, as well as any other ordinary people dare to climb into the tunnels for the metro were alien organisms. Microbes trapped in his bloodstream. Cost them a step beyond the station, as the air around them becomes inflamed, the reality of crack, and as if from nowhere appeared unimaginable creation, which exhibited against a person underground.

But Hunter was not a foreign body in the dark spans, it caused no disturbance of Leviathan, the vessels which they traveled. Sometimes he turned off the lights and turns into a clot of darkness that filled the tunnels. Then it seemed to take up the invisible threads and carried forward twice as fast. Gomer, hurrying for a foreman with all his

might, struggled, shouted after him, and he seemed to his senses, stopped and waited for the old man.

On the way back, they were even allowed to quietly pass the Nagorny. Wraith was gone, the station was asleep. She is now viewed all through, and it was impossible to imagine where she managed to hide the ghostly giants. Normal abandoned stop: salt growths on the cheese ceiling, a soft feather bed from dust, spread out on a platform derived carbon in the blackened walls of the abuse. And then his eyes lingered on the strangest divorce on the floor, left over from someone's feverish dancing on the hardened brown spots on the columns, the ceiling lampshades that were hurt and knocked down, as if to have someone rubbing.

Sermon flashed and stayed behind: they flew on. While Homer is keeping up with the foreman, though he too was imprisoned in a magic bubble, doing what the untouchables. The old man wondered to myself: where are the forces on a long march ...

But that's to say, breathing was not enough. Yes, Hunter, more and honored him with their answers. How many times during this long day Homer asked himself why he even gave up the lonely and ruthless foreman who always strove to forget about him.

... Crept and stunned the stench Nakhimov Avenue. This station and Homer himself would have slipped through, forgetting to be careful, as soon as possible, but the foreman, in contrast, slowed down a step. The old man in his respirator could hardly stand, and Hunter also sniffed, as if in trouble, suffocating stench Nakhimov could distinguish some individual notes.

At this time Flesheater respectfully wandered in front of them, throwing nedoglodannye bones, dropping out of the mouth pieces of meat. Hunter came exactly to the middle of the hall, climbed the small hill, sinking ankle-deep in the flesh, and looked around the station a long look. Then, unsatisfied, dismissed the suspicions, and moved on, and not finding what I was searching for.

But it found a homer.

Slipped and fell on all fours, he startled the young Flesheater, fascinated vykoyrivaniem tidbits from the soaked body armor. Saw rolled away uniforms Sevastopol helmet and blinded by sweat, which instantly sucked from inside the glass mask.

Curbing retching, Homer getting to the bones and povoroshil them, hoping to find a soldier's medal. But instead saw a small notepad, smeared with crimson. It opened at once on the last page, the words "in any case no storm."

* * *

Father weaned her cry a little girl, but now she had nothing else to answer to fate. Tears were streaming down the face of breast torn thin, melancholy howl. She knew immediately what had happened, but after a few hours could not bring myself to live with it.

Whether he was calling her for help? Like whether to tell her something important before he died? She did not remember the moment when a failure in the sleep and was not quite sure, whether awake now. He could exist and the world, where her father did not die. Where she did not kill him with his delirium, his weakness and selfishness.

Sasha was holding in his hands cooled down, but not yet stiff father's hand as if still trying to warm him, and tried to persuade - and him and myself:

- You find the machine. We go upstairs, sit in it and leave. You'll laugh, as in the day brought a receiver from music CDs ...

Initially, my father sat with his back to the column and resting his chin in his chest, so that it can be taken as dormant. But then the body started to slowly slide down into a puddle of blood thickened, as if he himself is tired of pretending alive, and Sasha did not want to cheat.

Wrinkles, perpetually furrowed his father's face, almost completely smoothed out.

She released his hand and helped him lie down comfortably, with his head covered ragged blanket. She had no other way to bury him. Yes, she would raise her father to the surface and leave it there, that he lay there, staring at the sky, which once again will still be cleared. But long before his body becomes prey to the hungry creatures that are not pobrezguyut carrion.

And on their station to him nobody pritroneysya. From godforsaken south tunnels danger not to be expected - they have survived except that volatile cockroaches. In the north span is broken, leaving a rusty and poluobvalivshemusya metro bridge the sole surviving gauge.

There, over the bridge, there are people, but none of them will not come up with the idea to cross it out of curiosity. Everyone knows that on his other side starts scorched wasteland on the edge of which stands the station-to-hut with two doomed exiles.

The father would not let her stay here alone, yes it anymore and did not make any sense. And then, Sasha knew: how far would she not escaped, as he tried desperately to escape from a spell behind bars, now it will not be able to get rid of it for real.

- Dad ... Forgive me, please - she sobbed, realizing that he can not earn forgiveness.

Removed from his finger a silver ring and dropped in the pocket. Picked up a rat cage with a hushed and went away to the north, leaving behind on the dusty granite chain of bloody footprints. Chain to which it is now planted for life.

When Sasha came down on the way and stepped into the stage, on an empty station, turned into a funeral boat, it happened an extraordinary sign. From the opposite tunnel vents broke a long tongue of flame, silyaschiysya reach the body of her father. Not pulled out and stepped back into the dark depths, reluctantly acknowledging the right of Sasha's father laid to rest.

* * *

- Come back! They are back!

Istomin took the phone from his ear and looked at her incredulously, as if it were an animate being and just told him the stupid bike.

- Who are - they?

Denis M. jumped from his chair, uncomfortable spilling tea, which lay on his pants embarrassing blot. Tea, he gave a curse and repeated the question.

- Who are they? - Mechanically repeated Istomin at the device.

- Brigadier and Homer - rustled tube. - Ahmed was killed.

Vladimir dabbed with a handkerchief temples and rubbed his temple under the black rubber of his pirate bandages. Declare relatives on the death of soldiers was part of his duties.

Without waiting for switching the switch, he looked out the door and shouted to aide:

- To me both! And tell them to a table covered!

Walked around the office, whatever corrected hanging on the wall pictures, whispered something to the card, turned on Denis Mikhailovich. He folded his arms, frankly rocks.

- Volodya, you as a girl before a date - chuckled the colonel.

- I see you, too, worry - snapped the head of the station, nodding at obmochennye commanding pants.

- I-what? I have everything ready. Two shock troops assembled, a day before the mobilization, - Dennis M. gently stroked on the table blue beret, stood up and clapped him on the head, giving himself an official form.

The office has started running, rang devices, orderly, looking inquiringly, showed a gap in the door misted bottle with alcohol. Istomin dismissed - after all then! At last he heard a familiar voice muffled barking, the door flew off and blocked the doorway baggy figure. Behind the back of an old brigadier hesitated a liar, which he for some reason dragged along.

- Welcome! - Istomin sat in his chair, stood up and sat down again.

- What is it? - Rezanul colonel.

The foreman moved heavy glance from one to another and turned to the chief.

- Tula captured by nomads. All cut out.

- And our all? - Raised his shaggy eyebrows Denis M..

- As far as I know. We reached the gate of the station was a fight, and they closed the gate.

- locked germovorota? - Istomin sat up, clutching his fingers into the edge of the table. - And what do I do?

- to storm - synchronously clanged brigadier and colonel.

- not to storm! - Suddenly brought out of the receiving voice Homer.

* * *

We had to just wait until the appointed hour. If it does not upset the day the trolley was supposed to appear from the moist darkness of the night soon. Every extra minute spent here, on a precipice, where the tunnel is excavated vein show up from the earth's strata, the day cost her life. But the output was only one: to wait. On the other side of the bridge she would put her in a sealed germovorota, opened only from within - once a week, a market day.

Today Sasha had nothing to sell, and buy needed more than ever. But now she did not care that she has asked people with trolleys in exchange for a pass back to the living

world. Mogilny and cold indifference posthumous father to send her, and she wanted to pay the fare before you have time to thaw.

How long before Alex was dreaming about how they once did wander off to another station, where there will be surrounded by people, where she will be able to make friends with someone, meeting someone special ... Questioned his father about his youth, not only because I wanted to visit again in a bright child, but also because it stealthily substituted in place of his mother - a current, and the place of his father - a nebulous handsome with variable features, and clumsily imagined love. Worried that he could not find common ground with others, they come back in a big metro in fact. What do they talk to her?

And before the arrival of the ferry remained within hours, maybe minutes, but she did not care for others - both men and women, and even thoughts of returning to human existence seemed to her betrayal of her father. Do not hesitate a moment she would be willing to now spend the rest of their days on the station if it helped save him.

Candle candle in a glass jar flicked in agony, and it is transplanted to a new flame of the wick. In one of the top hikes father extracted a box of candles, and some of them are always littered with large pockets in her suit. Sasha would like to think that their bodies were like candles here, and some piece of her father turned to her after he had died away.

Will the people with trolleys its signal in the fog?

Until now it arrive just in time so that nothing not to linger outside for a moment. Father forbade, and his swollen goiter by itself was sufficient warning. On the precipice Sasha usually feel uncomfortable, as izlovlennaya shrew, looked around nervously and rarely dare to get close to first flight metro bridge to catch a glimpse of him at the bottom of the Black River flowed.

But now she had more time than it could spend. Hunched and shivering in the dank autumn wind, Sasha took a few steps forward, and for bony trees retreated at dusk appeared loose ridges of high-rise buildings. In a viscous oily river heavily splashed something huge, and moaning in the distance almost human voices unknown monster.

And suddenly, their plaintive cry joined, mournful creak ...

Sasha on her feet, raising a lamp, and the bridge answered - the slippery, furtive ray. She skated towards the shabby old trolley, forced his way through a barely padded darkness, wedge weak squeezing flashlight in the night and pushing her. The girl backed away: the trolley was not the same as usual. It was strained, as if each revolution of its wheels let's work on arms people with great difficulty.

Finally she stopped ten feet away from Sasha. With the frame heavily jumped on rubble in a tight canvas high fat. In glasses, mask dancing, bouncing, devilish lights, hiding from her eyes. In his hand was clutching the old man with a wooden Army Kalashnikov rifle.

- I want to leave here - throwing up his chin, said Sasha.
- leave, - echoed canvas dummy, mock surprise or stretching the vowels. - And what do you have for sale?
- I have nothing left - she fixed her eyes in his raging eye socket, bound in iron.
- Anyone can pick up something, especially a woman - the ferryman zahryukal, then caught himself. - Throw a dad?
- I have nothing left - Sasha repeated, lowering her eyes.
- Podoh after all - relieved, but disappointed handed mask. - And come on. He would now upset - trunk automatic counterfeit strap Sasha's overalls and slowly dragged it down.
- Do not you dare! - She cried hoarsely, pulled back.

Bank of the candle fell on the rails, sprayed by shrapnel, and the darkness instantly licked flames.

- It will not be returned, as you do not understand? - Scarecrow looked indifferently at her dull, dead windows. - Your body is not enough even to pay back my way to one side. I believe that I accept it as payment for her father's debt.

Automatic kuvyrnulsya in his arms, pivoting butt forward and hit her in the head, mercifully putting out consciousness.

* * *

After Nakhimov Hunter for some reason do not let go of Homer himself, and he had no chance to really explore the notebook. The brigadier suddenly became a predictor and a bit, trying not only to leave the old behind, but even walking with him in the leg, although for this he and I had a jump. A couple of times he stopped, as if to check to see whether someone at their heels. But the torch of his spotlight, turning back, constantly pacing the face of Homer, forcing the old man feel like in the torture. He swore, blinked, trying to recover, and felt as tenacious eye Brigadier crawl all over his body, feeling it in search of what he picked up on Nakhimovskom.

Nonsense! Of course, Hunter could not see anything at the moment he was too far away. Rather, he simply caught the shifting moods of Homer and suspected him of something. But every time their eyes met, the old man break through sweat. What little he had found a spy notebook, with enough surplus to question the foreman.

It was a diary.

Some pages stuck together from dried blood, Homer did not touch them: afraid to break the stiff fingers of stress. Entries in the first sheets were inconsistent, the authors could not keep in check, even letters, as thoughts of his gallop, so that for them it does not keep up.

"Nagorno were no losses," - said pad, and immediately jumped: "In the chaos of Tula. Exit the subway there, Hansa blocks. Home can not. "

Homer listnul forward, peripheral vision to notice, as the foreman lowered the mound and goes to him. Diary should not fall into his hands, I realized the old man. But before the notebook has dived into his knapsack, Homer had time to read: "We took the situation under control, the station cordoned off, was appointed commander, and immediately: "Who will die next? "

And: circled in frame, dangling over the issue was the date. Although pozhuhshie sheet notepad and they thrust to think that the events unfolding in his diary nearly the past decade, according to the figures, the recording was made just a week ago.

Kosteneyuschie old man's brains with a forgotten prytkostyu was put together disparate pieces of the puzzle: the mysterious stranger, privedvshegosya unfortunate homeless on Nagatinskaya seemingly familiar voice of a guard at germovorotah, the words "you can not go home" ... Before it began to line up the whole picture. Could not scribble on the pages bonded to give meaning to all the other strange occurrences?

Absolutely, no capture of the bandits, Tula was not: there is something happening is much more complicated and mysterious. And Hunter, a quarter of an hour interrogated sentinel at the gate to the station, he knew it is not worse than Homer.

That's why it was impossible to show him the notebook.

That is why Homer dared openly objected to it at a meeting in his office Istomin.

- can not - he said again.

Hunter slowly, like a battleship, suggestive of the main instrument, he turned his head toward him. Istomin, moved his chair back and still decided to get out from behind his desk. Colonel weary grimace.

- Blow up the hermetic locks will not work, there is ground water around in a flash flood line. And all of Tula on the word of honor is held, pray, not to burst. Parallelelny tunnel - you know, that's for ten years as ... - Homer continued.

- What are we, to knock and wait until they open? - Asked Dennis M..

- Well, there's always a workaround - Istomin recalled.

The unexpectedness of the colonel coughed, and then fiercely debated with the chief, alleging that the intention to cripple and ruin his best men. Then the foreman fired a volley.

- Tula should be tipped ... The situation is such that it is necessary across-the destruction of all who are on the station. There's already there is not one of your people. With them over. If you do not want to even greater losses, the only solution. I know whereof I speak. I have information.

The last words obviously intended to Homer. The old man felt himself get up to mischief Kutenkov, which was shaken by the scruff to bring to life.

- Given that the tunnel is on our side, blocking - Istomin pulled his jacket - there's only one way to get to the Tula. On the other hand, through the Hanseatic League. But we can not hold back armed men, it is excluded.

- I find people - Hunter dismissed, and the colonel started.

- Even just to get to the Hanse, must pass two stages of Kakhovska line to Kashirskaya ... - Head pointedly silent.

- So what? - Brigadier folded his arms across his chest.

- The area Kashirskaya in the stretch background comes to two hundred X-rays, - said the colonel. - There are far fallen fragment warhead. Every second received a dose of dying within a month.

Hung unkind silence. Homer, using the hitch, quietly began to retreat - of course, a tactical - of istominskogo cabinet. In the end, Vladimir Ivanovich, apparently fearing that unruly brigade still go bear hermetic locks at Tula, admitted:

- There is a protective suits. Just two. You can take a very healthy fighter, anyone. We will wait, - he looked at Denis Mikhailovich. - What do we still?

- Come to the boys, - the colonel sighed. - Talk, otberesh a mate.

- No need to, - Hunter shook his head. - I need a homer.

Chapter 7

The trolley has passed a broad band, inferred bright yellow paint on the floor and walls of the tunnel. Steering could no longer pretend not to hear all the clicks are accelerating the dosimeter. Grasp the brake, he murmured apologetically:

- Comrade Colonel ... Can not go on without protection ...

- Let's just another hundred yards - gently asked Dennis M., turning to him. - A week later you will release from duty, for the harm. Us that - two minutes pass, and they in these suits for half an hour wading.
- Since last frontier because, Comrade Colonel, - the steering whine, not daring to slow down.
- stopped, - ordered Hunter. - Sami will go farther. Indeed, the high background begins.

Creaking shoes, swinging a lantern hung on the frame and the trolley got. The Brigadier and the old man, sitting on its edge, his legs dangling down, climbed on the road. Heavy protective suits made of fabrics prosvintsovanoy really look like real spacesuits. Incredibly expensive and rare - in all metro such unlikely there would be more than a few dozen - at Sevastopol they are almost never used, biding their time. These armors were able to absorb the most severe radiation, but they even turned into a regular walking difficult to achieve - at least for Homer.

Denis M. trolley left behind and a few more minutes of walking with them, exchanging with Hunter phrases - deliberately torn and crumpled so that Homer could not deploy, and disassemble them.

- Where did you take? - He grunted the foreman.
- Will be given. Will not disappear - looking straight ahead, he boomed.
- You no long waits. You're dead to them. Dead, you know?

Hunter paused for a moment and quietly, as if speaking not to the commander, and to himself, said:

- If only it were that simple.

He waved his hand, giving the Colonel an honor and simultaneously cut the invisible anchor rope. Denis M., obeying, stayed on the pier, and the foreman with the old man slowly, as if overcoming the counter-flow, away from the shore and went to his great voyage on the seas of darkness.

Withdrew his hand from his temple, the colonel gave the start signal to the steering motor. He felt exhausted: he had no one else to nominate ultimatums, no one with whom to fight. The military commandant of the island, lost in one of these seas, he could now only hope that a small expedition did not perish in it, and once back home - on the reverse side, in his own way by proving that the Earth is round.

The last checkpoint was located in the stretch immediately after Kakhovska and was almost deserted. How old could remember, from east to Sebastopol is not attacked even once.

Yellow devil though not divided into conventional sections of an endless concrete intestine, and the space elevator connects the two planets distant from each other for hundreds of light years. Behind it habitable terrestrial space imperceptibly gave way to a lunar landscape of the dead, and any similarity was misleading. Concentrated on his feet in pood shoes, listening to his strained breathing, forced into a complex system of corrugations and filters, Homer presented himself is an astronaut who landed on the moon a distant star. This childishness excused himself: he was so it was easier to get used to gravity and that for miles ahead, they will be the only living beings.

Neither scientists nor science fiction will never know how how to predict the future, the old man thought. By two thousand and thirty fourth year the people would long ago have had to become the ruler, if not half of the galaxy, at least to the solar system, Homer is promised as a child. But science fiction writers, and scientists have proceeded from the fact that mankind is rational and consistent manner. As if it is not composed of several billions of lazy, frivolous, fond of individuals, but it was a kind of hive, endowed with the collective intelligence and a single will. As if, taking as space exploration, it's going to deal with it seriously and do not quit halfway, played enough and switched to electronics, but with the electronics - in biotechnology, in anything without reaching an ever-impressive results. Except, perhaps, nuclear physics.

And here it is, wingless Astronaut, nonviable without his bulky spacesuit, a stranger on our planet, explore and conquer the stretch of Kakhovska to Kashirskaya. And for more and he and other survivors, it is better simply to forget. Stars from here is still not clear.

Strange: here, the yellow bar, his body moaned polutorakratnoy gravity, but the soul was in a state of weightlessness. Days ago, saying goodbye to Helen before going to Tula, he still hoped to return. But when Hunter called his name, for the second consecutive time by selecting Homer his companions, he realized: smalodushnichat fail. So much he asked for the test, about enlightenment, which was finally heard, and is now trying to wriggle it would be foolish and unworthy.

He realized: a matter of life can not be addressed at half time. Needless to flirt with fate, promising she will certainly fully surrender to it later, next time ... Other times may not happen, and if he will not be solved right now, for what it then be? Ended his days obscure Nikolai Ivanovich, crazy town, slobbery old storyteller with a walking smile?

But to turn from a cartoon of Homer in the present, from mifomana - in mifotvortsya to rise from the ashes renewed, it was necessary first to burn his former self. It seemed to him: if he continues to doubt, will indulge a longing for home, woman, continually looking back, you will surely overlook something very important to come. We had to cut it.

Of the new campaign it would be difficult to return an integer, and return at all. And no matter how sorry he was Helen who first cried, not believing that Homer has appeared

on the station all through the day alive and well, and then wept again seeing him in anywhere and not being able to talk, this time he did not promise her. Better to let the thought of him as dead. Themselves present he is considered dead.

Her tears were hot, but not burn. He pressed to itself and Helen over her shoulder looked at his watch. He had to go.

Homer knew: ten years of life is not easy to amputate, they will surely be reminded of his phantom pains, but now it was easier to pretend that he does not remember about Helen, but she forgot about it, though it does not tie anything to the station, which he managed to become native.

He thought that it would wash away all the time to look back, but stepped thick yellow line, though he really died, and his soul will soar, bursting out of both overweight, hulking shells. He was released.

Hunter protective suit, it seems, no hardship. Spacious clothes fanned his muscular wolf shape, turning into a shapeless masses, but still not diminish agility. He was flush with the breathless old man, but only because of Nakhimov became closely behind him.

After what he saw on Nagatinskaya on Nagornaya and Tula, Homer was not easy to agree and continue the journey with Hunter. But he found a way to convince myself: it was in the presence of Brigadier with it began a long-awaited metamorphosis, promising rebirth. It does not matter why the foreman pulled behind him on - to instruct the old man on the right path, or as a food supply. The main thing for Homer was now not to miss this state, to have time to take them time to think, write ...

And here's another. When Hunter called him away, Homer seemed that he was exactly the same needs it. No, not in order to specify the way in the tunnels, not to warn about the dangers. Maybe the old man feeding the inspiration, the team leader himself took him something without asking? But what he could not miss?

External detachment Hunter could no longer deceive the old man. Under the crust of his face paralyzed seething magma occasionally splashed across the craters from closing, smoldering eyes. He was restless. He is also looking for something.

No, Hunter is not suited to the role of an epic hero for a future book, Homer rejected it on the first samples, but something in the figure of the foreman in his unsaid words, terse gestures nevertheless took possession of his imagination. Hunter was one of those killers that hints tease a result, wanting to be unmasked. The old man did not know whether Hunter sees in him a confessor, a biographer or a donor, but I felt that this strange relationship is mutual. Becomes stronger than fear.

Homer did not let the feeling that Hunter pulls a very important conversation. Sometimes the foreman turned to him, as if about to ask something, but could not utter. Although the old man could once again indulge in wishful thinking, and

Hunter simply led away behind him out into the tunnels, there to curtail unnecessary witness neck.

His eyes shone more and more old haversack, which was lying at the bottom of the ill-fated bag. He could not see him, but seemed to guess what is hidden in a backpack a subject that attracts the thoughts of Homer, stalked them and slowly pulled himself closer and closer to the notebook. The old man was trying not to think about the diary, but in vain.

Time to pack almost was not, and the old man could retire with the diary only a few minutes. They did not have to otmochite and to distribute leaflets fused with blood, but Homer was able to briefly run through the other pages at random mottled rash, fragmentary records. Their chronology has been broken, as if writing with great effort caught the elusive words and put them on paper where necessary. Now that they have acquired a sense, the old man had to build them in the correct order.

"Relationships do not. The phone is silent. Perhaps a diversion. Someone from the expelled to seek revenge? Before us. "

"The situation hopeless. Assistance waiting nowhere. Requesting Sevastopol, sentenced her away. It remains to tolerate ... How much? "

"Do not let go. Believe I represent a threat to our own. Crazy. If not me, then who? Run away! "

There was something else. Soon as the last word, calling to abandon the assault of Tula, was signed - a fuzzy, brown wax pripechatat bloody finger. This is the name Homer is not only heard of before, but he often uttered. Diary belonged to communicators from the caravan that was sent to Tula week ago.

They walked the ramp to electrodepot, which certainly would have been sacked, if not going wild here background. Black otsohshaya branch, going into it, was somehow fenced off valves welded pieces, and not very skillfully, and obviously in a hurry. On a tin plate, wire screwed to the bars, showing his skull and could be seen the following warnings, the extracted red paint, but whether the erased from time to time, whether someone soksoblennogo.

Collapsed view of this slatted well and could barely get out of it back, Homer thought that the line probably was not always so lifeless, as did at Sevastopol.

Passed Warsaw - a horrible, rusty moldy, like a drowning caught. The walls are divided by tile cells, muddy water of oozing. Through parted lips hermetic locks into a cold wind from penetrating the surface, as if someone had a huge, prniknuv them outside, doing long decaying plant artificial respiration. Dosimeters fought hysterically, demanding that take away his legs.

Closer to Kashirskaya one unit goes down, the figures on the other rested on the very edge of the board. Homer felt a bitter taste on the tongue.

- **Where is the epicenter?**

Voice of the foreman was heard bad, though Homer dropped his head in the filled bathtub. He stopped - at least take this brief respite - and waved his glove in the south-east.

- **Do Kantemirovskaya. We think it struck the roof of the pavilion, or ventilation shaft. No one knows.**
- **So, Kantemirovskaya thrown?**
- **and always has been. For Kolomenskaya entire line blank.**
- **And I said ... - Hunter began, but paused, giving the sign of cease and Homer and tuning in some subtle waves. - It is known that Kashirskaya? - Finally he asked.**
- **Where to? - Old man was not sure that he was able to put an ironic note in nasal trombones buzz emanating from its respiratory filters.**
- **I'll tell you. There's a light that for a minute at the station, both broiled until coals. Nothing helps. There can not be. Pivoted.**
- **Back? At Sevastopol?**
- **Yes. Climb up there, I'll try to get on the ground - thoughtfully already wondering route, said Hunter.**
- **one going? - Homer is startled.**
- **I can not save you there. I'll be busy with his own skin. Yes there alone and did not pass. Even I myself alone with no warranties.**
- **But ... - Homer frantically searching for a reason to stay with the team leader.**
- **Nothing. I can handle.**

In Hunter said there was no audible jeers, as if he really calmed Homer, who really counted would help him. Although Homer knew: in fact, it's a gas mask filters filter out any impurities flowing into the only tasteless, sterile air, and outside - the mechanical and soulless voice.

The old man closed his eyes for a moment, remembering everything he knew about kutsoy Kakhovska line on the affected lower extremity radiation Zamoskvoretskaya branch on the way from Sevastopol to the Serpukhov ... Anything, just not to turn back, but would not return to his meager life, a false pregnancy, great novels and legends of the immortals.

- Follow me! - Suddenly he gasped with surprise even to himself agility hobbled to the east - to Kashirskaya in the inferno.

* * *

She drove a file by a bracelet of steel shackles, which had been chained to the wall. Files screamed and slipped, and even when she began to feel that his linen on a half-millimeter vgryzlos in steel, it was worth to come off and see how shallow, barely incipient furrow lingered in her eyes.

But Sasha did not despair: once again took on the tool and stesyvaya hands, was taken to cut unyielding metal, observing the strict rhythm. The main thing - do not stray from it, not to give up the slack, do not stop work for a moment. Grasped the ankle fetters were swollen and numb. Sasha realized that even if she can defeat the iron, it would still not be able to escape, because his legs refuse to obey it.

She hardly raised her eyelids.

Shackles were at the scene: two pairs of handcuffs tied her hands and feet. She lay in a dirty back of an old quarry trolleys, monotone poskulivayushey and painfully slow trailing forward. Her mouth was crowded with a greasy rag, temple whimpered and bled.

Not killed, I thought Sasha. Bad ...

Of the body was visible only piece of the ceiling. In the uneven scrap of light spot flickers spikes tubing: trolley rolled on track. While Sasha was trying to take his hands shackled behind his back, tubing replaced the peeling white paint. Sasha alert: that the station?

It was not good: not just quiet, and muffled, not deserted and lifeless, and completely dark. For some reason she always thought that there, beyond the bridge, each station is filled with people everywhere is a ruckus. It turned out that she was mistaken?

Ceiling over Sasha stopped. Her captor, grunting and blaspheming, climbed onto the platform, gnashed shod heels, walking around, like exploring the neighborhood. Then, apparently already taking off his mask, uterine sympathetic voice prourchal:

- Here is where we are. How old, how many winters!

And relish vent air from the lungs, hard hit - no, kicked his boot - something nonliving, voluminous - bag stuffed with? ..

Guess Sasha made his teeth in stinking rags and moaned, arched her body tetanus arc. She understood, and brought it to the canvas fat, and with whom he talked.

* * *

It was ridiculous to even hope to get away from Hunter. He caught the old man in a few lion jumps, clutching his shoulder and shook his hurt.

- What is it?
- A little more to go ... - Homer croaked. - I remembered! Here Congress directly to Zamoskvoretskaya, very close. Previously, because Warsaw was merely an offshoot of the Green Line, Kakhovsky is then built. But Congress still had to be preserved. You will not need to go to Kashirskoye. Go around, get out immediately to Kolomna. There should be close. Please ...

Seizing the moment, he tried to escape, but became entangled in the socket leg, fell back on track, he immediately got up and again jerked forward. Hunter, with ease, like a rat on a rope holding the old man on the spot, turned him to face him. Leaned over to him so that scuttles their masks came up. Looked at Homer and a few seconds later loosened his grip.

- Okay.

Now the foreman pulled it himself, without pausing for a moment longer. Knocking the blood in my ears drowned out the frantic chirping counters zadereveneli legs and could hardly listen to the lungs, it seemed, from stress cracked and scary smart.

Finally arrived. From afar when he saw a dark hole mezhlineynika densely cobwebby, Brigadier threw Homer:

- You have been there at least one day?

Anyone wishing breath talking, just shook his head. Indeed it was, before him there had never swerved. And those are things that he had heard about this tunnel, is hardly worth telling Hunter.

Throwing machine at his left hand, the team leader pulled out of his backpack a long rectangular cleaver, reminiscent of homemade machetes, and ripped a whitish sticky lace. Seared skeletons of flying cockroaches, stuck in the networks, began to tremble and rustled husky sleigh bells. Inflicted wound immediately closed my edge, though overgrown. Removing a translucent canvas web and thrusting into the light, the foreman lit side tunnel. At its clearance would be needed Hours: sticky thread multilayered weave filled mezhlineynik everywhere, as far beam.

Hunter checked with a dosimeter, has issued a strange guttural sound, and began to furiously shred stretched between the walls of the yarn. Cobweb succumbed slowly, taking more time than they had left. For ten minutes they were able to move all meters at the thirty-forward, and all the interwoven threads of denser cotton cap scoring pass.

Finally, overgrown with ventilation shafts, under which the sleepers lay an ugly two-headed skeleton, the foreman threw cleaver on the floor. They were stuck in the web just like cockroaches, and even if the monster that have woven these networks have not existed, they are still very soon die - from the radiation.

In those moments schitanye before Hunter made the decision, the old man remembered something else, once heard of this tunnel. Dropping to one knee, he was knocked out of the horn a few spare cartridges, remove the bullet, helping himself with a penknife, and pour the powder into his palm.

Hunter explanation is not required. A few minutes later, returning to the top of mezhlineynika, they poured the floor on a padded gray grinding hill and put it to her lighter.

Powder snorted, puffed, and suddenly the unbelievable happened: the flame of it was spilled in all directions at once, climbing the walls, pulling up to the distant ceiling, capturing the entire space of the tunnel. Vyzhiraya web, it lunged deep. A roaring, blazing ring, illuminating the grimy tubing and leaving behind only hanging from the ceiling rare burnt rags, unstoppable moving forward. Rapidly shrinking, the fiery hoop went to Kolomna, a giant piston, sucking in an air. Then the tunnel swerved, and the flame disappeared around the corner, dragging the purple robe Scorchlings.

And quite far through the smooth hum of the fire seemed to cut a non-human, half with a desperate cry hoarse hissing ... While hypnotized by this spectacle of Homer he could and quirks.

Hunter threw the sword back into his backpack instead fumbled it new, unopened cans for a gas mask.

- On the way back to shore - he changed his filter and a second bank gave the old man. - Due to a fire there dirty as immediately after impact.

The old man nodded. The flames sprang up, vzbalamutilo radioactive particles deposited on the web for years, eats into its threads. Black vacuum of the tunnel now, was actually filled with harmful molecules. Hanging in the void billions of tiny underwater mines, they closed their fairway. To pass them was impossible.

I had to go through.

* * *

- should have seen you now, your dad - mockingly chided her fat.

Sasha was sitting just in front of his father's body, overturned his back, his face in blood. Both shoulder straps of the overalls were already pull off with her shoulders, revealing faded T-shirt with the image of a gay animal. Thief did not allow her to see her face, searing her eyes bright beam every time she tried to raise them. Rag he pulled out of her mouth, but Sasha is still not going to ask him about anything.

- At her mother did not like, unfortunately. And I had hoped.

Elephant feet high rubber boots, izgvazdannyyh already in the red again embarked on a round column, which has sat Sasha. Now his voice was heard from her from behind.

- Dad thought that with time everything will be forgotten. But some crimes there is no statute of limitations ... In defamation. In treason.

His puffy silhouette emerged from the darkness on the other side. He stood over the body of Sasha's father, Poper his boot, spat profusely.

- It's a pity that the old man threw himself without my help - the fat man ran a ray of dull, faceless station littered with piles of worthless junk, stopped at beskolesom bike. - And at you here uyutnenko. I think if it were not for you, your dad would rather hang myself.

Until the lamp was distracted from her, Sasha tried to crawl away, but after a second beam is again caught her in the darkness.

- And I understand it - in one leap kidnapper was near. - The girl turned out just right. The only pity is that not like a mom. He, I think, too upset. Well, nothing - toe boots, he flunked it on its side. - No wonder I was getting here through all the subway.

Alex twitched and shook her head.

- See how everything is unpredictable, Peter - he again turned to Sasha's father. - There was a time when you gave love rivals before a tribunal. And thank you, that is not executed, but simply expelled for life. But life is long, and circumstances change. And not always in your favor. I'm back, let me and went at it for ten years longer than I planned.
- Return is never an accident - Sacha whisper echoed his father.
- Golden words - ironically praised fat. - Hey, who's there?

At the opposite end of the platform rustled and dropped something heavy, then as if he heard a hiss, stealthy steps big game ... Once again there was silence was false, ragged, and Sasha, just as her captor, she felt: the tunnel is something coming to them ...

Fat Man klatsnul gate knelt down beside the girl, pulled to the shoulder butt and looked shaky spot of light surrounding the column. Hear how come alive for decades unoccupied southern stretch, it was no less terrifying than waking up to find the marble statues in some of the central stations.

... In an already leaving in the direction of the beam flashed oiled shadow, not exactly cheloveskaya - either in outline or in agility ... But when the light fell again to a place where only that there were mysterious creatures that have already gone. A minute later, panicky hopping beam zatralil it again - only about twenty paces from them.

- Bear! - Incredulously whispered the fat man, taking his gun.

Bullets snapped up the column, were pecking at the walls, but the beast seemed transfigured, and not one shot has not reached the goal. And then the fat man suddenly stopped the senseless firing, dropped from the hands of gun and pressed them to her stomach. His flashlight rolled away, throwing plasteel on the floor and bottom of the cone of light illuminating his bulky figure bent.

From dusk slowly made man - a surprisingly soft, almost silently treading heavy shoes. In too freely even for a giant protective suit it really could be mistaken for a bear. Mask on it was not; ispolosovannaya scars shaved head looked like scorched wasteland. Part of his face - a brave, raw, and rather tartly delineated - was rather beautiful, but she seemed dead, and when you look at her Sasha was unable to overcome chills. The other half was frankly appalling: a complex interweaving of scars turned it into a half-mask fabulous monster, perfect in its ugly, but it is not evil, and indifferent. If it were not for his eyes, his appearance would be repulsive, but not frightening. Scoured, half-mad look enlivened immobilized person. Revived, but not swayed by it.

The fat man tried to climb to his feet, but immediately collapsed to the floor, screaming in pain, with a hole in the knees. Then a man crouched beside him, put a long, topped with a silencer pistol barrel to the back of his head and pulled the trigger. Cry broke instantly, but the echo for a few seconds wandered under the arches of the station, though devoid of the body has lost the essence.

Shot threw his chin, and now Sasha's kidnapper lay, turning to her ... Instead, his face wet gaping scarlet funnel. Sasha vzhala his shoulders and quietly began to howl in horror. Horrible man slowly, thoughtfully translated the muzzle on her.

Then he turned around and changed his mind: the gun disappeared podplechnoy holster, and he stepped back, though otkreschivayas of the offense. Opened flat flask and put it to her.

On a small stage lit by a flashlight is dying killed by a fat man, a new character: hard to breath taking, holding on to edge the old man.

Dressed in a suit, like a murderer, he looked at it utterly ridiculous. Caught up with his companion, he immediately fell down exhausted on the floor, not even noticing that everything is bathed in blood - and fresh, and already clotted. Only later came to himself and opened his eyes and saw two mutilated bodies, and sandwiched between them mute, terrified girl.

* * *

Was hushed heart jumped again. Homer could not yet put it into words, but knew for sure: he found it. After so many nights spent in fruitless attempts to imagine his future character, to come up to her lips and hands, dress and smell, movement and thought, he suddenly met a living person, which is exactly in line with his wishes. No, before he presented her to me is not so ... more refined, smoother and certainly more mature. It was much tougher, it had too many sharp angles and, looking into her eyes, instead of warm languid languid old man ran into two fragments of ice. It was different, but Homer knew: he was wrong, it's not able to correctly guess what it should be.

Her deadbeat view, distorted by fear traits, shackled his hands intrigued old man. Suppose he was a master of retelling fables, but to write a tragedy like the one that was supposed to happen with this girl, he was not given. Her helplessness, hopelessness, miraculous escape, and how naturally her fate intertwined in their history, means: he is on the right path.

And suppose she has not uttered a word, he was ready to believe it in advance. Indeed, inter alia, the girl - with its white, disheveled, somehow lop hair and sharp ears, smeared with soot in the nude carved cheekbones and collarbones - suddenly white, vulnerable, with its child-like plump, prikushenny lower lip - was are especially beautiful.

To his curiosity mingled and compassion, and a sudden tenderness.

The old man approached and sat down beside her on his haunches. She cringed and closed her eyes. Savage, he thought. Patted her on the shoulder, not knowing what to say, gave duty banality ... For more time was not enough.

- It's time to leave - had invaded Hunter.
- And what about ... - Homer nodded inquiringly at the girl.
- Nothing. None of our business.
- Do not leave her here alone!
- It is easier to shoot - cut off the foreman.
- I do not want you to go - suddenly gathered, she said. - Only remove the handcuffs. Keys should be with him - she pointed to a broken faceless mannequin.

Hunter, in three movements, and searched the corpse fished out from his inside pocket a bunch of tin key. Threw their little girl, looked at the old man:

- Satisfied?

Homer, still trying to postpone the parting, asked her:

- What does this subman to you?
- Nothing, - she said, picking at the lock. - Do not have time. He did not subman. Ordinary person. Cruel, stupid, vindictive. How it all.
- Not all of these - the old man replied, without conviction.
- All - stubborn girl said, frowning, but getting up on his stiff legs. - It's nothing. Remain a human being - too easy.

Quickly, she forgot her fright! Eye it was no longer lowered, staring at the men nasupleno, defiantly. Went to one of the corpses carefully turned his face up, put him zalomlennye hands and kissed his forehead.

Then she turned to Hunter, squinted, and a corner of her mouth trembled.

- Thank you.

Items and weapons with them, it did not take. Got off on the road and walked, limping towards the tunnel. Brigadier nabychivshis watched her, his hand hesitantly roamed the belt between the knife and a flask. Finally defined, it stood up and called to her.

- Wait!

Chapter 8

Cage was lying there, where the fat man knocked her out of Sasha's hands. Her door was ajar, the rat ran away ...

There was no choice, and Sasha had to wear a mask, up fallen her kidnapper. He seemed still retains the remains of his musty breath, but Sasha could only be glad that the fat man had time to remove the mask before he was shot. Toward the middle of the bridge jumped again background radiation, and it appear she was there without protection, who knows how much it would have sufficed. The huge canvas suit, in which it floundered as cockroach larva in a cocoon, maintained it for a miracle.

But the mask, even though he was stretched on the wide, sagging with Bryl, fat face, firmly stuck to her face. Sasha tried to blow as much as possible to get rid of the hoses and air filter, intended for another victim. But looking around through zaprevshie round glasses, she could not escape the feeling that fits not just someone's protective suit, and in someone else's body. Only an hour ago had come inside her soulless demon. Now, that still cross the bridge, it seemed had itself become them, look at the world through his eyes.

She did not remember very well what her life was like before them with his father went into exile. Maybe her subconscious mind brightened the fragmentary images from the distant past to give her some kind of outlet - besides himself tea bag? Hence, all the people in a large metro does indeed have been hardened, ruthless, and the station, where she could settle down, get lost, simply did not exist? Sorry, can not remain in the rubber mask, always pretending to be someone else, someone without a face and without feelings.

Whether it will, she will never have it is not removed. If it only helped her to become another person, depersonalized himself not only outside but inside, clear the memory. Forget everything that happened to her. I sincerely believe that you can still start again.

Sasha would like to think that these two men picked up its no coincidence that they were sent to the station just behind her, but she knew it was wrong. It was difficult to determine why they took her with him in fact - for fun, out of pity, or something to each other to prove. In a few words, like a bone thrown to her old, though through a sort of sympathy, but he did everything with an eye on his companion held the language and if he were afraid that his ulichat in humanity.

The second after let her go with them to the nearest manned station, more generally did not look in her direction. Purposely hesitated, Sasha missed it a little forward, so it can freely learn at least from the back. He clearly felt her eyes - immediately tensed up and pulled his head - but did not turn around, or condescending to the girl's curiosity, or not wanting to show that draws attention to it.

A powerful addition and animal habits shaved, which made fat mix it with the bear, gave it a warrior, and alone. It was not only in its growth, or a yard shoulders. From it came the power, and it would be just as palpable, whether he is thin and poor. Such a person would be able to make almost anyone to obey and disobey kill without hesitation.

And long before Alex finally cope with your fear of this man, before it began to try to understand it in himself, yet unfamiliar voice just wakes up in her women confidently said Sasha: she, too, he will obey.

* * *

TROLLEY go forward to the surprise of disputes. Resistance levers Homer hardly felt: the whole weight assumed the team leader. The old man, standing on their other side, for the order also raised and lowered his hands, but his forces, this work does not take away.

Squat Metro Bridge centipede crawling wade thick dark river. Concrete flesh peeled from his iron bones, paws gave way, one of the two ridges subsided and collapsed. Utilitarian standard and short-lived, as new buildings surrounding it, as all stamped outskirts of Moscow, he was completely devoid of any kind of grace. But by rolling over it and looking around admiringly, Homer thought of divergent magic bridges of St. Petersburg, on openwork blackened Crimean bridge.

For more than twenty years lived in the subway, the old man only three rose to the surface, and each time tried uglyadet more than I could see during his short leave pass. Revive memories, clicked stainless diaphragm visual memory, to gain experience in the years ahead. Of course, if he ever again be fortunate enough to find yourself at the top - at Kolomna, river station or a warm camp. In these wonderfully beautiful places to which he, like many Muscovites, had belonged to some - unfairly - disgust.

Year by year it grew old Moscow, crumbling, faded. Homer wanted to pat the decaying Metro Bridge as well as girl on Kolomenskaya last caressed past the blood of man. And the bridge, and the gray headlands of factory buildings, and orphaned hives homes. Stop looking at them. To touch them to feel that he is indeed among them, and do not see it all in a dream. And so just in case, say goodbye to them.

Visibility was bad, silvery moonlight came through the filter of dense clouds, and the old man had to guess more than notice. Nothing, he was no stranger to substitute fantasies a reality.

Completely given to contemplation, Homer is now thought of nothing else, forgetting about the legends that he had to lay down, and a mysterious diary, unseparated disquieted his imagination all the last few hours. He behaved like a child on

the trip: depart, zasmatrivayas on blurry silhouettes of skyscrapers, turning his head, saying something to himself aloud.

Another trip over the bridge apparently no pleasure. The foreman, who took the place facing forward, occasionally froze and looked around at the bottom came the noise. Otherwise, his attention was riveted on that remote, can not see anyone else at the point where the road once again dug into the ground. The girl was sitting behind the Hunter, for some reason, both hands clutching the trophy mask.

Was evident: at the top of her at ease. While the squad was moving through the tunnel, she seemed pretty high, but when they come out, as she shrank into herself, as if drawn into an invisible shell, and even removed from the corpse of a canvas smock, which was her monstrously large, did not make it bigger. To view from the bridge beauty she was indifferent, and looked increasingly to the floor in front of him.

It had no coquetry, she never played. It seems that she neglected not only firearms but also the usual array of female grimasok touching and cute antics, flapping eyelashes that could raise the storm, and poluulybok for which one can sacrifice himself or to kill another. Or simply did not know how to use it?

Anyway, this arsenal it was no good. One direct stab eyes she forced Hunter to change his decision. Are penetrations, hit the soft? Or need him for something? Rather, so the second: even assume that the foreman had vulnerabilities that it could not exactly hurt, but at least touch, Homer was in a strange way. Ask the old man of the Hunter, of course, dared not, and establish with him a conversation with a girl also did not hesitate.

In the darkness a pale entrance to the tunnel was black darkness absolute. Now, the suit was for Homer real armor, and he was - a medieval knight who enter the fairy cave dwelling in the dragon. Noise of the city at night remained in the doorway of his den, the same place where Hunter ordered to throw the trolley. Now was heard only timid steps, the rustle of the three travelers and their meager words, fragmented faltering echoes of the tubing. But in the sound of this tunnel was something unusual. Even Homer clearly felt an enclosed space, if they entered through the neck in a glass bottle.

- There is closed - has confirmed his fears Hunter.

Ray of his lantern first find the bottom: in front of a blank wall loomed locked hermetic locks. Terminating at the gates of the rails a little glitter in the loops of the massive brown tufts sticking out of grease. Were immediately dumped the old board, mangled dry branches, smoldering, if someone had recently burned a fire here. The gate is clearly used, but apparently only on the way out - no phone calls, nor any other devices to alert them that the direction was not.

The foreman looked at the girl.

- There is always wrong?

- They sometimes overlook. Visit us on the other side. Trade. I thought today ...

She's like trying to justify himself. Know that there is no access, but hide it?

Hunter zamolotil the gate of his arm with a machete, as if in a huge iron bell. But the steel was too thick, and instead of ringing drone responded by weak tinkling. It is unlikely that it was discernible through the wall even be there anyone alive.

Miracle happened. There was no answer.

* * *

Sasha illogically hoping that these people will be able to unlock the gate. Afraid to tell them that the entrance to a large metro is closed - they suddenly decide to go another way, and left her there, where they found?

But in a large metro they were not wanted and crack hermetic locks were beyond the power of any man. Shaven examined the leaf, trying to find a weak spot or a secret lock, but Alex knew: this side there are no locks. The door opens just outside.

- will be here. I have to investigate. Check valves in the second tunnel, look for ventilation shafts - he barked, paused, and for some reason added - I'll be back.

He said and disappeared. The old man picked up discarded containers from around the branches and planks, lit a puny kosterok. Sat directly on the sleepers, ran his hands in the backpack and began to search through their property. Sasha sat down beside him, hiding, watching. The old man was playing a strange spectacle - either for it, whether for himself. Fished out of a backpack worn and stained notebook, he threw a cautious glance at Sasha, moved sideways away from her and bent over the paper. Immediately jumped from the suspect for his age agility - to check whether the shaven left. Clumsily stole about a dozen steps to the exit of the tunnel, no one there has found and determined that these funny actions precautions will be enough. Leaned against the gate, blocked by Sasha bag and immersed himself in reading.

He read nervously: something vaguely Snuffles, then took off his gloves, took out a flask of water and was for some reason my notebook sprinkled with water. I read a little more and suddenly began to rub her hands on her legs, angrily slapped his forehead with his hand, whatever touched the mask, and again rushed to read. Infected by his excitement, Sasha distracted from their thoughts and to get closer, the old man was too occupied to notice her small maneuvers.

His pale green eyes, pouring light a fire, frantically shone even through the glass mask. From time to time it with a visible difficulty emerges back - for a breath of

air. Looking up, cautiously peering into the distant night sky penny at the end of the tunnel, but it was pure: shaven man disappeared from the ends. And then the notebook again swallowed it whole.

Now she understood why he had poured water paper: attempted to paste up pages are stuck together. Apparently, they resisted they do not: once he screamed as if he cut himself: accidentally broke one of the sheets. Cursed, cursed himself, and he saw how intently she looks at him. Embarrassed again corrected mask, but did not speak to her was, until not read to the end.

Then he jumped to the fire and threw it at his notebook. Sasha, he was not looking, and she felt: now get out is not worth sovret or smolchit. And there were things that troubled her now, much more. Passed, probably an hour since I left shaven. Not whether he threw them as an unnecessary burden? Sasha sat down close to the old man.

- The second tunnel is also closed, - she said softly. - And all the neighbors of mine bricked. There is only this entry.

He absent-mindedly looked at her with a noticeable effort focusing on heard.

- He finds a way to get inside. He has a flair - he paused, and a minute later, though not wishing to be impolite, he asked. - What is your name?

- Alexandra - seriously, it had the. - And you?

- Nicholas ... - he began, holding out her hand, and suddenly, as if he changed his mind, frantically pulled back her, before Sasha has had time to touch him. - Homer. My name is Homer.

- A strange nickname - repeating the old man stretched out Sasha.

- This is the name - firmly, "Homer said.

Explain to him that while they are with it, the door will not open? They could be wide open, come these two here alone. Sasha grew up in the belief that it bears a curse that Kolomenskaja refuses to let her go until she atone for his sin. After all, she is to blame for the death of his father, even if it did not kill him myself, let it simply could not save him.

However much she might try to chase these thoughts, they are as bloodsucking mosquitoes flew away from her at arm's length to get back as soon as she decides that she finally left him alone.

The old man has asked Sasha about something, but she did not respond: veil of tears froze to her eyes and ears rang his father's voice, repeating: "Nothing is more precious than human life." Moment had come when she truly understood him.

* * *

What was going on in Tula, was no longer a mystery for Homer. Everything was explained easier and more frightening than he imagined. But the story is even more terrible starts only now, together with details of the found notebook. Diary proved to be a black mark of Homer, one-way tickets, and receiving him in her arms, the old man could not get rid of it, no matter how he tried to burn it.

In addition, his suspicions regarding the Hunter, now backed by weighty, unambiguous evidence, even though Homer had no idea what he do with them. All that he read in his diary, quite contrary to the assertions of the brigadier. He simply lied and lied deliberately. The old man had to figure out for what was the lie, and whether it makes any sense. Depended on it and then decides if he does continue to follow the Hunter, and what will result if his heroic epic adventure or a nightmare reckless massacre, in which there will be no living witnesses.

The first notes in the notebook were dated the day, when the caravan passed without loss Nagornaya and went to Tula, without encountering any resistance ...

"Almost up to the Tula tunnels are quiet and empty. Moving quickly, a good sign. The commander expects to return no later than tomorrow ", - reported dead signalman. "Entry to the Tula is not protected. Sent a scout. Do not come back "- he was worried a few hours later. "The commander decided to move to the station all together. Preparing for the storm. " And some time later: "We can not understand what was going on ... We talk with the locals. Bad. Disease. As if embarrassed confusion the previous record, he soon explained: "Some people at the station hit by something unknown disease Death occurs within a few days. " Obviously, the caravan trying to help the sick: "The assistant was unable to find a cure. Said, looks like a mad ... Experiencing horrific pain, insane ... they drop on the other. " And then: "Loose disease may not cause serious harm. The trouble in the other ... "- here the page, as luck would have it ssohli, and Homer had to pour out their water from his canteen. "Photophobia. Nausea. Blood in the mouth, nose. Coughing up blood.Paramedic said "airborne" - is already the next day. The detachment was delayed.

Why are not reported, he asked the old man, and immediately remembered that somewhere already seen the answer. Perelistnul ... "no communications. The phone is silent. Perhaps a diversion. Someone from the expellees to seek revenge?Even before we found out, first drove patients to tunnels. One of these? Cut the cable? Or ... "

At this point Homer tore his eyes from the letters and unseeing eyes staring ahead of him. The cable is cut, for example. Why then did not return to Sevastopol?

"Worse. Yet manifested - it takes several weeks. No one knows who is sick, who are healthy. Nothing helps. No cure. Mortality hundred percent. " A day later signaller made another record, already familiar to Homer: "At Tula chaos. Exit the subway there, Hansa blocks. Home is impossible ", and by Page continued:" Those with guns, fired in patients, especially aggressive ones. Some of them are sick themselves through the day ... Make a shelter for infected ... Resist, asking out, and after a brief, scary: "bite each other"

Signal Corps, too, was terrified, but the iron discipline in the force prevented the fear turn into panic. Even in a deadly outbreak of the epidemic fever remained Sevastopol Sevastopol brigade brigade ... "brought the situation under control, cordoned off the station, was appointed commandant, was reading Homer. "Our all is OK, but too little time has passed."

Search party sent from Sevastopol, safely reached Tula - and, of course, also got stuck on it. "Made a decision to stay here until you pass the incubation period, so as not to jeopardize ... Or forever - doomed written communicator. "The situation hopeless. Assistance waiting nowhere. Requesting Sevastopol, sentenced her away. It remains to tolerate ... How much? "

Hence, a mysterious watch with germovorot at Tula was exposed to Sevastopol? Their voices are not accidental seemed familiar to Homer: duty of carrying the people with whom a few days before he was defended by ghouls Chertanovskaya direction! Voluntarily relinquished the return, they hoped to protect from infection with the native plant ...

"Most often, when a dense personal contact, but apparently, there is in the air. Someone's immunity? Began almost a month ago, many people do not get sick ... but dead more. We live in a morgue "- scribbled signalman. "Who will die next?" - Suddenly he broke into hysterical screams. He took himself in hand and went smoothly: "We must do something. Prevented. I want to go volunteer. Not to Sevastopol - find a place where a damaged cable. Call, you must call "

It was another day, probably filled with invisible struggle with the commander of the caravan, noiseless disputes with other fighters and growing despair. All that signalman tried to convey to them, he gathered, expounded in his diary. "I do not understand how it looks from Sevastopol! For a week as a blockade. Will send a new troika, which also can not return. Then he will be a great attacking team. Mobilized. All who come to Tula, at risk. Someone gets infected, run away home. It's all over. It is necessary to prevent a storm! They do not understand ... "

Another attempt to reach out to the authorities - a barren, like all the previous ... "Do not let go ... Crazy. If not me, then who? Need to run "

"Pretended to be reassured that he agreed to wait" - he telegraphed through the day - came out to watch a hermetic locks. Shouted that I would find cable break, and

ran. Shot me in the back. Stuck bullet. " All the latest letters were thickly fringed with blood.

"Not for myself. For Natasha, for earrings. Sam did not think to escape. Let them live. Shackle to ... "- then jumped into the pen unnerved hand, maybe he added it is already late, because the place was over or because they already had all the same, to write. Then broken chronology restored: "Through Nagornaya missed, thank you. Forces no longer exist. I go, I fall. Get up and go. Lose consciousness. How many slept? I do not know. In light blood? Expectorate. Or sick? Do not ... "- the letters curve straightened in the moving line as umirayushego encephalogram. But he still wakes up and ends with "... can not find any damage."

Nakhimovsky. Reached. I know where the phone. I will warn ... that is impossible! Saving ... Wife miss "- an increasingly incoherent with crimson clots splashed it on paper. "Get through. Heard? Going to die. Strange. Sleep. No cartridges. I want to sleep earlier than these ... Standing around, waiting. I'm still alive, be gone. "

Final diary was apparently procured in advance, entered a solemn right hand: the call is not to storm the Tula and the name of who gave their lives that did not happen.

But Homer is felt: the latter, that he managed to bring signalman, before its signal is extinguished forever, was "I'm still alive, be gone."

* * *

Two harvesting to fire people swarmed heavy silence. Homer is no longer trying to stir up a girl. Silently stirs the ashes with a stick in the fire, where it is difficult as a heretic died wet pad, and waited the storm raging inside him.

Fate mocked him. As he sought to unravel the mystery of Tula! How proud discover a diary, and boasted that it alone came close to to unravel all the knots in this story ... And what happened? Now that you answer all the questions he had in his hands, he cursed himself for his curiosity.

Yes, he was breathing through a respirator when picked up the diary on Nakhimovskom, and now he, too, was dressed as a complete defense. And let the signalman, wrote that the disease is transmitted through the air, and nothing is mentioned about other ways to get ... The risk that the bacillus entered into his body, it was still too high.

What was he like a fool when frighten myself with the thought that he left not so much! Yes, this is it customized, and helped to overcome laziness and overcome fear. But the death disapprovingly refers to when it is used for personal purposes. And he has

already appointed a diary a certain period: the month from the date of infection to death. How much he needed to keep up with these pathetic thirty days ...

What should I do? Confess to his companions that he was sick, and go die in Kolomna - not from the ailment, because of hunger and exposure? But if the dreaded disease has already bears it, then Hunter, and the girl with whom he shared the air, probably already infected. Especially the foreman, who spoke at Tula with sentinel of the cordon.

Or to hope that the disease will spare him hide and wait? Of course, not just so, and to continue the journey with Hunter. To the old man picked up a whirlwind of events would not let him, and he could continue to draw inspiration from them. After all, if by printing the damn blog, Nikolai Ivanovich, an old, useless and incompetent resident of Sevastopol, a former assistant engineer, crushed attraction to the land of the caterpillar dies, Homer, chronicler and mifotvoret, colorful butterfly-by-night only show up to the light. Perhaps he was sent down a tragedy worthy of the pen of the great, and now it depended only on whether he can translate it on paper in the thirty days that were allotted to him on this.

Did he have the right to ignore this opportunity? Did the right to become a hermit, to forget about his legend, to voluntarily withdraw from the true immortality, and to deprive him of all his contemporaries? What would be a big crime, lunacy - carry the torch through half plague metro or burn his manuscripts, and then burn yourself?

As a man vain and weak-kneed, Homer has already made his choice, and now only looking for arguments in its favor. What's wrong with what he himself mummified alive in a crypt at the Kolomna in the company of two other corpses? He does not designed to repeat the feat of Sevastopol commanders, who decided to isolate himself from the outside world cut off the station, take away from yourself and your soldiers hope ever to see another favorite. Volunteered to step up vigil in this nightmarish hospice, where each day one of his jailers forced into a prisoner sentenced to death.

At least they do not have to die alone ...

And what's the point if he would sacrifice himself? Hunter's him in any case not be stopped. And if the old man carried the plague, not knowing what he was doing, then Hunter was all well aware of that meeting in Tula. Not without reason he insisted on the complete destruction of all its inhabitants, including even the Sevastopol caravan. Not for nothing mentioned about the flamethrower ...

And if they both were already ill, then the epidemic will inevitably affect Sevastopol. And above all, the people with whom they were close. Helen ... the Chief of Station. Commander of the perimeter. Their aides. This means that after three weeks the station will initially be beheaded, it will cover the chaos, and then the plague were killed and most ordinary people.

But as Hunter himself hoped to avoid infection? Why is headed back to Sevastopol, although it was understood that the disease could be transmitted, and it? He became apparent that the foreman had not acted on a hunch, but step by step, carried out a plan. While the old man not to confuse it with all cards.

So, Sevastopol is doomed, and their whole campaign is meaningless? But even to go home and die quietly next to Helen, and Homer would be required to bring their world tour to end. Transition from one to Kakhovska Kashirskaya enough to masks out of order, but on the spacesuits, absorbed tens if not hundreds, of X-rays, it was necessary to get rid of as soon as possible. Return to the old way, he no longer can.

The girl was sleeping, burying his head in his lap. Koster finally doglodal plague-stricken blog, swallowed the last branches and curled. Spare batteries of his lantern, an old man tried to sit out, how many will turn out, in the dark.

No, he is forced to go for a foreman on. He will avoid other people, to reduce the risk of infection, will leave here a backpack with all their belongings, destroy the clothes ... and will rely on the pardon, and yet keep a countdown of thirty days. Will work on his book every day, not giving himself a rest day. Somehow everything will be resolved, he repeated his old man. The main thing is to follow the Hunter, to keep up with him.

If he still will ...

Was already the second hour, as he vanished into the murky lumen at the end of the tunnel. Exhorting his young companion, he does Homer was not so sure that the foreman will certainly come back to them.

The more Homer learned about it, the less understood. Doubt the brigadier was impossible, as impossible as believing in him. He did not give in preparation, not stretched on a normal human emotion. Confide in him was still that element of surrender. Homer has already done so, repent and be meaningless, and too late.

In the pitch darkness of silence did not seem as dense. Its smooth shell hatch strange whispers, somewhere distant howl ... rustling in some old chudilas drunken gait Flesheater, in others - illusory giant slide with the mountains, in the third - the cries of dying. Barely ten minutes, as he surrendered.

Flicked the switch and started.

Two steps from him was Hunter, his arms folded and staring at the sleeping girl. Overshadow the palm of the blinding light of habit, he said calmly:

- Now open.

* * *

Sasha dreamed: she single again at Kolomna, greets his father with "walk". It is late, but she definitely need to wait for him to help remove the garment, pull off a gas mask fed. By lunchtime, all have been already covered, she does not know how to occupy themselves. She wants to move away from the gates leading to the surface, but then he comes back just at the moment, until it will be next? Who will he? And now she's sitting on the cold floor near the exit, run hours, leave days, its all there, but it will not go away from his place, until the gates are not ...

He was awakened by loud knocking her unlocking bolts - just like in the hermetic locks at Kolomna. She awoke with a smile: his father returned. Looked around and remembered everything.

The present from all fast-volatile vision was just hooting heavy bolts on the iron gate. A moment later a giant wing vibrating and slowly moved away. In the gaping gap hit a sheaf of light and leaked diesel fumes. Log in large metro ...

Shutter gently moved aside and stood up in the groove, exposing the womb of the tunnel, going to the Avtozavodskaya and further to the ring. On the rails under steam stood, growling engine, a large rail car with a headlight and a few riders. In the crosshairs of machine-gun sight people with trolleys seen two zhmuryaschihsya, cover up the eyes of travelers.

- Hands! - There was an order.

Following the old man she obediently raised her arms. This time, the rail car was the one that went over the bridge on the trading day. His crew was very familiar with Sasha's story. But the old man with a strange name now sorry that he took with him a girl associated with an empty station, not asked, as she was there ...

- Remove the masks, to produce documents! - Has ordered a rail car.

Opening the face, she reproached herself for foolishness. Nobody was able to free her, and sentence her father - and she with him at the same time - no one has canceled. Why does she believe in what these two will be able to bring her on the subway? Thought that the border did not notice her?

- Hey, you! You can not be here! - Identified her immediately. - You have ten seconds to disappear. And who is this? This is your ...? - Anticipant chavknul automata latch.

- What's happening? - Bewildered old man asked.

- Do not you dare! Leave him alone! It's not him! - Sasha cried.

- Both asked for it, - icily concluded submachine. - In a defeat ...

- The girl? - There was a faint second voice.

- Shut up! I myself ...

Sasha blinked, the third time in a few hours getting ready to see the death and, perhaps, to meet with his father. Something quietly chirped and quiet. Final Order does not sound; wait became unbearable, and she opened one eye.

Motor still smoked, gray clubs sailed through the white stream coming from the spotlight and somehow directed at the ceiling. Now, when the beam is no longer scored Sasha eyes, she saw who was on the trolley.

All of them rasprotoshennymi dolls lying on the car or on the tracks next to it. Limply hanging arms unnaturally twisted neck, a broken body.

Sasha turned back. Behind her was shaved down the gun and carefully studying the rail car, turned into a cutting board. Threw up his trunk and pulled the trigger again.

- Now all that - he sounded satisfied. - Take them to the form and masks.

- Why? - Old upright.

- Change clothes. Let's go through the Avtozavodskaya on rail car.

Alex froze, mesmerized looking at the murderer fright fought it with admiration, disgust mingled with gratitude. He had just easily killed the three at once, breaking the home of his father's commandments. But did it to save her life - well, old man. Is it an accident, he saves her a second time in a row? Do not confuse it with the severity of the cruelty?

One thing she knew for sure: this man's fearlessness makes her forget his ugliness.

Shaven first went to the trolley and began to strip off the rubber with the scalps of fallen enemies. And suddenly with a muffled roar fell back on the rail car, staggered back, as if he saw the devil himself, held before him in both hands, repeating the same thing ...

- Black!

Chapter 9

Fear and horror - not the same thing. Whip up fear, forces act to invent. Terror paralyzes the body, stops thought, deprives people of the human race. Homer has seen enough in his life, to know the difference between them.

His foreman, not endowed with the ability to experience fear, suddenly appeared subservient to the horror. But what led Hunter to a state, the old man was surprised even more.

Corpse, with whom he had removed the gas mask, looked unusual. Under the black rubber revealed a dark, shiny skin, twisted lips, flat wide nose. Blacks Homer had not seen since stopped working as a TV with music channels - more than twenty years ago, but find a murdered man of another race was not difficult. Funny thing - definitely, but the object of phobia? ..

However, the team leader has already taken himself in hand, a strange attack not lasted a minute. Approaching the trolley, he highlighted simous face, growled something unintelligible, and began to undress grossly disobedient body, and Homer would have given his head on the amputation, he hears the crunch of broken fingers.

- Such a punishment ... In more complex man ... - he croaked barely audible.

Confused with someone else? Mutilates the dead in revenge for the humiliation or a minute still brings a long and much bigger bills? The old man glanced furtively at the brigade, through disgust scraping another corpse - quite ordinary.

The girl in the skinner production was not involved, and Hunter, it did not coerced. She went and sat down on the tracks and hid face in his hands. Homer seemed to him that she was crying, sobbing though, passed through the banks of a gas mask, was indistinguishable from a chuckle.

Hunter corpses dragged through the gate and dumped in a pile. It will not be overnight, from which nothing remains. Happy authority over the city goes to such creatures, that terrible nocturnal predators hammered deep into the hole, meekly waiting in the wings.

On the dark uniformed stranger to the blood was not visible, but it is not dried immediately. Coolly stuck to his stomach to his chest, though she would return to the living body, causing a nasty itch and skin, and reason. Homer asked myself, is it really needed was the masquerade, and comforted only by the fact that he would help them avoid new victims to Avtozavodskaya. If the calculation of Hunter will be faithful to them freely skip past, taking as its ... But if not? And if he seeks to ensure that reducing the number of excess deaths in its path?

Bloodthirst foreman not only repelled but intrigued by Homer. Self-defense is not justified, and one third of all murders committed by them, but the point here was something more than ordinary sadism. Most important, than the tormented old man - not to know, just to satisfy their cravings, Hunter was directed to the Tula?

Let the unfortunates caught in a trap at the station could not find a remedy against a mysterious fever. This is not meant that it does not exist in principle! In the underworld there were still places where the scientific thought continued to smolder, which were carried out research to develop new drugs, produced serum. For example, the Police - the merger of four arteries, the heart of the metro, the last semblance of this city, stretching in the transitions between the Arbat, Borovitskaya, the Alexander Gardens and the Lenin Library, which settled the survivors, doctors and scientists. Or a huge bunker near Taganka, the secret science city-owned Hansa ...

In addition, the Tula could not be the first station, where the epidemic broke out. Suddenly, someone has managed to win over her top? Is it possible to so easily give up hope of rescue, ask yourself Homer. Of course, the old man, now wearing a mine-hour sickness in his body, had a vested interest. Homer tries to subdue his mind with the possibility of first death, but his instincts are required to seek out. Finding a way to save Tula, he has protected and home to the station, and would preserve the life of himself.

But Hunter is not even going to seek a cure for this disease. Only once exchanged a few words with the rounds at Tula, he sentenced all of its inhabitants to death, and he immediately undertook to carry out the sentence. Going on a deliberate lie, mislead the command of Sevastopol for its tales of nomads, upon his decision and now inexorably nearer to ensure that embody it, betraying Tula fire.

Or he knew about what was happening at the station is something that once again turns everything upside down? Something unknown nor Homer, nor the one who left on Nakhimovskom his diary ...

* * *

Chadyaschimi old trolley for Sasha became a time machine from the tales that her father sometimes entertained. She took away the girl is not from Kolomna to Avtozavodskaya and returns from the present into the past. Although considered a true stone bag, where she spent the last few years, this blind process in space and time, could get away with only her.

She remembered well his way to the side: the father, associated with the cap over his eyes and gagged, was sitting beside her, still a girl. She cried all the time, and one of the soldiers firing squad, folding his fingers, showing her different animals, shadows dancing on the little yellow arena, running along the ceiling of the tunnel race with a trolley.

Father read out the verdict when they have already crossed the bridge: the Revolutionary Tribunal had mercy on him penalty commuted to life link. Pushed on the tracks, threw the knife machine with a single horn and an old mask, helped down to Sasha. Soldiers showed her horse and dog, the girl waved a hand.

Was not it to the shot today?

Feeling that she is breathing someone else's air became stronger when she climbed into a black mask, shot shaved with one of the bodies. Each tiny segment of the road was worth someone's life. Maybe they still would have died if these two were here without her. But she was with them, and thus became an accomplice.

Her father did not want to go home not only because they tired of fighting. He said that all his humiliations and hardships weigh no more than at least one another's life, and preferred to suffer himself, not bringing misery to others. Sasha knew that the cup, on which were stacked all retrieved their lives, and so is far below, and the father was just trying to restore the balance.

Shaven could in fact intervene earlier, could just scare people on a trolley by their appearance, to disarm them without firing a shot, Sasha was in this absolutely certain. None of those killed was not his worthy opponent.

Why is he wrong?

Station, her childhood was closer than she thought: in less than ten minutes ahead of her zamereschili lights. Entrances to Avtozavodskaya nobody guarded. Apparently, its residents rely too much on the locked hermetic locks. Over fifty meters to the platform shaven translated into small engine speed, and ordered to stand up to Homer at the helm, he crept closer to the gun.

Trolley rolled into the station almost noiselessly and slowly, slowly. Or is it frozen in time for Sasha that she had a few short moments to see everything and remember everything?

The day my father gave her up orderly, and ordered to hide until everything is resolved, and he led her deep into the underbelly of The station, one of the premises. But even there you could hear both roared a hundred throats, and he rushed back to be close to his commander. Sasha was rushed through the empty corridors behind him, ran out into the hall ...

They sailed along the platform, and Sasha looked at the spacious family tents and under-equipped office cars, racing in Sulky kids and sudachaschih old, sullen men, cleaning gun ...

And saw her father standing in front of a thin chain of angry and frightened men, trying to capture and retain the immense, boiling crowd. Ran up, hugged his leg. He

stunned looked down, shook her and slapped slap podospevshie adjutant. But something has already managed to come with him. Story, missed with a throw up guns, waiting for the command to open fire, got hung up. Single shot was fired into the air: her father began to negotiate a peaceful transfer station revolutionaries.

Her father believed: a person given signs.

Should only be able to see and read them correctly.

No, time has slowed down not only in order to allow her more time to go to the last day of childhood. Armed men, rising to meet the trolley, she saw before anyone else. Saw the shaven elusive flowing movement was a trigger, as he began to turn toward the astonished sentinel thick blued barrel.

Previously, the old man heard a hissing order to stop the trolley, and realized: there are now so many people die, that their breath enough to her for many years. But she could still stop the massacre, saved from something unspeakably horrible and they, and myself and one other person.

Sentinel has already filmed machines with fuses, but were working with them for too long behind the shaved a few strokes.

She made first thing that came into her head.

Jumped up and pressed her to his lumpy iron back, hugging him from behind and closed their hands on a fixed, if not breathing, chest. He shuddered, as if it stung him with his whip, was taken aback and hesitated ... poised to fire submachine.

The old man understood her without words.

TROLLEY leaped from their seats, belching black clouds of bitter, and the station took off Avtozavodskaya away. In the past.

* * *

Until the Paveletskaya nobody else uttered a word. Hunter freed himself from the unexpected hug, let go girl, as if bent prevented him from breathing steel hoop. But to scold her again or Homer did not. Slipped past the checkpoint only at full speed, sent him a fan with a bullet stuck into the ceiling over their heads. The foreman had to grab his gun and said in hushed three outbreaks. One seems to have fallen down, others merged with the walls vzhalis in shallow ledges tubing and so survived.

However, Homer thought, looking at snikshuyu girl. He thought that love line zavyazhetsya shortly after the heroine, but it evolved too quickly. Faster than it is keeping up with not only record but also to understand.

Leaving on Paveletskaya rose.

The old man happened to visit at this station, though awkwardly redrawn from the Gothic legends. Rather blunt columns that held the arches at all marginal new buildings of the Moscow metro, Paveletskaya relied on a string of air round the arches are too high for ordinary people. As expected, Paveletskaya was struck by an unusual curse, and also quite in keeping with these legends. Precisely at eight o'clock just bubbling station died out and changed into his own ghost. Of all its activities and proydoshlivogo people on the platform were a few brave souls. All other - with their children, with belongings, stuffed with product trunks, benches and couches - disappeared.

Slaughtered in a shelter - nearly mile long passage on the Circle line - and there were shaking all night long, while on the surface of Paveletsky station ransacked awakened always hungry monster. Knowledgeable people say that the station and surrounding lands were their undivided patrimony, and even when they were asleep, there is not dare to wander any other creature. Residents Paveletskaya were helpless before them: screens, cutting at the other stations escalators, there is simply absent, and the yield on the surface always remained open.

According to Homer, it was difficult to find a less suitable place to halt and stay overnight. But Hunter thought otherwise: having reached the far end of the hall, got the trolley.

- Until the morning will be here. Positioning, - pulled off a gas mask, he gestured station.

And left them. The girl held his gaze, then turned on the hard floor. The old man settled back and closed his eyes, trying to doze off. In vain: the thought of the plague, which he twine still healthy plant again surrounded him. The girl did not sleep.

- Thank you. I thought you were the same as he - gave it a voice.

- I do not think there are such people - the old man responded.

- You are friends with him?

- How to fish stuck with a shark - he smiled grimly, thinking to myself that the way it is: Hunter devours people, but bloody Shmat human flesh and fall to Homer, while he is with him.

- What is it? - She sat up.

- Where he went I. I think I'll manage without him, and he ... Maybe he thinks I will cleanse it. Although in reality no one knows what he thinks.

- And why you can not without it? - She sat down closer to him.

- It seems to me that while I am with him, inspired me to not leave - the old man frowned.

- Inspiration - from the word "breath", - said Alexander, and it was not clear, she asks or says. - Why do you breathe it? What does it give you?

Homer shrugged.

- It's not something that we breathe. This is something that breathes in us - he said.

- I think as long as you're breathing death, thy lips to no one else touches. Afraid putrid smell - it is something drew his finger on the dirty floor.

- When you see death a lot think about it - dropped a homer.

- You have no right to call her whenever you need to think about - she said.

- I do not call her, I was just standing there, and then it was not for the death ... Not only in it - the old man resisted. - I like to me there was a story that all the variables. Wanted to start a new round. To in my life, something happened. To me, shook his head ... And clean.

- You had a bad life? - She asked sympathetically.

- Boring. You know, when one day is like another, they fly so fast that it seems - the last of them were very close - tried to explain to Homer. - Afraid of nothing in time. And each of those days filled with thousands of small cases, do one, deep breath - it's time to take on more. Neither the strength nor the time for something really important to do. " Do you think - nothing, I'll start tomorrow. And tomorrow does not come, always just one endless day.

- You've seen a lot of stations? - It seems, is not followed by the fact that she was telling the old man.

- I do not know - he replied, puzzled. - Probably, everyone.

- I - two - a girl sighed. - First, my father and I lived on the Avtozavodskaya, then we were kicked out at Kolomna. I've always wanted still at least one to see. It's so strange - she looked around the series of arches. - It's like one thousand entries, and even the walls between them. And here they are all open for me, but I do not want to go there already. And scary.

- So it was your father? One second ... - Homer hesitated. - They killed him?

The girl hid herself back into his shell and was silent for a long time before you respond.

- Yes.

- Stay with us - committed to the old man got up. - I'll talk to Hunter, I think he will agree. Tell him that I need you to ... - he threw up his hands, not knowing how to explain to the girl, now wants to inspire her.

- Tell him I need him - she pressed on the last word.

Jumped onto the platform and wandered away from the trolley, patting each column, they pass.

* * *

Homer can not sleep. Though he changed his sultry black mask, compressing the skull for easy hiking respirator, breathing gave him everything as difficult, and vice, in which was clutched his head, not weakened. All her old clothes Homer threw in a tunnel with a piece of gray soap he scraped his hands, washed the dirt blossoming water from the canister, and voluntarily decided to now always wear a white muzzle. That the old man could still be done to protect those with whom was next?

Nothing. It is now absolutely nothing, not even go into the tunnels and turn himself into a heap of rags thrown decayed would not help. But the current closeness to death suddenly brought him back to the twenty-odd years ago, during the times when he just lost all he loved. And it gave his plans a new, true meaning.

Whether it is the will of Homer, he could erect a monument to him now. But at least the usual tombstones they just deserved. Born with a break in decades, died in a single day: his wife, his children and parents.

And his classmates and friends at school. Favorite film actors and musicians. And just all those people who on that day were still at work, or have already arrived home, or stuck in traffic somewhere in the middle.

And those who died immediately, and those who have tried a few more long days to survive in the poisoned, the dilapidated capital, little scratching in sealed germovorota subway. Those who at the moment split into atoms, being close to the point of impact, and those who are alive and soak crumbled, eroded radiation sickness.

Fighters intelligence, the first rise to the surface, after returning from a mission day and night could not sleep. Homer've met with some of them at the fire stations transplants, he looked into their eyes and saw seared forever the streets, similar to numb the river, swollen from snuloy fish. Thousands zaglohshih cars with dead passengers were

killed avenues and highways leading out of Moscow. Corpses were everywhere. While the city did not had new owners, they had no one to clean up.

Feeling sorry for myself, the scouts trying to get round the schools and kindergartens, but even the chance to intercept through the dusty glass frozen view of the back seat family car was enough to lose one's mind.

Billions life was cut short a time. Billions of thoughts remained unspoken, dreams - non-incarnate, billions of grievances - Unforgiven. The younger son of Nicholas begged his big set of colored markers, the daughter was afraid to go to figure skating, his wife jokingly promised him and other sweets in addition to Charlotte. When he realized that these little desire and passion were the last, they were suddenly filled with the extraordinary importance for him.

Homer would carve an epitaph of each. But since one of the epitaph on his giant mass grave of humanity was definitely worthy. And now, when he himself was only thirty days, Homer thought he would be able to find the right words for it.

He did not know in what order to put them than the bond, how to decorate, but already felt: in the story that untwist in his eyes, there is a place for each of the Dead souls, and for each of the senses, and every grain of knowledge, that he collected so laboriously, and for himself. The plot is perfect for this as well as possible.

When the top of dawn, and tremble at the bottom of stalls, he will walk through it, razdobudete net total notebook and ballpoint pen. For such a wealth of it will have to part with his horn cartridges, no less.

But if he does not strike at the paper outlines the future of the novel, vague mirage in front of him away, he might melt, and who knows how much he still have to sit on top of the dune, gazing into the distance, hoping that the fine sand and melting the air will return to its fold own ivory tower?

Thirty days may not be enough.

Whatever chattered little girl, look into the empty eye sockets of eternity makes the move, the old man smiled to himself. Then, remembering her arched eyebrows - two white beam on the gloomy, grimy face, her prikushennuyu lip, her hair disheveled straw, he smiled again.

On the market tomorrow and will have to find something else, thought Homer fell asleep.

Night at Paveletskaya always restless. Toss reflections on the stinking flames blackened marble walls, tunnels and uneven breathing barely audible talking people sitting at the foot of the escalator. Station pretending to be dead, hoping that the carnivorous creature from the surface, attracted by carrion.

But sometimes the most interesting of them shows the passing deep into the hole, vnyuhivayutsya and distinguish the smell of fresh sweat, hear the beating of hearts, feel the blood flowing through vessels. And begin the descent down.

Homer finally dozed off, and the excited voices from the other edge of the platform penetrated his consciousness tight, distorted. But here, once pulling it out of haze daze, struck up a machine gun. The old man jumped up, eyes wide, obsharivaya floor trolleys in search of his arms.

By the deafening machine-gun peals joined several machines, anxiety gave way to cries of sentinel true horror. On whom they might now firing from all guns out there, this is not caused him the slightest harm. Now this was not well coordinated fire at moving targets, and indiscriminate firing of people who try to save at least his own skin.

The machine was found, but Homer could not decide to get into the hall, all his will barely enough to resist the temptation to start the engine and whirl away from the station - do not care where. Without leaving the trolley, he pulled his neck, trying to spy out the battle arena through part of the lattice columns.

Or, and wrestle the defending sentinel rasseklo poignant vereschanie - unexpectedly close. Machine gun choked someone terribly shouted and then stopped suddenly, as if he severed his head. Again, hit the machine gun rattle the ears, but very scattered and rare. Chilling cry was repeated - it seems a little further ... And then emit it essentially echoes replied another - very close to the trolley.

Homer counted to ten, and with trembling hands start the engine: now, now his companions returned, and they can immediately break, it's all for their sake, not for ourselves ... TROLLEY vibrated, zachadila, heating, and then between the columns with the speed flashed something ... Lubricating and vyskalzyvaya from view faster than the mind could grasp its image.

The old man grabbed the handrail, put his foot on the gas pedal and took a deep breath. If they do not appear for another ten seconds, he dropped everything and ... And, asking myself what is happening and why he was doing, Homer stepped onto the platform, putting himself ahead of his useless gun. Just make sure that any of his, he will not help.

Pressing the self in a column, Homer looked out into the hall ...

I wanted to scream, but was over the air.

* * *

Alex always knew that the world is not confined to those two stations, where she lived, but could never imagine that the world outside can be so beautiful. Kolomna - flat and dull - yet she seemed comfortable and familiar to detail the house. Avtozavodskaya - upright, spacious but cold - turned away from their father, they spit, and she could not she forget it.

Relations with Paveletskaya could start from scratch, and the more Sasha spent time at this station, the more she wanted to love her. In light of these sprawling columns in huge Summoning arches in elegant marble walls with pretty stripes, makes the walls look like someone's delicate skin ... Kolomna was miserable, Avtozavodskaya - too harsh, but this station was built like a woman: playful and frivolous, Paveletskaya did not want to forget about their former beauty, even decades later.

People who live here can not be cruel and evil, thought Alex. Is she with her father was enough to overcome just one hostile to the station to be in this magical grotto? Does he have enough to survive even one day to escape from prison and again to be free? After all, even not shaven would be the first to shoot the wounded, and she managed to persuade ...

Away shaking plastered sentinel fire, feeling the ceiling of the spotlight, but Sasha did not want to go there. So many years it seemed that the only escape from Kolomna, and meet other people, she can be happy. But now she needed just one person - to be divided into two Sasha's delight, her surprise at the fact that the earth really was more on the entire third, and hope that you can still fix it. And she did not need and does anyone no matter what she tried to convince himself and the old man.

Sasha wandered in the opposite direction to where the right tunnel plunged by half a length of dilapidated with broken windows and doors wide open. Went inside, flying gaps between cars inspected first, second and third. In the fourth Sasha found a miracle survivor sofa and climbed on it with his feet. Looked around and tried to imagine that the train was about to touch and take her on to a new station - the bright, buzzing from human voices. But she had neither faith nor imagination to move from place thousands of tons of scrap iron. With her bike was all much easier.

Can not hide, we have: jumping from wagon to wagon behind Sasha, it finally caught up with the noise of the unfolding at Paveletskaya battlefield.

Again?

She pulled the leg and rushed headlong back to the station - in fact the only place that was capable of anything else to do something.

* * *

Torn body lay sentinel and glass booth with a frozen by a spotlight, and straight into the fire extinct, and in the center of the room. The fighters have already ceased resistance and ran to ask for asylum in the transition, but death overtook them halfway.

Above one of them crouched sinister, unnatural shape. From this distance, it was poorly distinguishable, but Homer saw the smooth white skin twitch powerful nape, eagerly cross the legs bent in too many joints.

The battle was lost. Where is Hunter? The old man looked out again and froze: ten feet away from him, pointing out to the columns exactly the same as Homer, teasing him and playing him in a child's game, with a height of more than two meters under the Charter nightmarish mug. By hanging lower lip dripping red, heavy jaw constantly moving, Umina terrible gum, under the sloping forehead was completely empty, but there seems no eye did not hurt the creature to move and attack.

Homer recoiled, vzhimaya trigger; machine was silent. Chimera heaved a long deafening cry and waved at the middle of the room. The old man zaelozil jammed gate, knowing that nothing will have time ...

But suddenly the monster has lost all interest in him, but now his attention was riveted on the edge of the platform. Homer turned sharply, tracking a blind eye, and his heart zaholonulo.

There's a frightened whisper, looking around, there was a girl.

- Run! - Homer shouted, suddenly jumping up in the fighting throat rasp.

White chimera jumped forward, at once covering a few meters, and found herself in front of the girl. She grabbed the knife, suitable except for cooking, and made an attack warning. Creature in response waved one of the front paws, and she collapsed to the ground; of ispolosovanny hand gushing blood, the blade flew off a few steps.

The old man was already on the trolley. But he did not even think about running away. Puffing, unrolled a machine gun, trying to catch in a web sight whitish dancing silhouette. Not an Option: monster zhalos to girl, as if feeling that he is at gunpoint. Homer did not leave feeling that, in minutes tearing sentinel, representing to him at least some danger, it is now just have fun, cornered by two weak and playing with them before they kill.

Here it is bent over her, has brought his paw to strike completes the circle ...Caused it! And then he twitched, staggered back, zaskreblo claws on sprawling spot on his back with a roar unfolded, ready to devour the abuser.

Unsteady walking, stretching machine in one hand, he walked towards the Hunter. Second hand with a whip hanging along the body, and it was evident how difficult and pain gave him every step.

Brigadier whipped creation of a new lineup, but she had the astonishing vitality; only pokachnuvshis, she immediately gained the balance and darted forward. Ammo ran out, and Hunter, miraculously izvernuvshis, took half a ton carcass on the blade of his machete. Chimera collapsed on top of him, crushing under her, the soul of the weight of his body, breaking bones.

Killing the last hope, flew the second creature. Froze over konvulsiruyuschim body of his neighbor, kovyrnula claw white skin, as if trying to wake him up, then slowly lifted her eyeless face with the old man ...

And Homer did not miss his chance. Large caliber rent chimera torso, split the skull, and is already knocking it still continued to pay into crumbs and dust the marble slab behind her. Soothe the heart and let go cramped fingers old man managed to not once.

Then he closed his eyes, took off his mask and let himself into the frosty air, saturated with the rusty smell of fresh blood. All heroes have fallen on the battlefield, he was alone.

His book is over before it started.

Chapter 10

"What remains after the dead?"

What is left after each one of us?

Gravestones and msheyut subside, and only a few decades of the inscriptions on them are made indistinguishable.

Even in ancient times, when the graves was no one else to look after the cemetery land is redistributed between the fresh corpses. Deceased came to visit only the children or parents to grandchildren rarely, almost never - great-grandchildren.

What has been called the eternal rest, in large cities meant a half-century of respite before the bones will be defiled: it can be, for the sake of further compaction, perhaps, to plow churchyard and to erect in its place residential neighborhoods. The land becomes too tight for the dead and the living.

Half a century is a luxury that could afford only those who died before the end of the world. Who cares about a dead man when the whole planet is dying? None of the survivors in the subway is not awarded the honor of being buried and could not hope that his body would remain undisturbed still at least a week ...

Before the remains were right to exist just as much as the living remember those to whom they belonged. People remember their loved ones, classmates, fellow soldiers. But

his memory is enough only for three generations. On those same five with a little more decades.

With the same ease with which each of us let go of the memory image of his grandfather, or old school friend, someone once sent away into absolute nothingness, and us. Remembering the man may be more durable than its skeleton, but when the last leaves of the people who we still remember with it dissolve over time and we are.

Photographs? Who else is doing it now? And how they were stored, when photographed each? Before the end of any thick family album had a small reservation for brownish old photographs, but few could have skimmed with certainty determine which of the cards was a picture of one or another of his ancestor. Anyway, the pictures can be considered retired death mask, removed from their bodies, but not in vivo replica of the soul. And then, smoldering shots only slightly slower than those bodies that have captured.

What's left?

Children? "

Homer touched a finger to a candle flame. Him, all alone, it was just talk, words of Ahmed still irritate him. Doomed to childlessness, deprived of the opportunity to continue their family, an old man now could only deny the possibility that the path to immortality.

He again took up his pen.

"They may be similar to us. In their terms, we can see a reflection of our own traits, miraculously fused together with the characteristics of those we loved. Their gestures, in the bend of the eyebrows, in a grimace with emotion will recognize themselves. Friends may tell us that our sons and daughters as if copied from us, cut from the same patterns. And it supposedly promises us some extension of ourselves after we cease to be.

But each of us - not the original image on which the molded subsequent copies, but only a chimera, half composed of the exterior and interiors of our father and our mother, just as they in turn are made up of half of their parents. It turns out that there is no uniqueness in us, but only an endless shuffling of tiny pieces of mosaic, which exist in themselves, joined together in the billions of random, having no particular value and break up in front of a panel?

Is it worth it then so be proud that our children we see bump or hole, which used to take her, but which is actually half a million years of wandering for thousands of bodies?

Whether there will be something to it after me? "

Homer had heavier than others. He sincerely envied those who allowed faith to hope for a pass to the afterlife; he had heard about him in conversation, old thoughts immediately transferred to Nakhimovsky Ave. Perhaps Homer was not only of flesh, which will grind and digest Flesheater. But even if it was something else, apart from meat and bones is something there incapable.

"What is left after the kings of Egypt? That after the heroes of Greece? After the artists of the Renaissance? It remains whether something from them - and whether they are in what is left?

But what still remains the immortality of man? "

Homer read the writing, ponder, and then gently pulled out sheets of notebook, crumpled them, put in an iron plate and swung at them fire. After a minute of work, which he has devoted the last three hours, there was only a handful of ashes.

* * *

She died.

Sasha has always and imagined death: off the last ray of light, silent all the votes taken away the body, leaving only the eternal darkness. Black and silence, from which people leave and where they inevitably return. Sasha heard tales about heaven and hell, but Hell has always seen her completely harmless. Eternity is carried out in perfect blindness, deafness and complete inaction seemed to her a hundred times worse than any of boilers with boiling oil.

And then ahead loomed a tiny trembling flame. Sasha reached out to him, but it was impossible to get it: dancing firefly ran away from her, again drew near to tease her, and immediately rushed to run away, playing and enticing for him. She knew what it is: the tunnel light.

My father said that when a person dies in the subway, his soul wanders in confusion bleak confusing tunnels, each of which ends with a dead end. She does not understand that is no longer tied to the body, that her earthly existence ended. And she will have to wander, until somewhere far ahead she will not see the fire ghostly campfire. And seeing has to rush to him, because he sent for this soul, and, running away, bring her to where she will rest. However, it happened that were kind, soul and light

brought back to the lost body. Such people were whispering that they had returned from the dead, although it would be better to say that they let go of the darkness.

Light to call her for himself, he was persistent, and Sasha lost. She did not feel his legs, but in them and there was no need: to keep up with the elusive fireflies was enough to simply not lose sight of him. Look at him intently, as if trying to persuade, to tame it.

She managed to catch him, and he dragged her through the impenetrable darkness, the maze of tunnels, from which she alone never would have found out, to the last station on the line of her life. Ahead a little weather got much better: Sasha now seemed that her escort contour of some remote areas, where waiting for her.

- Sasha - Called her voice is surprisingly familiar, though she could not remember to whom it belongs.

- Dad? - She asked incredulously, guessing native affectionate notes in a strange voice.

They came. Haunted Tunnel fire stopped and, turning to the usual flames jumped on the wick candles melted raspolzsheysya comfortably settling down for her, as if returning from a walk a cat.

Her hand covered someone's hand, cool and hidebound. Hesitantly, afraid to go back to the bottom, Sasha unhooked from the light. Waking up after her, cut pain ripped forearms, whined bruised temple. Emerged from the darkness, and rocked by series of partial breach furniture - a couple of chairs, bedside table ... She herself lay on this bed, so soft that his back Sasha is not felt. Though her body is returned by parts, and not before all else turn came.

- Sasha? - The voice repeated.

She looked at the speaker, and drew back his hand. Her bed sat an old man, with whom she was riding on the trolley. In his touch had no pretensions, it is not burning and not offend Sasha. She took his hand only because ashamed of how his father could be confused with the voice of a stranger, and the insult that the tunnel light led her the wrong way.

The old man smiled gently, it seems he was quite pretty and the fact that she was awake. Looking closely, Sasha saw in his eyes warm glare, which until then met in the eyes of just one person. No wonder she had deceived. And she suddenly became awkwardly in front of an old man.

- Forgive, - she said.

And then, recalling his last moments at Paveletskaya, jerked up.

- What about your friend?

* * *

The girl did not seem to know how to either cry or laugh, or maybe she had no power either to or for the other. The blood she had lost a lot: dvuhsantimetrovye claws did not touch the tendons, but left behind a deep moat, which experienced surgeon barely managed to pull off seams. The second blow claws, which the creature was supposed to kill the girl, fell flat, only depriving her of consciousness. Terrible day in a coma ended, and she no longer at risk, the doctor assured of Homer. On their troubles with the old doctor did not say.

Sasha - until she was unconscious, the old man used to call it so - went limp and fell back on his pillow, and Homer returned to his desk, where he waited, stretched out, the overall notebook on the entire ninety-four sheet. Wagged his fingers and continued to handle the place where newly initiated threw the book to approach the girl moaning in his delirium.

"... This time the convoy was delayed. Impermissibly detained for a long time, so that is already becoming clear: there was something terrible, unforeseen, from which failed to protect either battle-hardened heavily armed guards, nor the years to build relationships with the leadership of the Hanseatic League.

And all would do, if acted connection. However, with the ring held telephone wire that had happened, the message is discontinued as early as Monday, and sent in search of breaking team returned empty-handed. "

Homer looked up and winced: the girl was standing behind him, over his shoulder, examining the scrawl. Bandage on her right arm again wet, but it seems that her curiosity was stronger than the pain.

Embarrassed, the old man turned the notebook cover up.

- Are you looking for inspiration for this? - She asked him.
- I'm still only at the very beginning - why mumbled something Homer.
- What happened to the caravan?
- I do not know - he began to trace the name of the frame. - History is not over yet. Lie down, you need rest.
- But it depends on you than you've finished the book - she said, not budging.
- In this book, nothing from me does not depend on - the old man put a hand on the table. - I did not invent it, just write down everything that's going on with me.

- So, the more it all depends on you - she thought. - And I'll be in it?

- I now ask you for permission - Homer smiled.

- I think - seriously she said. - Why do you write it?

The old man rose to his feet, never looking up at her.

After their last conversation with Alex it became clear that her youth and inexperience have created a false impression, as if on a strange station, where they picked her, the year was two. She had a way not answer those questions, which he uttered aloud, and those that remain unspecified. And asked Alex Homer just something that he could not answer even to myself.

And yet it seemed to him: if he wants to count on her honesty - but otherwise it will be his heroine? - Then he should be with her honest, no lisp, and not to remain silent and talk to her no less than would have said to himself.

- I want people to remember me. And me, and those who were dear to me. To hear the most important thing from what I have learned and understood. That my life was not in vain. To do something after I have left.

- to invest there a soul? - She tilted her head sideways. - But this is just a notebook. It can be burned or lost.

- Insecure storage for the soul, huh? - Homer sighed. - No, I need a notebook, just to build everything in the correct order, and that I had not forgotten anything important, yet the story did not finish. And then it will be enough to tell her to several people. And if I will succeed, I no longer need be neither paper nor the body.

- Perhaps you've seen a lot of this, what a pity to forget forever - she shrugged her shoulders. - But I've nothing to record. And I do not need a notebook. Do not spend on my paper.

- Well, you have yet to be ... - Began the old man, and immediately broke off: it somewhere near there will be no.

The girl did not answer, and Homer was afraid that now she really closes. He tried to find the right words to play everything back, but only the more entangled in their own doubts.

- And what is most beautiful from what you remember? - She suddenly asked. - The most-thing?

Homer hesitated, hesitated. Share the most intimate with a man whom he did not know and two days, it was strange. He does not even trust Helen - and she thought that the wall hanging in their closet ordinary urban landscape. And will the girl who spent his entire life in a dungeon, do understand what he tells her?

- Summer rain - he decided.
- What's beautiful? - It's funny winced.
- Have you ever seen the rain?
- No, - the girl shook her head. - My father forbade to go outside. I still got out a couple of times, but to me there was bad. Frightened, when there are no walls. Rain - this is when water is poured on top - she specified just in case.

But Homer did not hear it. For him, suddenly there came again that distant day, like a medium, lent his body caused by the spirit, he stared into the void and talked and talked ...

- The whole month was dry and very hot. And my wife is pregnant, and so it was hard to breathe, and there is a hell ... In the hospital one fan on the whole ward, she always complained about how she suffocated. I, too, because she could hardly breathe. Suffered badly: how we tried, a few years nothing happened, then doctors miscarriage scare. And now she's like to save, and it would be better so the house was lying. The term has come, and nothing happens. No fights, but every day from his boss did not take time off. Yes I also someone said that if the transfer, the dead may be born. I myself do not find the place as soon as a work - just throw myself under a window on duty. In tunnels, the phone does not catch, I'm on every station, check to see if there was any missed calls. And then I get a message from the doctor: "Urgent call back." Yet emerged in a quiet place and have a wife and child buried in time, insecure fool. I type ...

Homer is silent, listening for a dial tone, waiting for an answer. The girl did not interrupt him, reserving the issues for later.

- I say: Congratulations, you have a son. It now sounds so simple: a son. And then I was the wife of the dead returned, and still is a miracle ... Climb up - and there is rain. Cool. And the air immediately became an easy and transparent. If the city was dusty cellophane wrapped, and here it was removed. Leaves shone, the sky is finally moving, home rejuvenated. I'm running down Tverskaya to the flower stalls, and also crying, and also of happiness. Umbrella was, but I did not disclose it, I vymoknut wanted him to feel the rain. Now I do not pass ... As if not my son was born, and I myself again, and look at the world as if for the first time see it. Yes, and he too fresh, though he, too, just the umbilical cord was cut and wash for the first time. And now everything is over, and everything that went wrong, what was bad, everything can be corrected. I have for now as it were, two lives. What I do not have time - the son will do. And we have yet to come. Everyone has a bright future ...

The old man fell silent, looking at floating in a pink evening haze Stalinist desyatietazhki, plunging into business-like hum of Tver, breathing in the sweet gas polluted air, and closed his eyes, substituting face summer downpour. When he recovered, his cheeks and around the eyes evidence of travel that day still glistened raindrops.

He quickly wiped them with his sleeve.

- You know - the girl looked confused at least to Homer, - probably, the rain can still be beautiful. I have no such memories. It is possible, I will remember yours? And if you wish - she smiled at him - I'll be in your book. After all, even from someone should depend on it will all end.

* * *

- It's too early - snapped the doctor.

Sasha could not explain it dried, it is important to her was what she asked him. She scored more air for one attack, but have not exhausted it, waved his good hand and turned away.

- Do not worry, be patient. And once you're on your feet and feel so wonderful, you can slowly walk - he gathered his tools in threadbare plastic bag and shook hands with the old man. - Go through a couple of hours. Bosses told bdit. You understand that we owe you one.

The old man threw Sasha spotted on the shoulders of a soldier's jacket, and she chose the outside, follow the doctor by the rest of the chambers hospital, through a series of rooms and small rooms, cluttered desks and beds, two flights of stairs up and through the inconspicuous door squat - in a vast oblong room. Measurements at the threshold, Sasha for a long time did not dare to set foot in it. She had never met so many people at once and even imagine what the world has so many human beings, it could not before.

Thousands of people - without masks! Such a diverse group of ... There were quite decrepit old men and babies. A great many men - bearded, shaven, tall, and dwarfs, emaciated and squeezed, full and muscular. Mutilated in combat or ugly from birth, too beautiful or attractive, in spite of a mean appearance, something elusive. And as many women - and broad-, red-faced merchants in headscarves and quilted jackets, and turned pale girls in fabulous bright clothes and fancy beads.

See whether that Sasha - other? Will she hide in the crowd and pretend to be one of them, or they will attack and now zagryzut her like a pack rat - a stranger-albino? At first it seemed that all eyes were fixed only on her, and from each randomly intercepted glance it was all in a fever. But it took a quarter of an hour, and she poobvyklas: among people who looked at her and came across hostile, and curious, and too persistent, but most were indifferent to it. Lightly touching her eyes, they are squeezed further, not paying any attention to Sasha.

She thought that these scattered, lacking sharpness of the eyes as lube grease gear flying around people. If they were interested in each other, the friction would be too high, and the whole mechanism would have been paralyzed.

To screw into the crowd, there was no need to dress or cut their hair differently. Rather it was, instead of diving into other people's eyes, pick up a chilly look back, barely obmakuvshts them. Was plastered with indifference, Sasha could slip between the moving, mating the inhabitants of this station, no more getting stuck at every step.

In the first minute she scalded with boiling broth human nose smells, but it soon became a dull sense of smell, learning to catch him in the important parts and ignore all others. Through the sour stench of stale body penetrated thin tantalizing aromas of youth; sometimes crowd washed wave incense, diverges from the well-groomed women. This also mingled with the meat and smoke from the braziers, and the miasma of cesspools. In short, for Sasha transition between the two groin Paveletsky life, and the longer she listened to this deafening smell, the sweeter it seemed to her.

A full investigation of the vast transition, it probably would require a month. Everything was amazing ...

... Counters with decorations, woven from dozens of yellow metal with embossed dots, which would consider the clock, and a huge book disintegrated, holds more arcane knowledge than she could ever comprehend.

Barker in the booth with the inscription "Flowers" and a rich collection of greeting cards with faded photographs of elegant bouquets - childhood Sasha gave one such, but how many were here!

Infants, cleave to the mother's breast, and older kids playing with these cats. Pairs on each other until only the eyes, and the pair already on each other's toes.

And yet the men who tried to touch her.

It could take them the attention and interest for the hospitality and desire something to sell it, but by their words, uvoschennyh particular aspiration, it was done and a little embarrassed disgust. To which she surrendered to them? Is it not enough local women? Among them there and truly beautiful, colorful fabrics, in which they were wrapped, made them look like blooming buds with postcards. Probably just laugh at her - on her overalls, jacket, over cheeks, smeared in soot.

And can it do to awaken men's curiosity? Her sudden stab unfamiliar question. Maybe it's not so mean? But why not? She has sadly drawn inside - where the triangular arch, its interlocking edges just beginning gentle vpadinka ... Only deeper. In the spot, whose existence she discovered just days ago.

Trying to ward off the alarm, she wandered along the stalls, scored all kinds of items - armor and trinkets, clothes and appliances - but they no longer occupy her so much. It turned out her inner conversation can be louder noisy crowds, and human images, which draws a memory, there are brighter than the living.

Whether it was worth his life? How could blame him after what happened? And, more importantly, what meaning was in her stupid argument now? When she has had nothing to do for him ...

And then, even before Sasha knew from what is happening to her, doubts receded and heart at ease. She listened to him and caught the echo of a distant melody seeping in from outside, flowing next to the muddy stream of human polyphony, but not mingling with them.

Music for Sasha, as well as for any person, began with a mother lullabies. But they have the same and ended: his father was deprived of hearing and singing did not like wandering musicians and other mummers in the Avtozavodskaya not welcomed. Sentinel, sipevshie campfire plaintively, bravura soldiers' songs, they could not really make any sound sagging plywood guitar strings, no strings strung Sasha.

But now she could hear no sad guitar strum ... Rather, the play of gentle, lively girl's voice, even the girls - but unattainable high for the human larynx and thus unnaturally strong for her. And what else Sasha was to compare this miracle?

Singing unknown instrument fascinated, gaping picked up and took them somewhere infinitely far away, into worlds that are born in the metro could not know about the possibility that should not have even guessed at. It made the dream and told that any dream feasible. Awakened a vague languor in the stomach and immediately promised to satisfy him. From him to do well, though zaplutav at an abandoned station, Sasha suddenly found a lantern, and followed in his ray showed up and exit.

She stood near the tent gunsmith, and in front of her stood a sheet of plywood screwed to it with a variety of knives - from folding pocket babies to predatory hunting blades. Alex froze, mesmerized looking at the blade.

Her two half clash in real hard fight. Thought that came into her head, was simple and seductive. The old man gave her with a handful of cartridges, and they just missed on a serrated knife blackened - a broad, sharp, could not be better suited to his plans.

A minute later Alex still decided and stepped over themselves. Purchase she had hidden in his breast pocket of his overalls - closer to the place that was going numb. In the hospital she returned, without feeling the gravity jacket and forgetting about the aching arm.

The crowd was higher than girls on the whole head, and far musician, exhaled amazing music, and remained invisible to her. But the melody is still trying to catch up, deploy, dissuade.

In vain.

* * *

The door knocked again.

Homer groaning rose up and wiped his mouth with sleeve, pulled the chain of the toilet tank. At the muddy-green cloth jacket remained short brown stripe. During the day, vomited for the fifth time, although he really did not eat anything.

Disease could have several explanations, trying to convince himself the old man. Why is necessarily accelerated during the damned disease? The matter could be in ...

- Soon there? - Impatiently yelled female falsetto.

Lord! Is it such a hurry that mixed up the letters on the door? Homer dirty sleeve dabbed his perspiring face, either run on a straight face and clicked the latches.

- drunk! - Overdressed woman was pushed away from him and slammed the door.

Well, he thought. Suppose that it is better to consider it a drunkard ... He stepped to the mirror over the sink and stared at his forehead. Barely caught his breath and just watching the misted glass, checked himself: mask slipped down and hung out under his chin. Quickly pulling the muzzle back, Homer closed his eyes again. No, I think that it sends the death of every person we meet along the way, is impossible. Turning back too late: if it is contagious, if not confusing symptoms, the whole station somehow already doomed. Starting right with this woman, guilty only because it itch at an inopportune moment. What had she done, tell it to her now that she would die at the latest in a month?

Silly, thought Homer, how stupid and to what mediocre. He has a dream to immortalize all those with whom he was pushing fortune, but instead was appointed to the angel of death - ironic, bald, impotent. He clipped the wings and ringed by defining a period of thirty days, thus pushing him to action.

Punished for arrogance, for arrogance?

No, keep silent about this old man could no longer. But the world was only one man to whom he could confess. His Homer is still not on track for a long time to cheat, and play with open cards, both will be much easier.

Unsteadily, he moved to the hospital rest.

Desired chamber was at the end of the corridor, and is usually at her door the nurse on duty, but now the post was abandoned, and through the crack from the inside could

hear the staccato rattle. Somehow, he formed the words, but here is to build one meaningful thing about it was unbearable, even for Homer lurking.

- Stronger ... Fight ... Must ... Still make sense ... Resist ... Remember ... Can still be ... Wrong ... Condemned ... But still ...

Words turned into a growl, as if the pain became unbearable and no longer allows us to lasso rushing thoughts. Homer stepped inside.

Hunter was unconscious, tossing crumpled on the wet sheet. Bandages, clenched his skull foreman, crept to his very eyes, sharpened cheekbones were covered in sweat, covered with the lower jaw fell off helplessly. His broad chest strained as bellows, walked up and down, with difficulty keep the fire too much television.

At the head of the bed back of the head to Homer was a girl, clasping his hands behind his back lean. Not immediately, but looked more, the old man said almost merge with the fabric of her suit black pirate knife handle which she hugged tightly with your fingers.

* * *

Beep.

Another beep. And yet.

One thousand two hundred thirty-fifth. One thousand two hundred thirty-sixth. One thousand two hundred thirty-seventh.

Artem considered them not to make excuses in front of the commander. This was necessary in order to feel: he moves somewhere. And if he is removed from the point at which began to assume, then, with every whistle, he still gets closer to the point where this madness will end.

Self-deception? Yes, so be it. But listen to them, thinking that they do not interrupt never been unbearable. Although initially, in the very first of his duty, he even liked it: whistles like a metronome regulates the cacophony of thoughts, devastated his head to obey her peaceful rhythm of galloping pulse.

But cut them a minute become exactly like one another, and Artem began to seem: it is, he was stuck in some time trapped and unable to get out of it until the sirens will not stop. There was such torture in the Middle Ages: naughty shaved bald and seated under a

barrel, from which the top of his head on a drop falling water, gradually reducing the accident crazy. Where was powerless rack, regular water gave excellent results.

Tethered cord, Artem had no right to absent himself for a second. All duty, he tried not to drink, that need not distract him from the rings. Two days ago he could not resist vyshmygnul of the room, domchalsya to the dressing room - and immediately back. More from the doorway and listened, and went cold: the pace was not the same, the signal parts, torn from the normal of measured steps. Could only have been one, and he understood perfectly. Moment, which he waited came when he was not there. Fearfully looking back at the door - did not notice anyone? - Artem perenabral quickly and pressed to the tube.

The device beeps and clicks, zeroing out the account went into normal rhythm. Since then, the "busy" is no longer been seen, and the phone did not fit one, too. But throw up Artem still do not dare, only to shift it from sweating ear to the frozen, trying not to lose.

Superiors about the incident he did not immediately reported, and now he is somehow not believe that the sirens would sound differently. He was given an order: reach, and now the week, as it has existed only for this purpose. For violation of an order he will go before a tribunal, for which the mistake is no different than sabotage.

And the phone told him how much remained to the end of duty. Their hours at the Artyom was not, but during rounds, he spotted by commanding: the signal is repeated every five seconds. Twelve signals - a minute. Seven hundred and twenty - hour. Thirteen thousand six hundred and eighty - change. Grain, they poured out some dimensionless glass bulb - the other, bottomless. And in the narrow neck between the two vessels invisible Artem sat and listened while.

Throw up, he hesitated only because the commander could descend to the test at any time. And so ... in what he was doing made no sense. On the other side of the wire likely more there was not a living soul. When Artem closed his eyes, before it rose again, this picture ...

He saw barricaded inside the office of the station and its owner, his face buried in a table, a contraction in the hand "Makarov". Of course, with a bullet right through his ears do not hear the phone screamed. Attackers have not been able to crack the door, but keyholes and cracks remain open. And desperate rattling old apparatus penetrates through them, crawling on the platform littered with swollen corpses ... Once phone calls were not heard because of the incessant hubbub of the crowd, rustle of steps, baby crying, but now dead, but they are not worried any more one sound. Blinking purple glow from the moribund emergency batteries.

Call.

Another call.

One thousand five hundred and sixty three. One thousand five hundred and sixty-fourth.

No one answers.

Chapter 11

- I reported!

What's that, and be surprised he was able to perfect. In the garrison commander of the legends: former mercenary known for art-treatment with machetes and their ability to dissolve in the darkness. Once upon a time, even before settle on Sevastopol, he single-handedly carved out entire enemy roadblocks, patrol worth it to show the slightest carelessness.

Artem jumped, clutching the phone to your ear with shoulder, saluted, and with some regret stopped counting. The commander went to the sheet on duty, checked the clock in front of the date - the third of November - has put a mark: nine twenty-two, signed and turned to Artem.

- Silence. I mean, nobody.
- Silent? .. - Commander chewed, stretching muscles, cracked his neck. - Do not believe it.
- What will not believe it? - Artem said warily.
- In what was so fast Dobryninskaya cover. Well, the epidemic is already in the Hanse? You imagine what was supposed to start, if the ring hit?
- We did not know - hesitantly said Artyom - may have already started. Because there is no connection.
- And if the wires are damaged? - Commander of the stooped, drummed his fingers on the table.
- It would be like with a base - Artem jerked his head toward the tunnel, leaving to Sevastopol. - Are becoming - in general, all muffled. But here at least whistles go. Technique works.
- A database, we probably do not need more time to the gate of no return. Or there is simply no longer any basis. And Dobryninskaya also not - exactly the commander said. - Listen, Popov ... And if there's nobody left, then we will all soon take rest. No one to help us not to come. And then our quarantine to anything. Maybe, well, the hell, you think? - He chewed again.

- No, the quarantine is necessary - frightened disown such a heresy, Tom, recalling the manner of a commander, first shoot deserters in the stomach, and then read their verdict.
- Required - thoughtfully repeated one. - Today, three more are sick. Two local and our one. Akopov. A Aksenov died.
- Aksenov? - Artem swallowed hard, blinked.
- smashed his head against the rail. He said that he is very sick - just exactly the commander continued. - And he's not the first. Damn much to be a headache to half an hour to try to knock it for myself, on my knees, eh?
- Yes, - Artem muddled.
- Do not feel sick? Weakness of not? - Anxiously asked the commander, directing the flashlight in his face. - Mouth open. Say "Ahh". Well done. You see here, Popov, best dial up. When you call, Popov, Dobryninskaya up and let them tell you that Hansa is a vaccine, and that their sanitary brigade will soon be here. And they have healthy, save. And patients will be cured. And we will not stay in this hell for all eternity. And go home to their wives. You will return to his Gal. I'm Alena and the Faith. Roger, Popov?
- That's right - frantically nodded Artem.
- At ease.

* * *

His sword cracked at the very hilt, unable to bear weight on it crashed creation. The blade entered so deep into a carcass that had not even tried to extract from there. Sam shaven, all ispolosovanny claws, nearly three days did not come to you.

Sasha could do nothing to help him, but she still had to see it. At least to tell him thank you ... Let him take her and would not have listened. But doctors would not let the girl into his house, saying that the wounded do not need anything but peace.

She did not know for sure, for what shaven killed those people with trolleys. But if he shot to save her, Sasha was able to justify it. She honestly tried to believe, but it has not worked. Plausible explanation was different: to kill him is easier than to ask.

However, at Paveletskaya everything was different. No doubt: it was just for Sasha and was even prepared to die for it. Hence, it is still not made a mistake - among them, and really begin to form a link?

When he called her there, in Kolomna, she waited for the bullet, not an invitation to go further together. And when obediently turned, immediately noticed a change occurred in him, though his scary face and remained in the same impassive. It was in his

eyes: like a peephole fixed black pupils suddenly looked out of someone else. Someone to whom she was curious.

Someone to whom she was now obliged to life.

Thought - not whether to refer him to a silver ring, a hint, as it did at one time her mother? But was afraid that the shaven not understand the sign. And as she has him to thank? Present him with a knife instead of the fact that he broke it, protecting it - the least that Sasha could do. When it froze that is predicated on this simple idea to shop gunsmith, imagining how will hand shaved his new blade, as he looks at it, what will ... She even forgot for a moment that he was going to buy a killer weapon, which he will cut throats and rip their stomachs.

At the moment it was for her not a bandit, a hero, not murderers, but a warrior, but most of all - man. And yet, unspoken and not even really thought of, her mind whirled: his sword is broken, and he himself was wounded, can not wake up. Maybe if he has a knife ... It's like a charm ...

Still bought it.

And now, standing beside his bed, hiding a gift behind his back, Alex waited until he felt it, or at least feel closeness of the blade. Shaven twitched, wheezing, coughing was the words, but never regained consciousness: the darkness is too tight it held.

Until now, Alex had never uttered his name not only loud, but silently. Before you shout to him, she whispered the name, as if to test him, and finally decided.

- Hunter!

Shaven fell silent, listening as if she was somewhere unimaginably far away, and her voice came to my ears to him a subtle echo, but he never responded. Sasha repeated again - louder, more insistent. She was not going to retreat, until he opens his eyes. She wanted to become a flame tunnel.

In the corridor someone cried out in surprise, shuffled his boots, and Sasha, in order not to lose time, knelt down and put a knife on the bedside table at the head of the bunk.

- It is you - "she said.

Steel fingers closed around Sasha's hand in a snap, capable iskroshit her bones. The wounded man managed to lift the eyelids, but his eyes wandered around neosmyslenno, on anything without stopping.

- Thank you ... - She did not attempt to release jammed a trap arm.

- What are you doing here?

To it jumped a tall fellow in a soiled white robe, shaved stung with a syringe, and he immediately went limp. Jerk picking up Sasha on his feet, nurse hissed through clenched teeth:

- Do not you understand? He was in such a state ... Doctor banned ...

- That you do not understand! He should for something to hold on, and on your shots in his hands unclenched ...

He nudged Sasha to leave, but she, flying a few steps, turned around and stubbornly zyrknula at him askance.

- To me you are no longer seen! And this is what is it? - He saw the knife.

- This is it ... I brought him - hesitated Sasha. - If not for him ... I have these creatures to pieces tore.

- And my doctor will break if he knew - growled nurse. - Everyone get out!

But Sasha has lingered for a moment and, turning again to utopshemu in drug datura Hunter, contract again:

- Thank you. You saved me.

Stepped out of the chamber and suddenly I heard a quiet, hacking:

- I just wanted to kill him ... Monster ...

The door slammed in her face, and the castle clanged key.

* * *

The knife was intended for something else, Homer knew right away it is. Was enough time to hear the girl calling floundering in the muddy delirium foreman - and demanding, and gently and pitifully. The ready to intervene, the old man became confused and stepped back: there he did not have anyone to save them. Help he could only one thing: get off there, so as not to scare off Sasha.

How to know if she was right? After all, the Nagatinskaya Hunter completely forgot about their companions, leaving them at the mercy of a ghostly Cyclops. And in this fight ... Is to brigadier girl could mean something?

Conceived, Gomer wandered down the hall to his room. To meet him, stomped nurse, pushed the old man's shoulder, but he did not even pay attention to him. It's time to give Sasha thing, which he bought for her at the market, said his homer. It seems that it will soon come in handy.

He pulled out a drawer pack, shook his hands. The girl burst into the room a few minutes later - a tense, confused and angry. With feet climbed onto her bed, staring into the corner. Homer waited - a thunderstorm or pass? Sasha was silent, only began nibbling his nails. Nastavalo time for decisive action.

- I have a gift for you - the old man got up from the table and put the bundle on the coverlet beside the girl.
- Why? - Klatsnula she claws, not showing from the sink.
- Why do people give each other something?
- To pay for the good - confidently replied Sasha. - Which they have done, or of which they then asked.
- Then, assume I'm paying you for the good you have done to me, - smiled Homer. - Send me ask you about.
- I told you did not do anything, - replied the girl.
- What about my book? I'll have it settled. Must pay, do not want to be in debt. All ahead, deploy, - he having admitted in a playful tone of irritation.
- I do not like to be a must, - said Alexander, tearing the wrapper. - What is it? Oops!

She was holding a red plastic disc, flat box, drop-down in half. Once it was a cheap hiking powder-box, but both the tray - for powder and blush - has long been deserted. But the mirror that was inserted into the inner part of the cover, there is still great.

- There can be seen better than in a puddle - Sasha funny goggled eyes, studying his reflection. - Why did you give it to me?
- Sometimes it is helpful to see yourself on the side - Homer smiled. - Helps you to understand more about yourself.
- And what should I know about myself? - She cringed.
- There are people who never saw his reflection, so take a lifetime for someone else. Inside it is often hard to see, and tell no one ... And yet they do not accidentally stumble across a mirror, will continue to err. And even when you look at the reflection, often can not believe what they see themselves.
- And the people I see in him? - She insisted.
- You tell me - he folded his arms across his chest.

- Himself. Well ... a girl - to make sure she turned to the mirror of one cheek, then another.

- Woman - corrected her Homer. - And rather sloppy.

It shook a little, then bugged a Homer eyes, intending to ask something, changed her mind, silent, yet plucked up the spirit and

blurted out, forcing the old choke:

- I'm ugly?

- Hard to say - he barely kept in check sprawling corners of her mouth. - Under the dirt to be seen.

- So in this case? - Sasha lifted her eyebrows. - Men that do not feel feminine beauty? You need to show and explain everything?

- Probably so. And using this, we are often deceived - Homer laughed. - Paint can work with a woman's face real miracles. But in your case, it is not about restoration of a portrait, but rather about the excavation. By sticking out of the ground the heel of an antique statue is difficult to judge of her beauty. Although almost certainly it is wonderful - he added indulgently.

- What is the "antique"? - Sasha was looking for a trick.

- Ancient - continued to play Homer.

- I'm only seventeen! - "She protested.

- find out only later. When the dig - the old man calmly sat back at his desk, opened a notebook on the last page of the completed and began to reread the record, gradual mrachneya.

If you dig up. And the girl and himself, and everyone else. Once he had entertained themselves with such speculations: What if through the millennia, archaeologists studying the remains of old Moscow, from which even then and the name will remain, will find one of the entrances to the underground maze? Will decide, probably, that ran into a huge mass grave - is unlikely because someone comes to mind is that people can live in these dark catacombs. The once highly developed culture in the twilight of its existence is clearly degraded, they will identify: the chiefs were buried in tombs along with all belongings, weapons, servants and concubines.

In his notebooks were still eighty-plus clean sheets. Will there be enough to accommodate both the world - and one that was lying on the surface, and that was in the subway?

- You do not hear me? - Girl shook his hand.

- What? Sorry, thought - he rubbed his forehead.
- A statue of the ancient truth beautiful? Well, what seemed like people had a beautiful, still beautiful today?
- Yes - the old man shrugged.
- And tomorrow will be? - Continued to pry it.
- Probably. If anyone would appreciate.

Sasha stopped and thought, Homer, again, I will go into a rut of his gloomy thoughts, do not rush the conversation.

- That is the beauty without the person does not exist? - Finally, puzzled asked Sasha.
- No, probably - he answered absent-mindedly. - If there is no one to see it ... After all, animals are unable to ...
- And if the animals are different from people that see no difference between beautiful and ugly - thought Sasha - means, without the beauty of man, too, can not exist?
- It may well - the old man shook his head. - Many people in it do not need.

The girl reached into his pocket and pulled out of it incomprehensible subject: painted box is a polyethylene, or plastic. Timid, yet proudly, as if opening a great treasure, Sasha handed it to Homer.

- What is it? - He asked.
- Tell me - she smiled slyly.
- Well, - he carefully took the box in hand, read the labels, returned it to the girl - packing of tea bags. With picture.
- with pictures - she corrected him. - With a beautiful picture - she added defiantly. - If not for her, I would ... brutalized.

Homer looked at her, feeling her eyes swell as close tears and it becomes harder to breathe. A sentimental fool, he lashed himself. Coughed, and sighed.

- You never rose up into the city? In addition to this time?
- What? - Sasha hid a bag back. - Do you want to tell me that everything is not so, as in the picture? That this does not happen? I myself know all this. I know, looks like the city - at home, bridge, river. Scared and empty.

- On the contrary, - answered the old man. - Perfect for this city, I saw nothing. And you ... you judge a whole underground of one sleeper. I must have you describe is not even I can. Buildings higher than any of the rocks. Brochures, rushing like a mountain stream. Negasnuschee sky, glowing fog ... The city of vanity, momentary - like any of the millions of its inhabitants. Insane, chaotic. Whole consisting of combinations of incongruous, built without any plans. Not eternal, because eternity is too cold and motionless. But so alive! - He clenched his fists, then waved his hand. - You do not understand. We need to look very ...

The moment he himself believed that, get up Sasha on the surface, she too will be the ghost of that city, he believed, quite forgetting that it needs to know him during his lifetime.

* * *

The old man could somehow agree, and it missed a cordon Hansa - under escort, as if shot, taken through the entire station premises, where there was a local bathhouse.

Total two Paveletsky was just a name, though the two sisters were separated at birth, and one got into a wealthy family, while the other grew up on short halt or even in tunnels. Radial turned dirty, reckless, but a light and spacious. Ring - low, thickset, decent lighting and polished to a shine, at first glance give out your nature - economic and fisted. During those hours there was nemnogolyudno - probably all those who have not worked at the station, preferred booth Radial chinnoy severity of the Ring.

In the locker room she was alone. The walls, lined with neat yellow tiles, floor tiles chipped multi-faceted, colored iron lockers for clothes and shoes, a light bulb on a wire shaggy, two upholstered leatherette bench cutted ... Inside it all froze in delight.

Skinny whiskered banschitsa gave her a towel is incredibly white and solid gray brick of soap, shower allowed to lock the bolt.

And the cells of towels, soap and nauseating smell - it all belonged to the far-distant past, when Sasha was a beloved and guarded the commandant's daughter. She forgot that somewhere in all of these things still exist.

Sasha undid zadubevshy dirt overalls, got out of it soon. Pulled off her shirt, threw off shorts, and skipping rushed to the frayed rusted pipe with a homemade watering can. Through force, gliding his fingers over the searing iron valve, releasing hot water ... Hot water! Clinging to a wall to protect themselves from shparyaschih spray spun another. Finally blended cold and heat in the desired ratio, the dance ceased, and all dissolved in water.

And in the slatted drain along with the bubbly water flowed down the dust, soot, engine oil, blood - and Sasha, and others, fatigue and despair, guilt, anxiety. It was some time before the water is lit up.

Will there be enough of it to the old man stopped her podnachivat, Sasha thought, if other people looking at my pink steamed feet, studying the unusual white hands. Will there be enough that its men can uglyadet her beauty? Perhaps Homer was right, and it was silly to come to the wounded, without giving oneself up? Perhaps such things have yet to learn.

Did he notice how Alex changed? She wrapped the valves, splashed into the locker room, opened a gift from the mirror ... No, do not pay attention to it was impossible.

The hot water helped her let go, to overcome doubts. His strange words on a monster shaven did not want to alienate. He just has not had time yet to wake up and addressed not to her, but only continued a bitter dispute that led to someone in his nightmare. It need only wait until he comes to himself, and at this moment to be near him to ... to Hunter and immediately saw it, and once to understand. And what happens after? Needless to her to think about it. He is experienced enough that it could all trust him.

Recalling how shaven tossing in delirium, Sasha felt, though she could not explain how: Hunter was looking for her, because she was able to calm him down, bring relief from the heat, to help him find a balance. And the more she thought about it, the hotter it became her own.

Greasy overalls she had been taken away, promising to be laundered, instead handed the thinned light blue trousers and a tattered sweater with the neck. In the new clothes she was cramped and uncomfortable. Moreover, until she was led back through the border posts in the infirmary, to pants and sweater stuck almost all the male gaze, and when Sasha got to her bed, she felt again like in the shower.

Old man in the room did not have, but bored in her solitude did not have to. A few minutes later the door creaked, and looked into the doctor.

- Well, congratulations. Can visit. Woke up.

* * *

- What's the date?

The foreman rose on his elbow, hard rolling his head and stared into the eyes of Homer. That for some reason, grabbed his wrist, although long hours are no longer worn, waved his hands.

- Second. Second November - has prompted the orderly.

- Three days - Hunter slipped on a pillow. - Three days of lain. Late. Need to go.

- Not go away - tried to reason with his nurse. - In your blood and a nearly empty.

- We must go, - not paying attention to him, he repeated the brigadier. - Time enough ... Thugs ... - and then suddenly stopped. - Why do you need a respirator?

The old man was preparing for this issue and he had three days to build a line of defense and counterattack plan. Forgetfulness Hunter relieves him of unnecessary admissions: now they can be replaced by deliberate falsehood.

- There are no bandits, - he whispered, bending over the wounded man. - While you were in a delirium ... All the time talking. I know everything.

- What do you know? - Hunter grabbed him by the collar, jerked to her.

- About the Epidemic in the Tula ... It's OK - the old man pleaded waved his hand while holding a medic who had rushed to pull off from his foreman. - I can handle. We need to talk, can I ask you ...

Medic reluctantly conceded, covered the needle cap and left the chamber, leaving them alone.

- About Tula ... - Hunter still did not take the old man mad, sore eyes, but little by little clip fading. - Nothing more?

- Just that. That the station focus of an unknown infection. That is transmitted through the air ... What we have established a quarantine, waiting for help.

- So. So ... - foreman sent him away. - Yes. Epidemic. Are you scared get it?

- Better safe than sorry - Homer replied cautiously.

- Well, yes. Nothing ... I did not come close, a draft was in their side ... Should not.

- Why did this story about gangsters? What's going to do? - Take heart old man.

- First on Dobryninskaya, agree. Then clean up the Tula. Looking for flamethrowers. Otherwise, no way ...

- Alive burn all at the station? And ours? - The old man still continued to hope that the words of the flamethrower, abandoned by the foreman, were as cunning maneuver, like everything else that he told the authorities of Sevastopol.

- Why are alive ... dead. No exit. All infected and all contactees. All of the air. I heard about this disease ... - Hunter closed his eyes, licked his cracked lips. - Medications not. A couple of years ago there was a flash ... Two thousand corpses.

- But she stopped? ..

- Blockade. Flamethrowers - foreman turned to the old man his disfigured face. - There is no other means. If you break out ... At least one person. All end. Yes, lied about the bandits. Istomin otherwise not be allowed to kill everyone. Too soft. And I will give those who ask no questions.
- And suddenly there are people who have immunity? - Homer began timidly. - Suddenly there is healthier? I ... you said ... All of a sudden they can still be saved?
- There is no immunity. All contactors are infected. There are no healthy people, there is only more tenacious - snapped the foreman. - For them, the worse. Longer be tormented. Believe me ... It is they need me to them ... to finish them off.
- And here's why this is? - Just in case the old man moved away from the bed.

Hunter closed his weary eyelids - and again, Homer said that he was in his eyes that was at the disfigured half of the face, can not completely close. Responses foreman did not allow for so long that the old man was about to run for the doctor.

But then, slowly and distinctly, as though sent by a hypnotist in the infinitely distant past of lost memories, through clenched teeth, he said:

- I have to. Protect people. Eliminate any danger. I am just for that.

* * *

Does he discovered it a knife? Understand whether it is from her? Suddenly, not solved, or not see if it promises? She flew down the hall, driving annoying her thoughts, not yet knowing what she was going to say to him ... What a pity that he regained consciousness before she was at his bedside!

Sasha has found almost all the talking - measurements on the doorstep and recoiling when they started talking about the murders. Of course, to decipher all she could, but she was nowhere. The most important thing she has heard. Was no reason to wait any longer, Sacha and knocked loudly.

The old man, rising to meet her, his face was reduced to despair. Homer barely moved, though he also got emasculatory shot, and a wick in his pupils someone twisted. Sasha, he replied with a nod willed - like gallows upward pull at the rope.

The girl sat on the edge of the heated stool, bit her lip and held her breath, before stepping into a new uncharted tunnel.

- Did you like my knife?
- A knife? - Shaven around, came across a black blade and, without touching it, warily staring at Sasha. - What's this?

- It's you - it seems a person stepped on the ferry. - Your broke. When you
...Thanks ...

- A strange gift. No person would not have accepted such - after a heavy silence,
"he said.

In his words she fancied hints, significantly, reticence, and she, taking the game,
but without knowing all its rules, was to select words touch. It appeared awkward, wrong,
but its language in general is ill-suited to describe what is happening inside Sasha.

- Do you also feel that I have a piece of you? That piece, which pulled out of you ...
who you're looking for? What can I give it to you?

- What are you talking about? - He splashed it with cold water.

- No, you feel it, - shivering, insisted Sasha. - What's wrong with me you will
become whole. What can I be with you, and that I should. Otherwise, why did
you take me with you?

- lost to mate - and his voice was colorless and empty.

- Why is defended by people on the trolley?

- I would have killed them anyway.

- What if you saved me from that creature at the station?

- We had to destroy them all.

- I wish I ate it!

- You are upset that survived? - He asked blankly. - So raise up the escalator, there
is such a lot.

- I am ... You want me to ...

- I do not want from you.

- I will help you to stop!

- You're clinging to my boots.

- You do not feel that? ..

- I do not feel - for a taste of his speech gave a rusty water.

Even the terrible claw whitish monster could not get it so deeply. Sasha jumped
up, wounded, rushed out of the chamber. Fortunately, her room was empty. She huddled

in a corner, curled into a ball. Searched in his pocket mirror - would throw it away - but not found, it seems, dropped at the bedside shaven.

When tears are drying, she knew what she was doing. Charges have not taken her a long time. The old man will forgive her, she stole his machine - he probably will forgive her anything. Canvas protective suit otchischenny and decontaminated, waiting for her in the back, hanging limply from a hook. Like some sorcerer gutted and cursed the dead fat man, forcing him and after his death everywhere follow Sasha and execute her will.

She climbed into it, tumbled into the corridor, swept through the transition and climbed onto the platform. Somewhere along the way it licked the trickle of magical music, the source of which she never found the last time. Not found in the search for extra minutes now. Pausing only for a moment, Alex overcame temptation and moved on toward the goal of his campaign.

Afternoon at the post near the escalator only one sentinel on duty: in the daytime with a surface never worried about the station.

On the explanation she had not gone five minutes: the way up here was always open, not the escalator was just down. Leaving a thin pliable Sentinel submachine Horn, Alex put her foot on the first of the steps of the staircase leading straight to heaven.

Slipping pulled his pants and ascended.

Chapter 12

Houses in Kolomna, until the surface was very close - exactly fifty Six flat stages. But Paveletskaya climbed into the ground much deeper. Clambering on crunching, machine-gun fire ravaged the escalator, Sasha did not see it rise the end. Her lantern lacked power only to the fact that the snatch in the dark glasses broken escalator fixtures so rusty sagging billboards with pictures of someone's dull individuals and large letters, which have been formed in a meaningless word.

Why it up? Why die?

But who needs it at the bottom? Really need as a person, not as an actor unwritten books?

Was it worth to continue to deceive themselves?

When Alex went to the deserted Kolomna, leaving behind his father's body, she felt that she carries out their old plan of escape. Takes him a piece in itself, at least as helping him to escape. But since he did not dream of it, and when she tried to call his image in his mind to share what they saw and experienced, he came out unsteady and voiceless. My father could not forgive her and did not want such a rescue.

Among the books he produced, that Alexander had time to browse before you exchange them for food and ammunition, she particularly remembered an old botanical book. The illustrations in it were conditional: pomutnevshie from time black-and-white photographs and pencil drawings. But in other books that she get, pictures did not occur at all, and that Sasha was a favorite. And more than any other plant in the handbook she liked bindweed. Even there, did not like - she sympathized with bindweed, learning it myself. After all, she just as in need of support. To grow up. To get to the light rays.

And now the instinct demanded from her to find a mighty trunk, to which she could cling, embrace and entwine it. Not to live someone else's body juices, not to rob him light and warmth. Simply because without him she was too soft, too flexible, spineless to stand up, and alone would be compelled to always creep along the ground.

Father told Sasha that she should not depend on anybody and anyone to rely on. Indeed, apart from him on their forgotten halt, she could not rely on anyone, but he knew he would not be around forever. Father wanted her to be raised is not an ivy, and pine ship, forgetting that it is contrary to the female nature.

Sasha would have survived without it. Have survived it without Hunter. But a merger with another man seemed to her the only reason to think about the future. When the trolley Raced she threw her with his hands, it seemed that her life had a new rod. She remembered that the trust others is dangerous, and depend on them - is unworthy, and trying to confess shaved overstep themselves.

Sasha wanted priniknut to him, but he thought she was clinging to his boots. Left without support and trampled in the ground, it was not going to humbly continue the search. He chased her upstairs - well, so be it. If it something happens on the surface, the wines will be on him, but his strength and to prevent it.

Finally, step over. Sasha was on the verge of a spacious marble hall, corrugated iron ceiling which collapsed in places. Through the distant holes slashed the brightest rays of the amazing off-white color, and they came the splash even before the cubbyhole, where she was. Put out the lantern, and with bated breath, Sasha stealthily moved forward.

Dents from bullets and shrapnel on the walls at the mouth of the escalator testified that the man had once been to these places. But already a few dozen steps began possession of other beings. A handful of dried manure, scattered everywhere gnawed bones and shreds of skin indicated that Sasha was in the heart of the beast's lair.

Hiding his eyes, without burning them, she walked toward the exit. And Sasha was selected nearer to its source, the denser became darkness in secluded corners of the rooms, through which she trod. Learning to look at the world, Sasha has lost the ability to feel the darkness.

Skeletons of the inverted booths, piles of trash and unimaginable frames peck technique filled the following facilities. Now it became clear that people have made outdoor pavilions Paveletskaya a transshipment point where dragged all the good of the neighborhoods, while creating stronger without forcing them out of here.

Sometimes in the dark corners Sasha seemed barely noticeable stir, but she blamed on his growing blindness. Nest in the darkness there was already too thick to allow it to distinguish it merging with mountains of trash ugly shapes slumbering monsters.

Monotone whining draft screened their heavy wheezing, and Sasha distinguish it, just walking a few steps away from the waving masses. Listened warily, then, frozen, stared at the outlines of the inverted-stand, revealing its kinks strange hump ... And faint.

The hill, which was buried hut, breathing heavily. Breathing and almost all other piles, surrounded by which she was. To be sure, Sasha clicked the button and sent the light on one of them. Pale ray ran into the folds of fat white skin, and ran down the immensity of his body and collapsed, and not by reaching the edge. It was one of the brothers chimeras, which nearly killed Sasha at Paveletskaya, and far more important than the creature.

Establishment were in a strange stupor and does not seem to notice her. But that's closest to her suddenly vzryknulo noisily sucked air through his nostrils oblique slot, turned round ... Recollecting himself, Sasha hid flashlight, and hurried away. Each next step in this macabre rookery gave her all the more complicated: the farther away from descent into the subway, it progresses, the denser nailing each other chimeras, and the harder it was to find a trail between their bodies.

To turn back was too late. Sasha is now not to worry as she will be able to return to the subway. Would pass quietly, without disturbing any of these creatures, get outside, look around, try ... If only they were not awakened from their slumber, only to release it here, but the return trip she will not have to look for.

Not daring to breathe deeply, trying not even to think - what if they hear - she slowly approached the door. Treacherously crunched under their boots broken tiles. Another misstep, incidental rustle - they will wake up and suddenly tear it apart.

And Sasha could not escape the thought that quite recently - just yesterday or even today - she has wandered this way among the sleeping monsters ... At least, this strange feeling it was somehow familiar.

She froze in place.

Sasha knew that someone else look sometimes you can feel the back of his head. But these creatures had no eyes, and what they are touching their space around it was much more persistent material and any look.

Nor what was the look back to understand: she stared hard into the back of the creation, awakened despite its caution. But it turned out.

* * *

Girl somewhere zapropastilas, but in Homer at the moment was not the slightest desire to rush to find her, nor was any other desires.

If your blog has left the old signalman shred of hope that the disease will pass by his side, then Hunter was ruthless. The plant foreman to escape the burden of carefully prepared talk, the old man seemed appellyatsiyu filed on his death sentence. But he did not want him to spare - and I could not. Homer was one to blame for that, it will inevitably happen.

Just a couple of weeks, or even less. Only ten filled pages. And all that is necessary to have time to shrink and squeeze into the remaining blank pages in a notebook with oilcloth cover. In addition to the desires of Homer had and debt, and forced a halt, it seems, came to an end.

He smoothed out the paper, intending to pick up the story from the point where last time distracted by the cries of doctors. But instead, the hand itself withdrew the former: "What will remain after me?"

And that after the accident, trapped in Tula, he thought, perhaps - the desperate, perhaps - still waiting for reinforcements, but somehow doomed to a brutal massacre? Memory? But so little people, of which up to now there would be someone to remember.

And memories - Tenuous mausoleum. Soon the old man would not, and together they perish all those whom he knew. Sink into nothingness and Moscow.

Where is he now, at Paveletskaya? Gardening is now lyso and dead - in the last hours of his cleared and cordoned off the military equipment to enable rescue services to work and drive an escort with flashing lights. Rotten, half dropped out teeth mansions grin driveways and alleys ... The old man easily could imagine the local landscape, even though he never climbed out of the subway at this station.

But before the war, it often happens here happens - appointed future wife goodbye in a cafe next to the subway, then go to the cinema for the evening session. And here as well, he took charge, merely negligent medical examination, when he intended to get a driver's license. And at this station sat on the train, having agreed to go with co-workers at barbecues in the summer forest ...

He looked at the cells lined paper and saw in it the station square, bathed in the autumn mist, the two melting into the mists of the tower: artsy Office replica at the Ring - it worked for one of his friend, and, a bit further, twisted spire of expensive hotels, is sewn to the expensive concert hall. Once he eyeing a ticket: they cost a little more than Nicholas earned two weeks.

He saw and heard even strum angular blue and white trams crowded disgruntled passengers, so touching in its stimulation of this harmless crush. And it goes the Garden Ring, the flashing of tens of thousands of festive lights and turn signals, combined in one closed garland. And timid and untimely snow melting before going on the black asphalt. And the crowd - a myriad of electrified particles, excited, facing seemingly chaotically rushing, but in reality - moving each in its own sensible route.

Stalin saw the gorge monoliths from which the square lazily flowed a great river Garden. Hundreds and hundreds of windows switched so-aquariums on either side of him. And flashes of neon signs, billboards and the titanic, modestly concealing razvorochennuyu wound, which soon was implanted a new prosthesis is a multi-storey ...

Who never completed.

Looked and realized that the words would still not pass this great picture. Do all of this will only mossy, sagging downtown tombstones and fashionable hotel?

She has not announced any hour or three. Embarrassed, Homer walked the entire passage, questioned merchants and musicians who spoke with zvenevym Hanseatic guard. Nothing. How through the earth ...

Not finding a place for himself, the old man again, nailed to the door of the room where lay a brigadier. The last person with whom one could consult about the missing girl. But who in Homer is now still remained? He coughed and peered inside.

Hunter lay, breathing heavily, resting his eyes on the ceiling. His right hand - the whole - was the work loose from under the covers, and tightly clenched fist recently ssazhen. Slight scratches oozing ichor, a pack of bed, but the foreman did not notice.

- When ready to go? - He asked in Homer, not turning to him.
- I have something right now - the old man hesitated. - Here is the deal ...The girl can not find. And how can you go? You're all ...
- Do not die, - replied the foreman. - A death - not the worst. Get ready. I'll be on my feet and a half hours. Let us move to Dobryninskaya.
- And an hour is enough, but I have to find it, I want her to continue with us ...I really need to, you know? - Hurried Homer.
- An hour later I go, - cut off Hunter. - With or without you ... And without her.
- I can not imagine where she could zapropastitsya! - The old man sighed in frustration. - Knowing would be ...

- I know - just said the brigadier. - But you do it from there just do not get it. Get ready.

Homer stepped back, blinked. He used to rely on the supernatural sense of his companion, but now refused to believe him. Suddenly, Hunter was lying again - this time to get rid of the extra burden?

- She told me that you need me ...
 - I need you - Hunter slightly bowed her head to him. - And you - I am.
 - Why? - Homer murmured, but the foreman heard him.
 - You make a lot depends - he blinked slowly, but the old man suddenly felt that heartless foreman he winks, and threw him into a cold sweat.
- Prolonged bed creaked: Hunter, gritting his teeth and sat down.
- Come out - he asked the old man. - And get ready, if you want to catch.

But before you get out of Homer stayed still for a moment - to pick up lonely was lying in a corner of the red plastic powder box. As she fled the lid cracked, bulged loops, and dispersed.

The mirror was broken to pieces.

The old man turned sharply to the foreman.

- I can not leave without her.

* * *

She was almost twice as Sasha, and her head rested against the ceiling, and claws hanging down to the floor. Sasha saw lightning move these creatures, with some incomprehensible speed attack. To get a girl to kill her in one motion, this fact was enough to throw forward one of the limbs. But it is somehow delayed.

Shoot it made no sense, but Sasha and would not be enough time trying to raise the gun. Then she made a hesitant step back to the aisle. Chimera published low moan, swung in the direction of the girl ... However, nothing happened. Monster remained in his seat, never taking Sasha close a blind eye.

She dared to step again. And yet. Without turning to the creature back, not showing her my fear, she slowly approached the door. Creating a charmed trailed behind Sasha, just a little bit of it behind, as if seeing her to the door.

And only when the girl, it was only ten meters from the unbearably luminous opening, broke down and ran off, the creature roared and rushed forward, too. Sasha flew

out, closed her eyes and seeing nothing around him, rushed forward, until you stumble and rolled head over heels through the rough solid ground ...

She expected chimera and overtake in tatters razderet it, but the stalker somehow allowed her to leave. Passed sticky moment, one more ... Around there was silence.

Sasha does not open her eyes until he fumbled in a bag bought from sentinel homemade glasses - two bottles bottom of a dark glass, captured tin rings and planted on a strip of rope. Points stretched on top of the mask so that the transparent green roundels landed exactly on the inspection openings rubber mask.

Now she could see. And, slowly opening his eyelids, at first suspicious, sullen, and then more boldly Sasha looked around a strange place, which found itself.

Above her head was the sky. Sky now, bright, great. Giving more light than any spotlight, all evenly lit green, somewhere downtrodden by low clouds, but somewhere unfolds in real deep.

Sun! She saw him through the thinning cloud fabric: a circle with a capsule size, polished white hot, so bright - that and look proplavit hole in Sasha's glasses. She averted her eyes in fright. Wait a little, and yet again, looked at him furtively. It was as if something disappointing: in the end, just a blinding hole in the sky, to which his worship, but no, it fascinated, attracted, bothered. Opening out of the beast's lair to accustomed to the darkness shone almost as much, but what if, flashed Sasha thought, the sun - this is exactly the same output, leading to a place where there is never dark ... And if, before it fly, you can escape from the earth in exactly the same as it had just crawled out from under it? And the sun came a weak, barely perceptible warmth, as if it was alive.

Sasha stood in the middle of the stone wasteland surrounded poluobvalivshimisya old buildings; black boxes piled failures almost ten series, as high as these homes. Buildings were infinitely many, they are pushing, blocking each other from Sasha, pressed forward to see it better. Because of the high buildings peered even higher for those silhouetted outlines of houses already quite huge.

Amazingly, Alex could see them all! And suppose they gave silly herbs - like the earth under their feet, like air, like crazy, luminous, boundless skies - but now she opened unimaginable distances.

How would Alex nor his eyes accustomed to darkness, they were not designed for it. At night, the cliff at the metro bridge she could see only the ugly buildings, separated by a few hundred meters from germovorot. Continue layering the darkness is too dense, and even those born under the earth Sasha could not proskresti her eyes.

The girl had never asked myself seriously, how big a world in which she lives. But, thinking about it, Sasha always imagined a small dusky cocoon: a few hundred meters on

each side, for whom - is the final break, the edge of the universe, the beginning of perfect darkness.

And even though she knew that in fact the land much more, but imagine what it looks like Sasha did not know how. And now she knew that she would have it still not possible - simply because they never having seen such report is currently impossible.

And so strange: for some reason it just was not afraid to stand in the middle of this vast wasteland. Previously, getting out of the tunnel at the break, she felt as if it pulled out of the shell, but now he seemed to her shell, from which she has finally hatched. In daylight, any danger became apparent at a great distance, and Sasha with a surplus would be enough time to hide or to prepare for defense. It was also one shy, unknown to her before the feeling of: if she returned home.

Draught drove to wasteland balls woven of thorn branches, sadly dudel in crevices between the buildings, pushing Alex on his back, requiring it to be brave, commanding sent to study this new world.

Select it, in fact, was not: to go down in the subway, she would have to re-enter the building, teeming scary creatures, only now they are no longer asleep. Sometimes in the wells passes surfaced for a moment whitish body, and then disappeared - probably light of day was it unpleasant. But what happens when it's night? Until then, if she expects to see at least something from the fact that depict the old man, before going to die, she needs to get out of here as far as possible.

Sasha moved forward.

She had never felt so small. She could not believe that these gigantic buildings to build the men had growth: why should they? Probably the last prewar generation had degenerated and ground ... Nature was preparing them to the harsh existence in the cramped tunnels and stations. But these buildings were erected proud ancestors of today's undersized men - powerful, tall and stately, like the houses in which they lived.

It reached a wide clearing: the buildings are parted, and the ground was covered like a stone cracked gray crust. Single jump in the world has still huge: with views of such distances that Sasha heart ached and felt dizzy.

He sat down at the untouched mold and moss, the castle walls with blunt clock tower, Shore clouds, she tried to imagine what was supposed to look like this town before it left the life ...

On the road - and it is, without doubt, was the road - walked a tall, handsome men in colorful robes, next to which the most elegant dresses residents Paveletskaya would seem miserable and stupid. In vibrant crowd scurrying car to a tee similar to cars metro trains, only very tiny, which can accommodate only four passengers.

Houses were not so grim. Window openings are not gaping black holes, and the gleaming glass is clean. And somehow, Sasha saw light bridges, induced here and there between the opposite houses on the very different heights.

And the sky was not so empty - it slowly drifted indescribable magnitude planes nearly touching the roof of his belly ... The father explained to her as something that, for the flight they did not have to swing anything, but they were drawn to Sasha lazy with strekozinyimi with huge wings - melteshaschimi, almost invisible and only a slightly greenish cast in the sunshine.

And was rain.

It seems to be just water falling from the sky, but the feeling was quite extraordinary. She not only washed away the dirt and tiredness - for they were able and hot jet from a rusty shower heads, heavenly water is treated people inside, bestowed their forgiveness for mistakes. Magic bath wash the bitterness from the heart, renew and rejuvenate, and gave a desire to continue living, and the forces on it. Everything, as the old man said ...

Sasha was so strongly believed in this world, that under the influence of her childhood spells he was indeed appear around it. Soon she heard the chatter and light transparent wings in the sky and the cheerful chirping of the crowd, and rhythmically tapping the wheels and the hum of warm rain. Itself, and she remembered the intertwined in this roll call was heard yesterday in the passing melody ... Something painful stab in my chest.

She jumped up and ran down the middle of the road in defiance of traffic count, going round stuck in the crush cute cabins machines, substituting face heavy drops. The old man was right: there really was a fabulously well, strikingly beautiful. We had to just scrape the mold and the patina of time, and the past begins to shine - as a colored mosaic panels and bronze in the abandoned stations.

She stopped on the embankment of the green river thrown through it once the bridge is broken, barely begun, she was in no way to get to the other side. The magic ran out. The picture seemed so real, so colorful just a moment ago, faded and faded. Shrunken and hard-hearted of old empty houses, roads cracked skin, covered with two-meter roadside weeds and wild impenetrable thicket that swallowed the remnants of the waterfront as long as the eye could see - was all that remained of a second later, the beautiful ghostly world.

And Sasha suddenly felt so hurt that she had never seen him personally, that she would have to choose between the death and return to the subway, and that nowhere on earth there was not a handsome giant in bright robes ... That, apart from her for very broad road, dating back to the distant point where the sky crept to the abandoned city was no longer a single living soul.

Weather established excellent. Nedozhdlivaya.

Sasha did not even want to cry. Now it would be nice just to die.

And, as if hearing her wish, high above her head, spread out the wings of a huge black shadow.

* * *

What if he would have to choose? Brigadier release and throw the book to stay on station until he would find the missing girl? Or forget about it forever and follow Hunter, Sasha blank out of his novel, and in spider hide in anticipation of new characters?

Reason forbade the old man absent from the foreman. For what else his entire trip, for what mortal danger to which he subjected himself and all the subway? He simply has no right to risk their work - the only one that justifies all the sacrifices - and has already brought, and the future.

But at the moment when he picked up from the floor, a broken mirror, Homer realized that to leave the Paveletskaya, not knowing the fate of the girl will be a real betrayal. A betrayal sooner or later inevitably poison and the old man, and his novel. From my memory of Sasha, he is not never dipped.

Whatever he said Hunter, Homer must do everything to find the girl, or at least make sure that it is no longer alive. And the old man with redoubled efforts began to search every now and then coping with passers-by that hour.

Ring excluded - without documents she herself did not get to the Hanseatic League. Gallery rooms and chambers under the transition? The old man examined her from beginning to end, doznavaayas every comer, if he had not seen the girl. Eventually someone hesitantly replied that seem to be confronted with it, dressed in a tarpaulin protection ... From there, Homer, not believing his ears and eyes, drew a Sasha's way to the firing point at the foot of the escalator.

- And me-then what? Wants - let him go. Pts her good spihnul - Sentinel said limply in the booth. - You is not comin. And it has already received from the diluent. There's nest at the top newcomers. Nobody here can not walk. I was even amused when she asked - his eyes, wide as the pistol barrels, poked in space, not falling into the old man. - You'd better come in the transition, my grandfather. Dark soon.

Hunter knew it! But what he meant when he said that the old man is not a virtue to be back girl? Maybe she's still alive? ..

Stumbling with excitement, hurried back to Homer brigadirskuyu ward. Ducked under the low lintel of secret doors, hobbled by a narrow staircase, without knocking, opened the door ...

The room was empty: no Hunter or his weapons, only scattered on the floor tape brownish dried blood on bandages, but lying forlornly empty flask. Disappeared from the utility room and just barely otchischenny suit.

The foreman just threw the old man, how boring dog punished for stubbornness.

* * *

Her father had always believed: a person given signs. Should only be able to notice and read them.

Sasha looked up and froze, shocked. If someone would like now to send her a sign, could not think of anything more eloquent.

Not far from the bridge struck from the dark thicket stood round the ancient tower with fancy tip - the highest of all the surrounding buildings. Years have not gone to his advantage: the walls zmeilis deep cracks, and the tower itself dangerously tipped. It would long ago have collapsed if not for a miracle. As she had not paid attention to it?

Building girded cyclopean size bindweed. Its trunk was, of course, many times thinner than a tower, but its thickness and strength is more than sufficient to keep the structure falls apart. Wonderful plant twined spiral tower, pulling back from the main trunk branches thinner from those - even more subtle, and together they form a network that did not allow the building to crumble.

It is true that once bindweed was all in the same weak and flexible, as the most tender and young from his shoot now. Once he had to cling to ledges and balconies of the tower, which seemed eternal and indestructible. Had she not been so high, and he would have grown so.

Sasha mesmerized looking at him, to save their building. All for it again makes sense, returned to her desire to fight. Strange, because in her life, absolutely nothing has changed. Just suddenly, again, against all odds, through the gray crust of despair a tiny offshoot of the bindweed in her soul to get through and turned green hope.

Suppose that there were things that she never fix things, which can not be undone, and words that do not withdraw back. But in the current of history was still a lot that she could change, if still not sure how. The main thing is that it has reappeared force.

Now Sasha thought she guessed, and the reason why the ruthless chimera allowed her to escape unscathed: some unseen monster kept in chains, to give the girl another chance.

And she was grateful for that. Was ready to forgive, ready to re-argue and fight, but from the Hunter she needed only the lightest hint. Another sign.

Setting sun suddenly went out, but immediately broke back. Sasha lifted her chin and the corner of my eye has had time to catch the black silhouette of a rapid, leapt above her head for a moment obscure the star, and then out of sight.

The air is cut up a whistle and a piercing shriek - Overshot just a little bit, Sasha rock fell from the sky a huge machine of. At the last moment, instinct forced the girl to throw down, and it is only spared her. Slid along the ground on the wide-open leathery wings, unseen monster powerful strokes gained altitude and began to write a semi-circle, going for a new attack.

Sasha grabbed the machine, but then refused to useless venture. Even fired at point-blank queue could not knock off course a carcass, there was nothing much to think about how to combat it. It's still needed to get! The girl ran back to the wasteland from which went to his short journey, not thinking about how to go down into the subway.

Volatile monster heaved a hunting cry, and rushed back to her. Braiding in other people's pants, fell prostrate Sasha on the road, but twisted and snapped in short bursts. Bullets were discouraged creature, though not caused her any harm. Behind to win a second girl was able to get to his feet and rushed to nearby houses, too late to figure out how to hide from predators.

The sky is now circling the two shadows, supporting himself in the air with heavy strokes of broad membranous wings. Sasha's was simple: Pull over to the wall of any building. Flying monsters were too large and cumbersome to get it out there, and more ... She is still nowhere to run.

Succeeded! She pressed her against the wall, hoping that the creature away from her. But no: he happened to drive and more izobretalnuyu game. Nightmare Creature - first one and then the second - down to the ground in two dozen paces from the girl, and, dragging his wings folded, hurrying toward her.

Automatic fire is not scared, but only angered them, like a bullet stuck in the thick matted hair, not reaching the flesh. Near to Sasha creature viciously bared his teeth: a vyvorochennym snout and a black upturned lip bare curves, sharp as nails, teeth.

- Down! ..

Sasha did not even think about where she heard this distant voice, just rushed down to the ground face down. Very close to it there was an explosion, it shook and scorched air waves. Immediately followed by a second, behind it - enraged animal squeals and claps receding wings.

She timidly raised her head, coughing, knocking the dust from the lungs, looked around. Far from it the road was vyzherblena fresh funnel and drizzle with a dark oily blood. Torn from the meat, lay next to scorched leathery wings, and then a few charred pieces of formless.

Through stone wasteland to Sasha measured, not crouching, walking a powerful built man in a heavy protective suit.

Hunter!

Chapter 13

He took her hand and helped her up and pulled behind him. Then, as if recollecting himself, let him go. His eyes, hidden a special smoked glass, Sasha was not visible.

- Keep up! Darkens rapidly, it is necessary to have time to get out of here - he progundosil filters.

And never looked at it more rapidly moved forward.

- Hunter! - Called out to his girlfriend through the misted windows of his mask trying to find their savior.

He pretended not to hear her, and Sasha is nothing else to do but with all the legs to run after him. Of course, he looked at her angry: for the third consecutive time to bail out the stupid girl. But he got up here, went up for Sasha, which she could now be no doubt ...

Shaven not even going to approach the den, which served as Sasha exit of the subway, he knew the other trails. Turning off the main road to the right, he dove into the arch, crossed the rusted iron skeletons of flat boxes, similar to the booths for dwarfs, shot startled the vague shadow, and stopped at a small brick hut with a tightly barred windows. Cranked the key in the massive padlock. Shelter? No booth was blende: the door zigzagged went to a depth of concrete stairs.

Sheds same lock from the inside, he lit the lantern and stamped down. The walls are painted in white and green, peeling of the time, were covered with names and dates: input-output, input-output ... Illegible scribbled something and Sasha's savior. Probably everyone who has used a secret lift to get out on the surface, had to be written here when he left and when he returned. Here are just under many names return date was not.

The descent was interrupted more quickly than anticipated Sasha: Although steps have fled further down, shaven paused at flea iron doors slammed in her fist, and after a few seconds on the back side gnashed constipation. Opened a disheveled man with a beard of the liquid, the blue pants with the knees drawn.

- Who's that? - He asked, puzzled.

- To pick up on the Ring - boomed Hunter. - A little bird is not eaten, barely managed from the grenade launcher. Hey, kid, what do you get there?

He took off his hood, pulled the gas mask ...

Before Sasha stood an unknown man: hedgehog blond hair, pale gray eyes, flattened, like a broken nose. And she is still discouraged, reassures herself when she thought he was too agile for the wounded, that his gait is not the same, not beastly, that costume just like the other ...

She was suffocating, and it also tore the mask.

After four hours of Sasha was already below the Hanseatic border.

- Forgive me, without documents can not leave you here - in the voice of her savior could see through sincere regret. - Maybe tonight at this thing ... Well, in the transition?

She silently shook her head and smiled.

Where to now?

To him? Plenty of time!

Sasha could not suppress a grudge against Hunter because he did not save her this time ... She had one more thing that she no longer wanted to procrastinate.

Gentle and inviting, the echoes of wonderful music to find her way through the human hubbub, rustling through the shoe and cries of traders. It seems that this was the tune that put a spell on her before. Stepping forward to meet her, Sasha seems once again made its way to the doorway, emitting an unearthly glow ... Just where he was now?

The musician was taken to a dense ring of dozens of students. Sasha had to knock before a crowd spat it into an empty circle. Melody and attracted these people and keep them at bay, though they too were flying into the light, but were afraid to get burned.

Sasha was not afraid.

He was young, slender and surprisingly handsome. Perhaps a bit fragile, but his well-groomed face was gentle, and his green eyes seemed to be naive. Dark hair, though uncut, lay flat. Understated clothes singled him in people's brew Paveletskaya unearthly purity.

Instrument of its kind of like a child's tune, which is made of plastic insulating tubes, but a large, black with brass buttons, red carpet, and apparently very expensive. The sounds that a musician from him removed, just belonged to some other world, another time. As the instrument itself ... Like his boss.

He caught sight of Sasha's first moments, released and immediately picked up again. She was confused: although his attention and was not unpleasant to her, she came here for his music.

- Thank God! I found you ...

To her squeezed Homer - panting, sweating.

- How is he? - She asked Alex.

- Is ... - Started one himself and laid siege ended differently. - He was gone.

- How? .. Where? - As if someone had squeezed in a fist Sasha's heart.

- Out. Took away all his things and left. We need to think on Dobryninskaya ...

- Nothing is left? - Timidly, she specified, himself zagadyvaya response, which she now gives Homer.

- Cleaned - the old man nodded.

Shush them angrily, and Homer became quiet, listening to the melody and at the same time looking suspiciously at a musician, then a girl. In vain: she was thinking about something else.

Let Hunter drove her and hurried escape. But Sasha has already begun to comprehend the strange rules that he followed. If shaven and really took away all their belongings, in general, all ... So, he just wants it to be more insistent that she stay the way, wants her to find him. And she does, she still does. If only ...

- A knife? - She whispered the old man. - He took with my knife? Black?

- In the House it is not - he shrugged his shoulders.

- So, take it!

Sasha was quite enough and this is a mean character.

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Flutist was certainly talented and also beautifully mastered his art, as if only yesterday he was playing in the conservatory. In the case of his instrument, his open begging, would be

enough ammo to feed a small station - or to cut its population polls. Here it is, the recognition, with a sad grin, thought Homer.

Melody looked the old man vaguely familiar, but no matter how much he tried to recall where he could hear her - in the old movies? a radio concert? - Nothing came. In tune was something unusual - accidentally tuning in to its wave aside no longer receive; wanted absolutely to listen to the end, and then applauding the musician, while he will not take over the game again.

Prokofiev? Shostakovich? Homer's knowledge of music were still too sparse to really try to guess the composer. But whoever wrote these notes, the flutist is not just played them, he fed them to new sounds and new meaning, enlivened. Talent. Talent, and for him Homer was ready to forgive the guy teasing glances which he threw affair between Sasha, as a paper bow kitten.

However, it was time to take away from it girl.

Waited until the music bud, and the flutist will give the audience cheering, the old man grabbed Sasha by the damp, still smelling of bleach costume, and pulled her out.

- Items collected. I'm going for him - he paused.

- I, too, - said the girl quickly.

- Do you know what to get involved? - Homer asked softly.

- I know everything. I overheard - she looked at him defiantly. - Epidemic, huh? And he's going to all burn. And the dead and the living. The entire station - Sasha eyewash.

- And what do you want to such a person? - The old man that was really interesting.

Sasha did not answer, and for a while they walked near silence, until you got into a very lonely corner of the room.

- My father died. Because of me, my fault. And I can not do anything that he was once again alive. And there are people who are still alive. Which can still be saved. And I have to try. He should - slow and awkward "she began at last.

- Saving from whom? From what? The disease is incurable, you heard - the old man replied bitterly.

- From your friend. He is worse than any disease. Death - the girl sighed. - Diseases of the at least give up hope. Someone always recovers. One in a thousand.

- How? Why do you think you can? - Looked at her Homer.

- I've already got - she answered hesitantly.

Do not overestimate your girl power? Do not deceive yourself, attributing stale and ruthless foreman of reciprocity? Homer did not want to put a damper on Sasha, but it was better to prevent it now.

- Do you know what I found in his house? - The old man carefully took out a crippled her compact and gave it to Sasha. - It's you it so?

- No, - she shook her head.

- So, this is Hunter ...

The girl slowly opened the box, is reflected in one of the glass fragments. Thought, remembering his last conversation with shaved and the words spoken to them in the twilight, when she came to give him a knife. Hunter remembered face when he walked heavily to it, all bloody, to zanesshaya its blades chimera threw Sasha and killed him ...

- It is not because of me. This is due to the mirror - she said firmly.

- It is here where? - Old man raised his eyebrows.

- You said - Sasha banged the door. - Sometimes it is helpful to see yourself from outside. Helps a lot about myself to understand - she mimicked didactic tone of an old man.

- Do you think that Hunter does not know who he is? Or is that still going through because of his appearance? Cause and broke? - Homer chuckled condescendingly.

- It's not in appearance - the girl leaned back against the pillar.

- Hunter knows who he is. And, apparently, just does not like him that reminds - answered the old man himself.

- Or maybe he forgot about it? - She replied. - I sometimes think that he always tries to remember something. Or ... that he was chained to a heavy trolley, which rolls downhill, into the darkness, and nobody would help him stop it. I can not explain it. Just look at him and feel - Alex frowned. - Nobody sees, and I can see. I'm so if you said that he needed.

- That he threw you - brutally poked her Homer.

- That I left him, - the girl stubbornly frowned. - And now must catch up before it's too late. They are still alive. They can even save - a wound, she said. - And he, too, can still be saved.

- Its something to you from anyone save it? - Raised his chin in Homer.

She looked at him incredulously - really old so do not understand, despite all her efforts? And incredibly seriously replied:

- From the man in the mirror.

*

- Busy?

Sasha, absently poking with a fork mushroom stew, was startled. Next to her with a tray in his hands was green-eyed musician. The old man somewhere away, and his place was now empty.

- Yes.

- You can always find a solution! - He put his tray, and playfully picked up at the next table free stool, sat down on the left of Sasha before she had time protested.

- If anything, I'm not invited - she warned him.

- Grandpa narugaet? - With the kind of understanding winked musician. - Let me introduce myself. Leonid.

- He is not my grandfather - Sasha felt the blood rushes to my cheeks.

- Even so? .. - Leonid mouth stuffed to overflowing with admiration and arched an eyebrow.

- You are arrogant, - she said.

- I'm pushy - he pontificated lifted the fork up.

- Too sure of himself - Sasha smiled.

- I do believe in people, and of himself in particular - he muttered indistinctly, chewing.

Returned the old man, stood behind the impostor made a wry pout, but still sat on his stool.

- Sasha, do not you close? - Contentiously he asked, looking past the musician.

- Sasha - Triumphantly repeated the one looking up from his bowl. - Very nice. I recall, call Leonid.

- Nikolai Ivanovich - glancing at him, frowning, "Homer said. - And what do you tune in today marks? Seems familiar ...

- No wonder I was the third day of her right was doing - pushing the last word, he said. - In general, his own composition.

- Thy? - Sasha deferred instruments. - And how is called?

- Can not say, - Leonid shrugged. - Above the title I once thought. And then, as in letters to shift?And why?

- Very nicely - the girl admitted. - Just incredibly beautiful.

- Then I can call in your honor - not confused musician. - You deserve it.

- No need - she shook her head. - Let titles will be better off without. This makes sense.

- It is to dedicate it to you, too, have some merit - he was laughing, but choked and coughed.

- Well, are you ready? - Old man took Sasha's tray and stood up. - It's time. You excuse us, young man ...

- Nothing! I already had finished. Let me spend a little girl?

- We are leaving - has said Homer.

- Wow! I am too. At Dobryninskaya - musician either run over an innocent look. - We have different ways?

- By the way - unexpectedly for herself "Sasha replied, trying not to look in the direction of Homer, and all the eye leaping to Leonid.

It was something easy, gentle risibility. If a boy, a twig fences, it causes the lungs nebolnye injections, which did not work really angry, it seems, even the old man. But his hints he presented Sasha do so, so funny that she was not going to take them seriously ... And what's wrong is that he likes her?

And then, in his music she fell in love long before they became acquainted with him themselves.And the temptation to take on the road with this magic was too great.

*

All about the music, not otherwise. Devil's like a youngster gammelnsky piper beckon innocent souls of its sleek flute and used his gift to spoil all the girls, to whom he could reach. Here he tried to get up and Alexandra, and Homer did not even know what to do!

Swallow his audacious joke old man had great difficulty, and very soon they got him in the throat.Homer's annoyed, and how quickly Leonid managed to negotiate with the Hanseatic inexorable command to the entire Trinity allowed to pass around the ring stage to Dobryninskaya - and it is undocumented! In the mansion to the station, an elderly bald dude with a mustache, cockroaches, the musician was a member with a case full of cartridges, and came out smiling and light.

Homer was forced to admit that his diplomatic skills they were by the way: motodrezina on which they arrived at Paveletskaya, disappeared from the decanter along with the disappearance of the Hunter, as a way to bypass could take a week.

But most of all an old man alerted the ease with which the mugger broke bread with the station and said goodbye to all the savings, only to go into the tunnels for him Sasha. Otherwise, this would be easy to say about love, but here the old man saw a continuous lack of seriousness of intentions and habit of quick victory.

Yes, little by little, Homer turned to grumbling dragon ... but he had reason to be vigilant and cause for jealousy. The only thing it now lacks - that his miracle newfound muse ran off with an itinerant musician! With a completely superfluous, I should say a hero, for which his novel was not harvested sites, and he fetched own stool and boorishly sat exactly in the middle.

- Is the whole earth just nobody left?

Their trio is already a step towards Dobryninskaya accompanied by three guards: good use cartridges, it was possible to make a reality wildest dreams.

The girl, who had just excitedly talks about her campaign to the surface, broke off and sad. Homer, exchanged glances with the musician: who was the first rush to comfort her?

- Is there life outside Moscow? - Old man chuckled. - A new generation is also defined by this question?

- Of course there is, - has confidently declared Leonid. - It's not that nobody else has survived, just no connection!

- Well, here I am, for example, heard that somewhere behind Taganskaya a secret passage, which displays in a curious tunnel - began the old man. - Default seems to be a tunnel, six feet in diameter, only without the rails. Lies deep meters at forty or even fifty. Goes far to the east ...

- This is not a tunnel that leads to the Urals bunker? - Interrupted him, Leonid. - And a story about a man who accidentally wandered into it, then came back with a stock of food and ...

- It was a week with a short halt, then he has to end food and had to turn back. Tunnel had not yet seen any end or edge - crumpled, having lost the epic tone, graduated from Homer. - Yes, according to rumors, to the Urals bunkers. Where else can someone be alive.

- It's unlikely - yawn musician.

- Another friend in Polis told once that one of the local radio operators established communication with the tank crew, who managed to screw up and go into a wilderness

that no one even did not occur to her to bomb ... - Pointedly referring to Sasha, he continued the old man.

- Well, - Leonid nodded. - Also known story. When they ended diesel fuel, they planted tank in the ground on the hill, and around him built a farm. And a few more years in the evenings talking on the radio with Polis.

- While the receiver is not broke - irritably finishing what Homer.

- Well, about a submarine? - Stretched out his opponent. - About the nuclear boat, which was a long march, and when it started an exchange of blows, just do not have time to go into combat positions. When surfaced, all have long been over. Then the crew put it on the moors not far from Vladivostok ...

- And from its reactor still eats a whole village - butted the old man. - Six months ago I met a man who claimed he was - the first mate of the boat. He said that the country has crossed a bike and still got to Moscow. Three years of riding.

- Straight talk with him personally? - Leonid politely surprised.

- Personally - snapped Homer.

Legends have always been his strong point and he just could not let the young Nahal shut himself in his belt. He remained in reserve and another story, sacred. It was he who wanted to tell her quite a different case, and not to waste in useless controversy ... But watching Sasha laughs once the joke of this rascal, decided the same.

- And about the Polar Zory not heard?

- What dawns? - Turned to him a musician.

- Well, how? - The old man smiled modestly. - Far North, Kola Peninsula, the city of Polar Zory. God-forgotten place. Until about fifteen hundred miles of Moscow, to St. Petersburg - at least a thousand. Nearby except Murmansk with its naval bases, but before him decently.

- In short, the wilderness - encouraged him, Leonid.

- Far from the big cities, from the secret factories and military bases. Away from all the major objectives. Those cities that our missile defense to protect could not have been erased in the dust and ashes. Those over which was a shield, which had triggered interceptors -

the old man looked up - you know. But there were after all the places in which nobody was aiming ... Because they are no threat is not represented. Polar Zory, for example.

- Up to them, and now some things nobody - said the musician.

- And in vain, - cut off the old man. - Because near the town of Polar Zory was Kola nuclear power plant. Was one of the most powerful in the country. Almost the entire North of energy provides. Millions of people. Hundreds of businesses. I'm myself one of those places, Arkhangelsk. I know what I'm saying. And at this station in high school has been on tour. This fortress state within a state. Its small army, own land, farm utility. Could exist in the offline mode. Had even nuclear war - nothing in their lives do not change - he smiled grimly.

- And what do you mean ...

- St. Petersburg is not, Murmansk was gone, the Archangel. Millions of people perished, the company - along with the cities ... in dust and ashes. And the city remained Polar Zory. And the Kola nuclear power plant was not damaged. Around for thousands of miles away - just snow, snow and ice fields, so the wolves polar bears. Communication with the center there. And they have enough fuel to supply the big city is not the year or two. And by probably, even together with polar Zoryami, a hundred years will suffice. Winter with ease.

- It's a real ark ... - Leonid whispered. - And when the flood is over, and the waters subside, the top of Mount Ararat ...

- It is - the old man nodded.

- How do you know about it? - In the voice of the musician had no more, no irony, no boredom.

- I had somehow and I run a radio operator - Homer replied evasively. - Very much like to find at least one living person in their places.

- How long are they stretched, in the north?

- I am sure. The last time I was, however, the relationship two years ago went. But you can imagine what that means - even a century with electricity? In the heat? Medical equipment, from computers to digital libraries to disk? You have nowhere else already know ... The whole metro computers two pieces, and those only as toys. And it is the capital - the old man smiled bitterly. - And if somewhere else and there were people - not alone, I mean, and even villages ... They have long since the seventeenth century came again, and this is the best, but it already does - a stone. Sticks, cattle, magic, one in three dies in childbirth. Scores and birch bark. And apart from the next two hamlets in the world, nothing more. Wilderness, solitude. Wolves, bears, mutants. Yes, all of modern civilization - the old man coughed, glancing around - based on electricity. Dry up the energy, the station will rot and all. For centuries, billions of people are building brick by brick erected, and all for nothing. Start over again. And will it succeed? And then the delay in the whole century! Correctly, you said Noah's ark. Almost unlimited supply of energy! Oil's still necessary to extract and recycle gas - drill pipe and thousands of miles to drive! Well, back - to the steam engine? Or even further? I'll tell you this - he took Sasha's

hand. - People-then nothing will happen. People are hardy as cockroaches. But civilization ... It would save.

- And they have a really civilization?

- Be calm. Engineers, nuclear engineers, and technical intelligentsia. And as the conditions they had just better than ours with you. For two decades, Polar Dawn grew well. They put the radio on an eternal repetition: "All the survivors ..." and co-ordinates. Say, and people still slip ...

- Why do I never heard of this? - Muttered musician.

- Few people have heard. Hence their wave is difficult to catch. But you try sometime, if you can find a couple of free years - the old man grinned. - Call "Last Harbor".

- I would know - he shook his head gravely. - I collect these cases ... But that could all be peaceful?

- How do you say ... around the wilderness, if there were more villages and towns are nearby, quickly alienated. Sometimes, the barbarians attacked. Oh, and beasts, of course, if it so be called. But they lacked arsenals. A perimeter defense, secure the perimeter. Barbed wire is energized, watchtowers. This fortress, I say the same. And during its first decade, most liho, they still managed to build one wall, palisade of logs. Around all examined ... Before the Murmansk reach two hundred miles. Funnel there reflow instead of Murmansk. Even going to organize an expedition to the south, to Moscow ... I tried to dissuade them. Why cut the cord? That will drop the background, will be new lands to develop - then ... And yet there is nothing to do. Cemetery and the cemetery - Homer sighed.

- Funny thing happens - suddenly said Leonid - if humanity is destroying itself an atom, they are the same and be saved.

- Not funny - sternly looked at him the old man.

- It's like a fire, stolen by Prometheus - said he. - The gods forbade him to pass the fire people. He had wanted to pull the man out of dirt, darkness and vegetating ...

- I read - sarcastically snapped his homer. - "Myths and Legends of Ancient Greece."

- Prophetic myth - said Leonid. - Do not accidentally gods were against it. Know what's all over.

- But it was a fire made of man by man, - said the old man.

- Do you think without electricity, he once again turn into an animal? - Asked the musician.

- I believe that without him we have two hundred years ago rolled back. And considering that survived one of the thousands, and that all have to rebuild again, conquer, explore - all five hundred. Or maybe never catch up. What do not you agree?

- I agree - said Leonid. - But is it all it's only electricity?

- What do you think? - In the heat of the clasped hands Homer.

Musician measured him with a strange long look and shrugged.

The silence dragged on. Such an outcome could well call Homer deduct for his victory: the girl finally stopped devouring insolent eyes and think of something else. But when the station has already left quite a bit, Leonid suddenly said:

- Well. Let us then, and I'll tell you a story.

The old man could have depicted the fatigue, but said gracious nod.

- They say that somewhere behind the station and the Sports front of the ruined bridge Sokolnichesky from the main tunnel goes dramatically down a dead-end branch. It ends with a lattice, for which - closed tightly germovorota. Gate more than once tried to open, but it never lead to nowhere. And if it went to the lonely traveler, back they are almost never returned, and their bodies were found in quite other ends of the subway.

- Emerald City? - Homer grimaced.

- Everybody knows - not paying attention to him, he continued, Leonid - that Sokolniki Metro Bridge collapsed into the first day, and all the stations behind him were cut off from the subway. It is considered that none of the other on that side of the bridge was saved, although it has no evidence whatsoever.

- Emerald City - impatiently waved Homer.

- Everyone is also aware that the Moscow University was built on shaky ground. Hold a huge building on it only because in his basement working powerful holodogeneratory that frozen marshy soil. Without them, it has long had to slide into a river.

- Beaten argument - knowing what he is, managed to insert the old man.

- It's been more than twenty years, but the abandoned building for some reason goes on ...

- Bike it, here's why!

- Rumor has it that a university - not just any basement, and a great strategic air-raid shelter on ten floors down, in which not only holodogeneratory, but also its own nuclear reactor, and accommodations, and connections with the nearest subway stations, and even with Metro -2, - Leonid did Sasha terrible eyes, making her smile.

- Nothing new I have not heard - contemptuously weighed him Homer.

- They say there is a real underground city - a dreamy musician continued. - Town, whose residents - and they certainly did not die - have devoted themselves to collecting the bits of lost knowledge and excellent service. Do not be stingy with the money they send an expedition to the surviving art galleries, museums and libraries. And bringing up their children so that they have not lost a sense of beauty. There is peace and harmony, there is no other ideologies, except for education and other religions, other than art. There is no squalid walls painted in two colors kondovyh oil paint - they are all painted with wonderful frescoes. From the speakers instead of barking commands and can hear the sirens, alarms, Berlioz, Haydn and Tchaikovsky. And anyone imagine, is capable of quoting Dante from memory. And just that some people have managed to remain so, as before. Even there, not the same as in the twenty-first century, and as in ancient times ... Well, you've read because of "Myths and Legends" ... - Musician smiled the old man as a feeble-minded. - Free and brave, wise and beautiful. Fair. Noble.

- Nothing like this has ever heard! - Homer only hope that sly devil did not bribe the girls.

- The Metro - Leonid looked at the old man - this place is called the Emerald City. But its inhabitants are rumored to prefer a different naming.

- And what? - Homer whetted.

- Arc.

- Nonsense! Nonsense! - The old man snorted and turned away.

- Of course, nonsense - phlegmatically otliknulsya musician. - It's a fairy tale ...

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Dobryninskaya was plunged into chaos.

Homer, puzzled and frightened looking around: Do not mistake it? Could it happening at one of the quietest stations of the ring? He gave the impression that in the last hour Hansa someone had to declare war.

From a parallel tunnel peering cargo trolley, which have been piled up as corpses. Military medics in aprons dragged the body onto the platform, laid them on the sheet: one head separately from the other face of the living space is left, the third issued gut ...

Homer closed his eyes to Sasha. Leonid got air in his chest and turned away.

- What happened? - Terrified asked one of the nurses assigned to guard the trinity.

- Our Watch with a large junction with the main SSP. Fly here, one of them. Nobody left. And it is unclear who did - medic wiped his hands on her apron. - Big Brother, I lit it, eh? And then your hands are shaking ...

Home BSC. Branch-spider, departing for Paveletskaya-radial and includes four lines at once - Ring, gray, orange and green. Homer thought that Hunter will choose this path, the shortest, but guarded by reinforced squads Hansa.

For what is a massacre? First they opened fire on him, or did not even see it in the dark tunnel? And where is he now? Oh, another head ... How could he do this create? ..

Homer thought of the fragmented mirror and Sasha's words. Is she right? Perhaps, the team leader opposed to himself, trying to refrain from unnecessary killing, but not being able to restrain themselves? And, breaking a mirror, he really wanted to hit that ugly, horrible person, which gradually turned into ...

None. Hunter saw in him not a man, but a monster. Him he was trying to impress. But only shattered the glass, turning one reflection - in the dozens.

Or maybe ... The old man watched the way nurses view of the trolley to the platform ... Eighth, the last one. Maybe, just out of the mirror still looked sad man? Former Hunter?

And the ... Another ... was already outside?

Chapter 14

"And really, what makes a man a man?"

He wanders the earth for more than a million years, but the magical transformation that has made clever gregarious animal into something completely different, unseen, occurred to him some ten thousand years ago. Just think, ninety-nine per cent of its entire history, he took shelter in caves and gnaw raw meat, unable to keep warm, create tools, and real weapons, unable to even really talking! And the feelings that he was able to experience, a man no different from monkeys or wolves: hunger, fear, affection, caring, appreciation ...

How he could suddenly schitanye for centuries to learn to build, think and write down their thoughts, change the surrounding matter, and to innovate, why it took him to

paint and how he discovered music? How could conquer the whole world and rebuild it to its needs? What exactly ten thousand years ago, have added to this beast?

Fire? Gave man to tame the heat and light, carry them with you in the desert cold ground, fry production at stake, to appease the stomach? But it changed? Is that allowed him to expand his domain. But rats and no fire were able to flood the entire planet, and have remained what they were originally - clever gregarious mammals.

No, I did not fire, and in any case, not only the fire - was right musician. Something else ... What?

Language? That is undoubtedly distinct from other animals. Cut raw diamonds are thought to define words which may be a universal coin, to get widespread circulation. Ability is not so much to express things happening in my head as organize it, casting unstable, flowing like molten metal forms a rigid form. Clarity and sobriety of mind, the ability to clearly and unequivocally to pass by word of mouth orders and knowledge. Hence the ability to organize and subdue, to convene the army and build a state.

But ants do without words, on his own, unnoticed by human level by creating these mega-cities, finding its place in a complex hierarchy, up telling each other information and commands, calling thousands and thousands of dauntless legions with iron discipline, which shlestywayutsya unheard of, but ruthless wars of the toy empire.

Maybe the letters?

Letters, without which there would be no opportunity to accumulate knowledge? Those same bricks that make up the aspiration to heaven Tower of Babel of world civilization? Without which the unbaked clay of wisdom, mastered one generation to unravel and be cracked, sags and crumbled into dust, unable to endure its own weight? Without them, each successive generation would begin construction of the great tower of the former level, vozilos to life on the ruins of the previous hut and okolevalo would, in turn, has not lifted a new floor.

Letters, writing allow a person to make the accumulated knowledge beyond its close the skull, to keep them unaltered for future generations, eliminating those from the need to re-open a long time open, allowing them to build on their own, own on a solid foundation, inherited from their parents and grandparents.

But it's not just the letters? ..

Learn to write wolves whether they would like upon the human civilization? Was it to their civilization?

When the wolf is full, it empties into the blissful prostration, devoting time, affection and games, as long as the pain in his stomach did not chase it further. When a hungry man, it awakens a longing properties. Elusive, inexplicable - the one that causes him to spend hours looking at the stars, scratch ocher walls of his cave, decorated with

carved figures of the nose of combat boats, which for centuries bent, erected a stone colossus, instead of strengthening the fortifications, and to spend life on honing verbal skills rather than in order to cultivate the art of swordsmanship. The one that makes the former assistant engineer to devote the remains of years of reading and search, and attempts to write something ... Something ... Tosca, trying to satisfy you, dirty and poverty-stricken crowd listens to a wandering violinist, Kings privechayut patronizing troubadours and painters, and Born in a cave for a long time girl watches painted something like the packaging from the tea. Unclear, but a mighty cry, which can stifle even the call of hunger - just a man.

Is not it pushes the other animals available range of feelings, letting the person has and the ability to dream and daring to hope and courage to spare? Love and compassion which a man often finds its distinctive feature, not open them. The dog is able to love, and compassion: when her master was ill, she does not depart from him, and whimpers. A dog can even get bored and see its meaning in another: if its owner dies, she is sometimes willing to izdohnut, just to stay with him. But now she can not dream.

It turns out, the longing for beauty and ability to appreciate it?

Maybe. But not only that.

To block the gunfire and desperate cries related naked people, other people happen to put in a full volume grand Wagnerian symphony. Contradictions do not exist: one only emphasized more.

So what else?

And, even survival in today's hell man as a species, whether to keep it this fragile, almost intangible, but certainly a real part of their essence? That spark, that ten thousand years ago, turned half-starved beast with a dull look to the creation of a different order? In essence, tormented soul hunger hunger more solid? Exists eternally restless, flailing between the spiritual greatness and meanness, between inexplicable mercy unacceptable to predators, and neopravdyvaemoy cruelty, which has no even in the dead of the insect world? Erecting the magnificent palaces and writing incredible fabrics, competing with the Creator, the ability to synthesize pure beauty - and invented the gas chambers and hydrogen bombs to annihilate all of creation and economically destroy their own kind? Carefully line up on the beach sand castles and recklessly destroying them? In essence, knows no limit in anything alarming and irrepressible who can not satisfy their hunger strange, but devotes all his life to attempt to do this? In person?

Will it in him? Will this from him?

Or a brief spike in the chart of history will disappear in his past, a one percent deviation from a strange man returning back to its eternal torpor in the usual timelessness, where countless generations, never taking his eyes from the ground chewing gum and follow each other, and where ten or a hundred, Five hundred thousand years are equally unnoticed?

What else? .. "

* * *

- Is it true?
- What is it? - Leonid smiled at her.
- About the Emerald City? About the Ark? That there is a place in the subway? - Sasha thoughtfully asked, looking down at his feet.
- Rumor has it - he replied evasively.
- It would be nice to get there one day - she drawled. - You know, when I walked up there, I felt so sorry for the people. For what they once were wrong ... and would never be able to get everything back as it was. And there was so good ... I guess.
- Error? No, this is the gravest of crimes - seriously answered her musician.- Destroy the world, kill six billion people - a mistake?
- anyway ... Do you and I do not deserve forgiveness? And everyone deserves. Everyone should be given a chance to remake itself and change everything, try again one more time, let even the last - she was silent. - I would so like to see how it all actually ... Before I was not interested. Previously, I was just afraid, and I'm all there seemed ugly. And it turns out, I just climbed in the wrong place. So stupid ... This town is at the top - he is like my life before. There is no life, no future. Only memories - and the strangers ... just a ghost. And I have something very important to understand, yet there was, you know ... - Sasha is jammed. - Hope - it's like blood. Until it flows through your veins, you're alive. I want to hope.
- Why do you want in the Emerald City? - Asked the musician.
- I think there should be anything like it before. People should be very different. People who have not forgotten the previous day and who exactly will come tomorrow, should be very, very different ...

They walked leisurely around the room Dobryninskaya under the watchful eye of guards. Homer left them alone with apparent reluctance, going to the reception to the station, but now for some reason delayed. Hunter also had still not been announced.

In lines of the marble hall Dobryninskaya Sasha saw playful hint: it faced large arch leading to the waterway, interspersed with small arches, decorative, deaf. Big, small, big

again, again small. Holding hands as if man and woman, man and woman ... and she also suddenly wanted to put his hand in a broad and strong masculine hand. Hide it for a while.

- Here, too, can build a new life, - Leonid said, winking at a girl. - You do not go somewhere, look for something ... it is enough to look around the sides.
- And what I see?
- me - he bowed his head with feigned modesty.
- I've already seen. And heard - Sasha finally responded to his smile. - I love, like everyone else ... You do not need your ammo? You gave them so much that we missed here.
- Looking for just to have enough to eat. And I always have enough. It is foolish to play for the money.
- And for what you then play?
- For the sake of music - he laughed. - For the sake of the people. Even there, not so. For the sake of what music does to people.
- And what did she do with them?
- Generally speaking - anything - Leonid again became serious. - I have, and such that makes love, and such that makes cry.
- And the one you played last time - Sasha looked at him askance. - That which is without a title. It is what makes doing?
- This here? - He nasvistel entry. - Nothing makes. She's just pain relief.

* * *

- Hey, man!

Homer closed his notebook and shifted to an uncomfortable wooden bench. The duty officer was seated behind a small desk, almost the whole area is occupied by three old black phone with no buttons or drives. One of the vehicles comfortably flashing red light.

- Andrey Andreyevich was released. He has on you for two minutes, as Will you come - not mumbled, and immediately on the case come on - strictly admonished the old man on duty.
- Two minutes is not enough - Homer sighed.
- I warn you - he shrugged his shoulders.

Had neither of the two or five: the old man really knew, nor where to start, nothing more than to finish, or what to ask, ask anything of, and apart from the Chief Dobryninskaya contact him now was not to anyone.

However, Andrei Andreyevich vzmokshy of anger in bold burlyneshodyaschemsya uniform jacket, a long time to hear the old man did not.

- Do not you understand? I've got a force majeure, eight people were killed, and you tell me about some of the epidemic! No nothing here! Everything is good take up my time! Or do you get out of here myself ...

Like surfs the sperm whale, the head shot up his carcass up, nearly knocking over a table where he sat. In the study looked inquiringly on duty. Homer, too, bewildered rose from a hard and low guest chair.

- Sam. But why would you then entered the army at the Serpukhov?
- What's your deal?
- The station said ...
- What do they say? What do they say? You know what ... You to tell me there is not panic suggests ... Pasch, let's it in a monkey!

In a flash, Homer was kicked in the waiting room. Alternating with zubotychnami persuasion, a security guard dragged her resisting the old man into a narrow side corridor.

Between the two slap in the face of Homer jumped off a respirator, he tried to hold his breath, but then he got a sup, and got a cough. Sperm whale popped up on the doorstep of his office, filling the entire doorway.

- Let there yet, then We will understand ... And who are you? According to records? - He snapped at the next visitor.

Homer even had time to turn to.

At three paces from him, arms folded, motionless, stood Hunter. Dressed in a tight form with a stranger's shoulder, hiding the face in the shadow of the raised visor of his

helmet, he did not seem to recognize the old man did not intend to interfere. Homer is expected that he would like a butcher izgvazdan in blood, but only a crimson stain on the dress was a foreman bruise on his own wound. Tumble stone look at the station, Hunter suddenly walked slowly to him, as if intending to go into the office right through his body.

He was taken aback, stammered, stepped back, releasing the pass. A guard with a homer in his arms expectantly froze. Hunter pushed his way inside after the retreat fatso, a lion's roar brought down from the peg and made to fall silent. Then he moved on to the commanding whisper.

Abandoning the old man's duty crept to the door and stepped outside. In a moment he was carried out flow dirty battlefield; voice of the station broke into screams.

- And let this provocateur! - As if under hypnosis, repeating someone else's orders, he cried at the end.

Scalded, red, orderly shut the door behind him, trudged back to his place at the entrance and buried in a news leaflet, printed on brown paper. When Homer is strongly moved by his desk to nachalnicemu office, he just vzhalsya even stronger in his tabloid, showing that it is happening now does not apply.

And only now, triumphantly looking at a guard, cover up their shameful piece of newspaper, Homer had a good look at its phones. On the fact that all the time podmargalival was naleplen piece off-white plaster, over which a blue ballpoint pen someone brought one word illegible.

"Tula".

- We are in contact with the Order - sweaty, head Dobryninskaya crunched his fists, but the eye to lift the foreman did not dare. - And about this operation was not warned us. Itself a solution, I can not accept.
- Then call on the Central, - he said. - Do you have time for approval. But a few.
- They will not give approval. This would jeopardize the stability of the Hanseatic League ... You do not know what to Hansa is above all else? And we have everything under control.
- What else to hell with stability? If no action is taken ...
- The situation is stable, does not understand that you are not happy - stubbornly shook his heavy head Andrei Andreyevich. - All outputs are held at gunpoint. Mouse does not slip. Let's wait until everything will be resolved by itself.

- Nothing itself is not allowed! - Hunter roared. - Wait for it be that someone will be selected and crossing the top, or find a workaround. Station to clear out! For all the instructions! I do not understand why you yourself are still not done!
- But there may in fact be healthy people. How do you imagine? So I ordered his guys to shoot and burn all the Tula? And the train with sectarians? Maybe Serpuchovskay at the same time? Yes half there whores prikormleny and illegitimate children ... No, you know what! We're not fascists. War is war, and it ... Patients to cut ... Even when FMD was of the Belarusian and then carried the pigs one by one at different angles - so what becomes infected, she died, but some healthy - the one that lived, and not all in a row to score.
- Since then the pig, and then people - colorless said the brigadier.
- No, no, - the chief shook his head again, then splashing. - I can not so. It's inhumane ... It's on my conscience will be then. And I ... Why do I need it? To dream about then?
- Do you own and do not have to. To do this, there are people who do not have dreams. You just miss us through his station. That's all.
- I sent walkers in Polis, learn about the vaccine - Andrei Andreyevich wiped his sleeve sweat. - There is hope that ...
- There is no vaccine. There is no hope! Enough to hide his head in the sand! Why I do not see health units from Central? Why do you refuse to call back and ask for the green light for the passage of the Order of the cohort?

Head remained stubbornly silent, for some reason tried to fasten the buttons on his jacket, dig deeper into their slippery fingers and threw it away. Went to the mangy sideboard, poured himself a glass of sweet-smelling tincture swallowed in one gulp.

- So it is not being reported ... - Hunter guessed. - They are still nothing do not know. Do you at the next station epidemic, but they do not know ...
- I head for this answer - he uttered a hoarse voice. - The epidemic at the adjacent station means retired. Let's say ... Did not prevent ... Created a threat to the stability of the Hanseatic League.
- On a related?
- While there is quiet, but I suddenly remembered too late ... Not react in time. Who knows ...
- And how do you all explain this? Troops at Serpukhov? Sealing off the tunnel?

- **Bandits ... Rebels. It happens everywhere. Nothing special.**
- **And now recognized too late ... - Brigadier nodded.**
- **Now it is not resignation - Andrei Andreyevich filled and then emptied the second glass. - This is the highest measure.**
- **Now what?**
- **Waiting - Head down backwards on his desk. - Waiting. All of a sudden?**
- **What are you on their calls do not answer? - Homer butted. - You have a phone grub - from Tula call. All of a sudden? ..**
- **Do not overstrain - extinct voice answered that one. - I have the sound turned off. Only light burns. While burning - are still alive.**
- **Why do not you answer? - The evil old man repeated.**
- **And what I say to them? To have suffered? To quickly recovered? That assistance is close? To put a bullet in his forehead? I had the one conversation! - Get enraged boss.**
- **Shut up immediately - quietly ordered him to Hunter. - And listen. I'll be back with the squad a day later. I have to freely pass on all the posts.Serpuchovskay going to keep closed. We will go to Tula and clean it. If need be, clean and Serpuchovskay. We represent a small war. Central can not advise. You do not have anything to do. I myself ... Restore stability.**

Head, exhausted, limp as a perforated bicycle camera, nodded listlessly.Having filled himself another brandy, sniffed it, and before drinking, asked quietly:

- **You've got hands to the elbows in the blood will be. Not scared?**
- **Blood is easily washed off with cold water, - he said the foreman.**

When they left the room, Andrei Andreyevich, gaining a little more air, loudly summoned to duty. He rushed inside and slammed the door with him. Priotstav of Hunter, an old man bent over a desk, tore off a black tube with a treasured staff, pressed to her ear.

- **Hello! Hello! Listen to you! - He whispered loudly into the microphone screen.**

Silence. Not deaf, as if it was cut off the wire, and loudly, as if on the other side of the tube was removed, but simply had no one to answer to Homer. If there is someone

very long wait until he goes to the phone, but did not wait. If the second handset is now an old man groaned distorted voice in his ear corpse.

Hunter looked unkindly on Homer from the threshold, and he cautiously returning to their seats, obediently followed.

* * *

- Popov Popov Alarm! Quickly get up!

Punching through the eyelids and eyes pouring fire marrow, struck a powerful commander lantern. Strong hand shook his shoulder, then swiped his hand walked up to Artemova unshaven cheek. Barely Prodirayas eyes, rubbing his cheek burned, Artem rolled off the bed onto the floor and stood up, saluting.

- Where to arms? Take the machine is alive for me!

Napped, of course, right in the trousers, and in general all over the outfit. Unwound the rags in which the night was wrapped up his Kalashnikov, Tom, still reeling, stamped after the commander. How he managed to sleep? Hour? Two? My head buzzed, throat dry.

- Begins ... - Over his shoulder, breathed into his face stale commander.

- What starts? - He asked fearfully.

- You'll see now ... Hold here's horn. You'll need.

Tula - a spacious, devoid of columns and seemingly just the tip of an incredibly thick tunnel was almost all immersed in darkness. In several places convulsively rushed faint rays of light in their movements, there was no system, no sense, like lanterns in the hands of very small children or monkeys. Only from there take the monkeys ...

Once awake, frantically checking the machine, Artem suddenly realized what had happened. Not deterred! Or it's too late?

Jumped out of the guard, they were joined by two other fighters - swollen, hoarse asleep. The commander on the road scraped off all the balances of all who could stand on their feet and keep their arms. Even those who had already cleared his throat.

In the heavy, vdyshannom air swept the strange, ominous cry. Do not cry, do not cry, not a command ... Merged from hundreds of breath moan - torn, full of despair and horror. Stone, framed with a mean iron grinding and tinkling, drifting at the same time from two, three, ten seats.

The platform was cluttered with torn and sagging tents upside down residential booths, collected from metal sheets, pieces of the train, sheathing, plywood stalls, someone's abandoned belongings ... Commander, pushing the piles of trash, like an icebreaker - hummocks, step forward, but in its wake, and trotted Artem other two.

Delivered from the darkness standing in the right way of lopped: the light in both cars paid off, open doors, somehow zareshecheny pieces of portable fence, and inside ... Behind dark glasses seethed, boiled terrible human mass. Dozens of hands clutching the bars of flimsy fences, rocked, swayed, rattled. Apart from each of the passages gunmen in masks from time to time jumps to blackish wide-open mouths failures doors to carry the stock, but a beat, much less shoot did not dare. Elsewhere, guard, on the contrary, tried to persuade, placate the raging human sea, squeezed in an iron box.

But to understand whether something more people in cars?

As part of their driven, because of the special sections in the tunnel, they began to disperse, and because they became too much, more than healthy. It has long been, and much more.

Commander swept past the first, second car, and then Artem finally see where they are in a hurry. An abscess had burst into the last door. Out of the car emerged out strange creatures - hardly stand on his feet, mutilated beyond recognition swelling on their faces, with swollen, badly rastolstevshimi hands and feet. Escape no one has yet managed: the door tied up all the free submachine.

Vsporov cordon commander stepped forward.

- I ordered all patients to return immediately to their seats! - He pulled out of the officer's belt holster "Stechkin.

Closest to it contaminated is difficult, in several stages raised pounds swollen head, licked his cracked lips.

- Why do you say to us do that?

- You know what struck an unknown virus. We are looking for medicine ... You only need to wait.

- Are you looking for a medicine - repeated after him sick. - Funny.

- Go back to the car immediately - Commander relish clicked fuse. - I count to ten, and then open fire. One ...

- You just do not want to rob us of hope that somehow we manage. While we do not okoleem ...

- Two.

- We have day did not bring water. Why water bombers ...
- The guards are afraid to approach the grating. Two so infected. Three.
- In the cars are already full of corpses. We are marking time on the human person. You know, like crunches nose? If children, then ...
- They have nowhere to go! We can not burn them. Four.
- And in the next so closely that the dead continue to stand alongside the living. Shoulder to shoulder.
- Five.
- My God, shoot me! I know that drugs do not. I will die quickly. I will not feel that all my insides rubbed on a large emery, and then pour alcohol ...
- Six.
- And on fire. Though in my head worms, which devour the inside of a piece is not just my brain and my personality, just me ... Am, am, brittle, fragile, brittle ...
- Seven!
- Idiot! Let us out of here! Let us die like human beings! Why do you think you have the right to torture us so? You know that I myself might have ...
- Eight. That's all for the sake of security. To others survived. I myself am ready to starve, but you bitches plague, no it does not go away. Get Fit!

Artem threw his machine, caught on the fly from the nearest sick ... God seems to be a woman ... Under the T-shirt, shriveled into a brown scab, bristled swollen breasts. He blinked and turned the barrel on the wobbly old man. The crowd freaks zaroptala, leaned back, first by trying uzhatsya back door, but could not - out of the car with fresh pus pressed forward more and more infected, moaning, crying.

- Sadist ... What are you doing? You're on live people now ... We are not you a zombie!
- Nine! - The voice of the commander sat down and half dead.
- Just released us! - Shouted the patient strained and stretched to the arms like a conductor, causing the whole crowd become agitated, to go forward after a wave of his fingers.
- Fire! ..

* * *

People began to flock to him once, had only Leonid fall at her lips to his instrument. First sounds, yet the test, raw, churning out of the barrel of his flute, was enough to pack began to smile approvingly, clapping encouragingly, and when her voice began to grow stronger, the person who heard transformed. With them went like dirt.

Sasha at this time assumed a special place - next to a musician. Eyes of those around them have now been directed not only at the Leonidas of admiring glances and fall to her. At first she felt uncomfortable - because she did not deserve their attention and their gratitude, but then picked up the tune with its granite floor and suffered with him, distracting from the outside, how can captivate and make forget about everything a good book or told someone the story.

Again played that same tune - his own, without a title, Leonid begin and end her each performance. She was able to smooth out wrinkles, dust off with glassy eyes and kindle the small oil lamps on the other side of them. Although she was already familiar with Sasha, but Leonid discover its secret doors, introducing new chords, and the music took on a different sound ... If she had a long time staring at the sky, and suddenly in the glades of white clouds for a moment, revealed to an endless bright-green distance.

Then stab her. Taken aback, before the term back into the ground, Sasha turned round in alarm. Here it is ... On his head towering above the crowd, a little behind the rest of listeners stood, throwing his chin, Hunter. His eyes - sharp, serrated - was stuck in it, and if he is temporarily weakened his grip, only to jab more and musician. The one on the shaved paid attention, at least, did not file the form that his game is something interferes.

Ironically, Hunter did not go, did and attempts to pick her up or break the performance. And only doterpev until the last chord, he leaned back and disappeared. Immediately throwing Leonid, Sasha wedged into the crowd to keep up with shaven.

He stood nearby, a bench on which sat limp Homer.

- You heard it all - he rasped. - I'm leaving. Will you marry me?
- Where? - The old man smiled faintly the approaching girl. - She knows everything - he explained shaven.

Hunter pointed Sasha again, then nodded, and without saying a word.

- not far from here - he took his head, referring to the old man. - But I'm ... I do not want to be alone.

- Take me with him - decided to Sasha.

Shaven noisy breath, clenched and relaxed his fingers.

- Thanks for the knife - he said finally. - It is great help to me.

The girl pulled away, wounded, but then again, gathered up his courage.

- It's you decide what to do with a knife - she said.

- I had no choice.

- Now you have it - she bit her lower lip, nabychilas.

- And now there. If you know you should understand. If you really ...

- Understand what?

- How important it is to get to the Tula. How important to me ... Hurry ...

Sasha saw how small shake of his fingers, like bottled dark spot on his shoulder, she felt terrible and that man, and even more - it is terrible for him.

- You have to stop - she asked him softly.

- Excluded - he snapped. - No matter who did it. Why can not I?

- Because you'll ruin yourself - she gently touched his hand - he jerked, as from the bite.

- I have to. Here and so everything is decided by cowards. If the delay yet - I will destroy all the Metro.

- What if there was another possibility? If it were my medicine? If you did not have to? ..

- How much can you repeat ... There are no funds from this fever! Really I would become ... Would ...

- What would you choose? - Sasha would not let him.

- Not many to choose from! - Shaven shook her hand. - Get ready! - He barked the old man.

- Why do not you take me with you? - She cried.

- I'm afraid - he uttered this very softly, almost whispered, so that except for Sasha no one has heard.

He recoiled from her, as if from a plague-stricken, turned and walked away, burknuv only the old man at last, that in order to yield ten minutes.

- I am mistaken, or there someone fever? - Sasha sounded behind him.
- What? - She spun and faced with Leonid.
- I heard what you said about the fever - he smiled innocently.
- You have heard - it was now not going to discuss anything with him.
- And I thought, gossip yet confirmed - thoughtfully, as if to himself, the musician said.
- What? - Alex frowned.
- About the quarantine at Serpukhov. About supposedly incurable disease. About the epidemic ... - He looked at her, trying to catch every movement of her lips, her eyebrows.
- How long you been listening? - She blushed.
- Do not do it on purpose. Just an ear for music - he shrugged his shoulders.
- This is my friend - for some reason, she explained, Leonid, nodding after Hunter.
- Smart - he answered vaguely.
- Why do you say "supposedly" incurable?
- Sasha - Homer rose from the bench, keeping a suspicious eye on the musician. - Can you? We need to discuss how to further ...
- Allow more second? - The old man waved a polite smile, jumped aside and beckoned the girl behind him.

Sasha hesitantly stepped toward him, it did not leave feeling that the battle with shaved is not lost, that if she left now, even by the old man, the Hunter will not be enough of spirit to drive it again. That she was still able to help him, let him have it and have no idea how to do it.

- Maybe, I heard about the epidemic which had you? - Whispered to her, Leonid. - Maybe I'm not the first encounter with this disease? Suddenly from her to help some magic pill? - Musician looked into her eyes.
- But he said that means no ... What will all ... - Mumbled Alex.
- Eliminate? - Finished for her, Leonid. - He ... This is your lovely friend? That's really not surprised. Words are not a boy, but a certified doctor.
- Do you mean ...
- I want to say - the musician put his hand on Sasha's shoulder, leaned toward her and gently breathed into her ear - that the disease is treated. There is a remedy.

Chapter 15

The old man coughed at first angrily, then took a big step for them.

- Sasha I need to talk to you!

Leonid, winking girl pulled away from her, with ostentatious humility Sasha passing into the hands of Homer, and walked away. But she could not think of anything else. And while the old man explained something to her, arguing that Hunter is still possible to sell on, something is suggested or even something he pressed her, she looked over his shoulder at the musician. He answered her in the eye, but flying a smile, wandering over his lips, telling her that he sees that he understands: she got into his snare. She nodded to Homer, ready to agree with everything, just to be alone with the musician for another minute, listen to the end. Only to itself to believe that the drug exists.

- I'll be back - and not uterpev, and cut off her old man in the middle of a word slipped out and ran to Leonid.
- In addition? - He met her.
- You must tell me! - She no longer wanted to play with him. - How?
- With this more difficult. I know that the disease is curable. I know people who cope with it. And I can take you to them.
- But you said that you know how to fight it ...

- You misunderstood me - he shrugged his shoulders. - How do I? I just flutist. Itinerant musician.
- Who are these people?
- If you're interested, I'll introduce you to them. True, have to walk a little.
- At what station they?
- It is not very far away. Itself all know. If you want to.
- I do not believe you.
- But you want to believe - he said. - I, too, as long as you do not believe so and I can just tell.
- Why do you want me to go with you? - Sasha blinked.
- Me? .. - He shook his head. - I do not care. That you need. I should not and can not save anyone. In any case, not so.
- You promise that bring me to these people? Promises that they will be able to help? - She hesitated, she said.
- cite - Leonid answered firmly.
- What have you decided? - Once again broke their indefatigable old man.
- I will not go with you - Sasha plucking the strap of his overalls. - He said there is a remedy for fever - she turned to the musician.
- He lied - hesitantly, "Homer said.
- I see you know a virus much better than mine, - respectfully said Leonid. - Studied? Or on their own experience? What do you too think that extermination - the best way to fight the infection?
- Where? .. - Old man was taken aback. - Did you tell him? .. - He looked at Sasha.
- And here is your friend is a graduate - when he saw the approaching Hunter, musician prudently stepped back. - Well, the entire emergency team in the collection, I start to feel superfluous.
- Wait, - has asked the girl.

- He's lying! He just wants to you ... But even if it's true - hotly whispered to her Homer. - You still did not finish. Hunter will return here with reinforcements at the latest the next day. If you stay with us, maybe sumeesh persuade ... And this ...
- I'm not able, - sullenly replied Sasha. - Its now nobody can stop, I feel. He needs to be given a choice. To split it ...
- split? - Homer reared eyebrows.
- I'll be here sooner than a day - departing, she promised.

* * *

Why did he let her go?

Why give up the slack, let Crazy tramp stealing his heroine, his muse, his daughter? After all, the old man intently studying Leonidas, the less he liked him. His big green eyes were able to let go suddenly greedy looks, but by angelic face when the guy thought it no one is watching, slipped vague shadows ...

What is the musician? At best, a connoisseur of fine nakolet her innocence on a pin, and to dry in his memory - bruising, chipped with the pollen of all the charm of youth, which can neither remember nor even a photograph. The girl, deceived, used, otryahnetsya, fly away, but to purify it and forget it will be able soon, especially since the damn buffoon wants to get her a fraud.

Then why is let go?

And out of cowardice. Because Homer did not dare to not only argue with Hunter, but at least ask him those questions that really bothered the old man. Because Sasha, as in love, to forgive and her courage, and recklessness. Show whether the foreman at the same indulgence to the old fool?

Homer went on to herself to call him a brigadier - partly out of habit, but partly also because it calmed him: okay, nothing special, it's the same with the commander of the Northern Watch Sevastopol ... But no. Shoulder to shoulder with Homer are walking is not unsociable old soldier of fortune. The old man began to understand: his companion, reborn in the eyes of ... With him was something terrible, and it was silly to try to deny it, there was no need to persuade yourself ...

Hunter again took it with him - this time to show him the bloody outcome of all the drama? Now he was ready to destroy not only Tula, but yutyaschihsya tunnel sectarians, and along with Serpuchovskay together with all its inhabitants and the soldiers entered the garrison there Hanseatic - upon mere suspicion that some of them could become

infected. The same is probably waiting and Sevastopol, if Hunter decides that the virus has had time to get there.

To kill, he did not need were the reasons he sought the only reason.

Homer finds the strength to just trail behind him, fascinated, like a nightmare, watching and documenting his crimes. Justify themselves by saying that they are committed to rescue, convincing themselves that it is the lesser evil. Ruthless foreman seemed to him the embodiment of Moloch, and Homer has never tried to overcome fate.

But the girl it does not seem to recognize. And if the old man in the depths of his soul had already accepted the fact that Tula and Serpukhov will be turned into Sodom and Gomorrah, Sasha continued to grasp at the slightest hope. Homer has ceased to persuade themselves that may still show up pills, vaccines, serums before Hunter stop the epidemic flame and lead. Sasha was ready to seek a cure to the last second.

Homer was neither a soldier nor a doctor, and most importantly, he was too old to believe in miracles. But the particle of his soul still longed to wonder, dreaming of escape. He pulled away and let this particle - along with Sasha.

Just dumped a girl that would not dare do myself.

And doom discovered calm.

After one day all will be over. And after the old man wishes to defect from the service, find a cell and dopishet his book. Now he knew what it would be.

About how intelligent an animal found the magical shooting star, the heavenly spark, swallowed it and became man. About how stole fire from the gods, a man not cope with him and burned down the world. And how to punish one hundred centuries later, he was taken away from the very spark of the human, but, deprived of her, he did not become a beast again, but turned into something far more terrible, which is not even a name.

* * *

Zvenevoy pour a handful of bullets in his pocket and sealed a deal with the musician, a firm handshake.

- For a nominal extra charge I can put you on the tram - he said.
- I like romantic walks - Leonid responded.

- Well, look. The two of you to let go of our tunnels can not - tried to reason with him zvenevoj. - All the same, because the protection will go. Documents from your no ... And so would you rr-time - need to express, and there really was alone with her, - he whispered loudly.
- And we must not alone! - Sasha said firmly.
- We assume that this is the honorary escort. As if we were Prince and Princess of Monaco on the promenade - the musician girl weighed bow.
- What is the princess? - Could not stand Alex.
- Monaco. It was once a principality. Right on the Cote d'Azur ...
- Listen, - has torn off his zvenevoj. - If you want to walk, let's get ready. Bugle horn, but the guys in the evening to the base is necessary. Hey, Crutch! - He called to his soldiers. - Hold the two men to Kiev, saying the patrols, saying the deportation. Drop them into radial and back. All right? - He turned to Leonid.
- Yes, - he answered.
- Come again! - Winked zvenevoj.

And yet, how the land Hansa differed from the rest of the Metro! Over the entire span of Paveletskaya before October Sasha did not see a single place where it would be completely dark. Every fifty yards to the wire, creeping along the wall, were planted bulbs. Light any of them just to get, to reach out to its neighbors. Even a spare hose and secret tunnels, going away from the main, were well covered, and they had little frightening.

Would be Sasha's will, she ran to escape forward, if only to save precious minutes, but Leonid convinced her that in no hurry. Where they will move after Kiev, he flatly refused to explain. Leisurely paced with a bored air: perhaps even forbidden for ordinary citizens metro spans Rings musician visited often.

- I am glad that your friend his approach to everything - he said.
- What do you mean? - Alex frowned.
- If it is just as much as you wanted to save the civilian population would have to take it with you. And so - were broken into pairs, and each will do what he wants. He was - to kill you - treat ...
- He does not want to kill anyone! - Sharp and too loud "she said.
- Well, yes, just a job ... - He sighed. - And who am I to judge him?

- And what will you do? - not hiding mockery, she asked Alex. - Play?
- I'm just going by your side - smile Leonid. - What else is necessary for happiness?
- You simply say so. - Sasha shook her head. - You do not know me at all. How can I make you happy?
- There are ways. On a beautiful girl look enough - the mood lifted. And so ...
- You think know about beauty? - She glanced at him.
- It's the only thing I can make out - it is important nodded.
- And what of me with that? - Finally smoothed out wrinkles.
- You all shine!

His voice seemed to be sounded serious, but after a moment musician priotstal a step and slid over her eyes.

- It's a pity that you love so rough clothes, - he added.
- And what is it not? - It is too slow to unstick from the back of his mind tickling.
- Light does not pass. And I'm like a butterfly ... Always flying to the fire. - He deliberately wacky views waved wrists.
- Darkness afraid of? - She smiled faintly, taking the game.
- Solitude! - He put on a sad mask, paws folded on his chest.

And in vain. Tuning the strings, did not calculate the resistance, and the thinnest, most tender, which could just about sing, rattled and broke.

Lightweight Tunnel draft, blown away serious thought and forced the Sasha juggle playful allusions to the handsome musician, once verse. She sobered up and now reproached himself for having succumbed to it. Did she quit for the sake of the Hunter, left the old man?

- As if you know what it is - cut Sasha and turned away.

* * *

Serpukhov, pale gray with fear melted away into the darkness.

The soldiers in the army gas masks cut it from the tunnel on both sides, blocked the transition to the ring, and the station, anticipating trouble, buzzing hive of agitated. Hunter and Homer were the hall with the guard, as a great boss, and every inhabitant of the Serpukhov tried to look into their eyes - not whether they know what is really happening, is not resolved whether it is fate? Homer buried his gaze to the floor - he did not want to remember these individuals.

The foreman did not report to him, which is going to go any further, but the old man and he figured it out. Ahead was the Police. Four subway station, the combined transitions, a real city with thousands of residents. The unspoken Capital Metro, shattered dozens of warring feudal states. Stronghold of science and shelter culture. The shrine, which did not dare to attempt one.

Nobody but old Homer, half-witted plague messenger?

But in recent days he felt better. Nausea receded - the day he ran only twice in the toilet, and a consumptive cough, forced him zastiryvat saturated with the blood of a respirator with cold water, a little weak. Maybe the body itself cope with illness? Maybe he did not have any infection? Huh? Simply, he is too insecure, had always known it for themselves, and still so scared ...

Driving in Serpukhov - a dark, dull - a bad reputation. As far as was known to Homer, until the Polis they did not have to meet a single soul, but here's an intermediate stop between habitable Serpukhov and residential Borovitskaya could impress strangers. On the subway Polyanka hodilo many legends, if they believe that this station is rarely attempted on the life passing by, but it could damage their minds.

The old man happened to be here a few times, but with nothing special it does not come across. Legends give explanations and that Homer knew them all. And now he's struggling hoped that the station and this time will remain the same, dead and abandoned, as the best of times.

Hundred meters to Polyanka he started to become uncomfortable. From the first distant glow of electric lights on a white marble walls, from the first echo of a broken sounds, shot through here from the station, the old man became suspicious. He could hear human voices ... But this could not possibly be. Worse - Hunter, hundreds of steps not know how to felt the presence of any living creature, now remained completely deaf and indifferent.

At worried glances to the old man did not answer, fully immersed in himself, though he had not seen what was revealed now, Homer ... The station was colonized! When managed? Homer before often wondered why, despite the overcrowding, the inhabitants of the Policy has never tried to learn and add an empty

Polyanka. To prevent it could only superstition. But it seems they alone have been reason enough to leave the country stop at rest.

As long as someone is not able to overcome the fear of it and deploy this tent city, to lighting ... God, how is wasteful then treated with electricity! Even before that, how to get out of the tunnel to the platform, the old man had to cover his eyes with his hand, not to be blinded: the ceiling station shone brightest mercury lamps.

It is amazing ... Police even did not look so clean and festive. On the walls there was not a trace of dust or soot, and the marble slabs were flashing, and the ceiling seemed to be bleached only yesterday. Through the openings of arches Homer failed uglyadet a single tent - either they have not yet managed to place here, whether the station and did not intend to settle in. What then? Make a museum? With the cranks that govern policy, will become ...

The platform gradually filled with people. They did not have any work to the arms hung thug in titanium helmet, either before limping beside him grubby old man. Looking closer to him, Homer realized that is no longer able to make a single step: he lost the leg ...

Each of the approaches to the edge of the platform was empty, as if in Polianka was filmed on the two thousandth. Coats and raincoats with needles, colorful hollow jacket, sky-blue jeans ... Where are the jackets, where the tattered pigskin, where inescapable brown underground, the tomb of all colors? Where such a wealth?

A person ... These were the faces of people who have not had in a moment of losing his entire family. The faces of those who have seen the sun today, and who, after all, just started the day with hot showers. The old man was willing to vouch for it's head. And more ... Many of them seemed vaguely familiar to Homer.

Amazing people became more and more, they huddled at the edge of the platform, but the path is not going down. Soon the entire station of the tunnel before the tunnel was filled with well-dressed crowd. Homer is still no one was looking. Anywhere - on the wall, in newspapers, stealthily - on each other, oil, or curiosity, disgust, or sympathy, but not at the old man as if he were a ghost.

Why are they here? Why wait?

Homer finally came to his senses. Where is the team leader? How does he explain the inexplicable? Why did not say anything until now?

Hunter stopped a bit further. Its not at all interested in the station shall be filled by people coming down from the quarter-century old photos. He stared hard into the space in front of him, as if leaning into a sort of barrier, though a few steps in front of him at eye level, hanging in the air, something ... The old man crept closer to the foreman, anxiously looked under his visor ...

And then Hunter struck.

Clenched fist ripped the air, went from left to right on a strange trajectory, as if the foreman wanted to slash someone invisible invisible knife. Homer, whom he almost touched, jumped to the side, and Hunter continued to fight. He beat and Slash, attacked and retreated, trying to keep someone a steel clamp, and a second later he rattled in a choking, released and again attacked.

The old man did not leave the impression that he had seen something like that, and quite recently. Where and when? And what the hell was going on with the foreman? Homer tried to call him, but to dokrichatsya possessed was impossible.

And people on the platform did not pay any attention Hunter, he did not exist for them in the same way as they do not exist for him. They obviously care about others: they are all anxious glances at the wristwatch displeasure lighten up, chatting with neighbors and reconciled with the red numbers on digital clocks mouth of the tunnel.

Homer's eyes narrowed, looking at them after the others ... It was a counter, measured the time since passage of the preceding train. But his display seemed unnaturally elongated, ten-digit: eight digits before flashing colon and two more - Stopwatch - after. Zmeilis red dots, counting the seconds running away, changed the last digit in an incredibly long, including: twelve-something million.

There was a scream ... Sob.

The old man behind the mysterious hours. Hunter, motionless, lying face down on the rails. Homer rushed toward him, barely turned the heavy lifeless body face upwards. None, the brigadier was breathing, albeit fragmentary, and the wounds it was not clear, though his eyes and rolled up like a dead man. The right hand does not unclenching, and only then did the old man discovered that Hunter still has not been disarmed in this strange fight. From the fist peering handle black blade.

Homer whip brigade on the cheeks, and one wall as hangover, blinked, sat up on his elbows, ransacked the old man's cloudy eyes. Then in one fell swoop on his feet and dusted.

Moroka cleared: no trace of vanished people in cloaks and bright jackets and went out the blinding light, and the dust has settled over decades on the walls. The station was a black, empty and lifeless - such as Homer remembered it from his previous campaigns.

* * *

Prior to the October no one said a word, but they could hear the whispering and panting, stumbling on sleepers canvas that was set to guard him. Sasha was furious not even a musician - to itself. He ... And what is it? Behaved as he had to. In the end, she felt uncomfortable even before the Leonids - not too much if she was cutting him?

And on October the wind changed.

Quite naturally. Just saw this station, Sasha forgot about everything. In recent days, she had to visit the places in whose existence she had not even believed it. But the October outshone its finery any of them. Granite floors were carpeted - opleshivevshimi pretty, but it is still storing the original patterns. Lamps, molded flames, polished to a shine, flooded room flat milky glow. For apart here and there, the tables were people with shiny persons engaged in that lazily tossed together words and papers.

- It's so ... rich - confusedly said Sasha, almost turning his neck.
- I ring the station resemble chunks of pork shish kebab, skewered on a skewer, - whispered to her, Leonid. - And oozing with fat ... By the way! Maybe a snack?
- There is no time - she shook her head, hoping that he will not hear the greeting rumbling in her stomach.
- Come on - the musician pulled her arm. - There is one place ... All that you ate earlier, not pales in comparison ... Guys, eat do not mind? - He hooked up the guards. - Do not worry, a couple of hours will be in place. Of pork barbecue, I do not accidentally spoke. Here is a do ...

He almost took the story in verse about the meat, and Sasha wavered surrendered. If the goal to just two hours, a half-hour lunch will not change anything ... In stock almost a whole day, but who knows when will bite next time?

And the barbeque was worthy of poetry. But it was not the end: Leonid asked for a bottle of mash. Sasha could not resist, swallowed a glass of curiosity, the other musicians sawing with the guards. Then she recovered herself, jumped to his feet and razmyakshie strictly ordered to stand Leonid.

More strictly, that while having lunch, hot razmorennaya Braga, she hesitated, and almost too late to shake with his knees, his fingers. Light, sensitive. Sassy. He immediately raised his hands - "Surrender!" - But the skin remember his touch. Why drove so fast, she asked herself Sasha, confused, and herself punished the pinch.

It was necessary now to wipe that sour-sweet dinner scene from memory, to swing it with something meaningless priporoshit its top words.

- There are strange people - threw it, Leonid.
- What? - He fell swoop drained the glass and finally climbed out from behind his desk.

- in their eyes something was missing ...
- Famine - defined musician.
- No, not just ... They seemed to have nothing else.
- It's because they have nothing else, - Leonid chuckled. - They are well fed. Hansa-queen feeds. What eyes? Normal osolovelye eyes ...
- When my father lived - Sasha became serious - we so much in three days would be enough, as we now nedoeli ... Maybe it was necessary to pick up, give it to someone else?
- Nothing to feed the dogs, - said the musician. - Beggars here do not hold.
- But it could give to the next station! Where hunger ...
- Hansa charity is not engaged - butted into the conversation one of the guards, he was named a crutch. - Let them whirl. It is not enough bums on itself to pull!
- Do you own a radical with the ring? - Asked Leonid.
- Always lived here! Since I can remember!
- Then you would not believe, but those who are not born on the ring, too, sometimes have to eat, - he said the musician.
- Let devour each other! Or, maybe better we will subtract and divide, as they say red? - Pressing forward troops.
- Well, if everything continues in the same spirit ... - Began to Leonid.
- So what? You shut-ka, shpendel because you have uttered here to deportation!
- On the deportation, I uttered even earlier - the musician lifted his finger. - We are doing this and.
- And can you, and deliver much needed. As the red spy! - Zagoryachilsya guard.
- And I love you for drunkenness on duty ...
- Oh ... Yes, you yourself to us ... Yes you ...
- No! Forgive us ... He did not want to say this - Sasha intervened, grabbed the musician in his sleeve, pulled him from the heavy breathing Crutch.

She almost dragged by force to Leonid ways, looked at the station clock and gasped. Over lunch and disputes at the station almost two hours. Hunter, with whom she started to compete in speed, certainly did not stop even for a second ...

The musician behind her drunkenly laughed.

All the way to the Park of Culture, the guard did not stop hissing ominously. Leonid now and then struggled to answer them, and Sasha had to then pull up a musician, a humble persuade him. Hops does not erode out of his head, adding to it and the courage and audacity, she could barely shuffle to remain beyond the reach of his hand waxing.

- I told you not like me? - Resented it. - Not your type, huh? You do not like these, you muscle Give ... Shraaaamy ... What did you come with me?
- Because you promised me! - Leonid she pushed away. - I'm not for that ...
- I do not ta-ka-ya! - He sighed sadly. - The eternal theme. I knew that you were so touchy ...
- How can you be? There are people ... Living ... They all die if we do not have time!
- And what can I do? I can barely move the legs. You know what they are heavy? On here, try ... And people ... Still die. Tomorrow or in ten years. Both I and thou. So what?
- So you lied? You lied! Homer told me ... Warned ... Where are we going?
- No, do not lie! If you want, swear that was not lying? Itself will see! Still going to apologize! And suppose you will then be ashamed, and you tell me: Leonid! I'm so co-west-but ... - He wrinkled his nose.
- Where are we going?
- Come on expensive labor-y-udnoy ... We in the City Izumru-y-udny. Something there tram-Pam-monument ... Dear difficult - conducting forefinger, sang the musician, then dropped from the hands of the case with the flute, he swore and bent down to pick up and nearly fell out of himself.
- You're drunk! Until you reach the Kiev themselves at all? - Called them one of the guards.
- your prayers! - Bowed to him a musician again, not just crashing to the ground.- And Ellie will return ... - He continued the song - and Ellie will return ... With Totoshka ... Woof! Woof! Home ...

* * *

Homer never believed in the legend Polyanka, and she decided to teach him a lesson.

Some call it fate Station and revered as an oracle.

Some believed that the pilgrimage here at a crucial time of life can open up the future, hint and give clues to predict and predetermine the rest of the way.

Some ... But all sensible people know that the station emissions of poisonous gases excavation, inflamed the imagination and causes hallucinations.

To skeptics, the devil!

What could mean his vision? The old man thought he was on the verge of clues, but then lost their mind, confused. And before his eyes rose again, Hunter, slashing the air with black blade. Expensive to Homer gave to learn that appears foreman with whom he fought a duel that ended with his defeat, if not death ...

- What do you think?

Spasm of surprise the old man twisted inside. Never before Hunter did not speak with him without a reason. Barking orders, dissatisfied growl terse answers ...How to wait for a call on the souls of those who have no soul?

- So ... About anything - Homer faltered.

- Think. I hear - exactly said Hunter. - About me. Scared?

- There is no - the old man lied.

- Do not be afraid. Will not touch you. I like you ... recalls.

- Who? - Homer asked cautiously after poluminutnogo silence.

- Something about me. I forgot that in me is there, and you remind me - pulling out of itself and spreading, one after another heavy words, he looked ahead into the blackness.

- So you're for it took me with him? - Homer was both disappointed and puzzled, and he was expecting something ...

- For me, it's important to keep in mind. It is very important - said the brigadier. - And for the others is also important to me ... Otherwise it may be ... As we have already.
- You've got something from memory? - An old man like sneaking walked through a minefield. - Are you that something had happened?
- I still remember very well! - He replied sharply. - Only here myself forget. And I'm afraid just to forget. Will you remind me, okay?
- Well, - Homer nodded, though Hunter it now and not seen.
- Previously, all made sense - it is difficult to reprimand the foreman. - In everything I did. Defended the subway, people. People. Had a clear objective - to eliminate any threat. Destroy. This made sense, he was!
- But now ...
- Now? I do not know that now. I want to once again everything was just as clear. I'm not just so I do not gangster. Not a murderer! It's about people. And Sebastopol ... There I was. There my kennel. Station must be saved, we must help them. What price would not pay. I think if I do ... When to remove the threat ... This is a big deal now. Perhaps, then remember. Should. I have so soon, and then ... It is faster and faster rolling. During the day, I should definitely have time. To do everything - and in Polis, people gather, and back ... And as long as you remind me, okay?

Homer nodded stiffly. He was afraid to just imagine that it would begin to happen when the foreman finally forgets himself. Who will remain in his body, when the former Hunter and fall asleep forever? Is not ... Not whether what he has today lost an imaginary battle?

Glade was left far behind: Hunter struggled to the policy as deflated with the chain, sensing prey wolfhound. Or, as fleeing from pursuers wolf?

At the end of the tunnel seemed to light.

* * *

Somehow came to light at Park Kultury. Leonid tried it yet to make peace with security, touted all in "one fine restaurant, but now the guards were on the alert. Even in

a latrine he managed to take time off with great difficulty. One of the escorts took up their guard, the other, whispering to him, he disappeared.

- Money is left? - In the forehead asked one musician that was on duty at the door.
- A little - he put on the outstretched palm of five rounds.
- Come here. Crutch, you decided to surrender. Thinks you're an agent provocateur red. If he guessed right - here go to your line, well, you should know. If not, then you can wait until after you come counterintelligence, and with them he dobazarivaysya.
- unmasked, huh? - Leonid tried to keep the hiccups. - Okay! Let ... We will be back! Thank you for your service! - He threw up his hands in a strange greeting.- Listen ... Well its this transition! Before the tunnel bringing the best, eh?

Grabbing Sasha, a musician with amazing alacrity, though stumbling, hobbled off the first.

- Good one! - He muttered under his breath. - Here, go to your line ... I do not want to climb? Forty meters of depth. Not seem to know that everything is clogged a long time ...
- Where are we? - Sasha has understood nothing.
- How to ... The red line! You've heard - the provocateur, caught, exposed ... - Leonid muttered.
- Are you red?
- De-PFA in mine! Do not ask me now about anything! I am or think I can, or run. Run we need ... Now our friend will raise the alarm ... Even shoot in detention ... Money because we know very little, we still have a medal ...

They ducked into the tunnel, leaving the guard outside. Clinging to the wall, ran forward, to Kiev. To the station to get all the same will not have time, I realized Sasha. If a musician, right, and the second guard is now himself points out, where the fugitives had gone ...

And suddenly, Leonid turned left into the light side of the tunnel - so confident, though, and really went to his home. Just a few minutes - and show a flag in the distance, grid, piled the bags machine-gun nests, they heard dogs barking. Frontier? Whether they have already warned about the escape? As he was going to get out of here? And whose land begins on the other side?

- I'm from Albert Mikhailovich - musician poked a nose guard who ran up a strange-looking document. - I would at the beach.
- According to the usual fare - looking into the crust, identified one. - Where is the young lady on paper?
- Let's double-, - Leonid emptied out his pockets, vypotrashivaya the last round. - A lady - contraband?
- Let's not "let" - posurovel border guard. - Are you in the market? Here the rule of law!
- What are you! - Makes the frightened musician. - I just decided that once a market economy, it is possible to bargain ... Did not know that there is a difference ...

Five minutes later, and Sasha, and Leonid, disheveled and rumped, with ssazhennoy cheekbone and a bleeding nose, threw in a tiny room with tiled walls.

Steel door clanged.

There was darkness.

Chapter 16

In the pitch darkness of the remaining human senses more acute. Odors become brighter and sharper, the sounds louder and bigger. In the cooler could hear someone scratching at the floor, and unbearably stinking rotten urine.

But a musician because of drinking, do not seem to hear even pain. Short time he had mumbled something under his breath, then stopped and respond uniformly snorted. He was not worried that any minute the camera had to break his pursuers with the Park of Culture. Do not worry what will happen to Sasha, without papers and excuses trying to cross the border Hansa. And of course, it left quite indifferent fate of Tula.

- I hate it - quietly said Sasha.

Him and it was like.

Soon the darkness, which was covered camera, they discovered a hole - a glass peephole in the door. Everything else remained invisible, but this was enough loopholes
Sasha: gently fingering the black around her, she crept to the door and brought down upon it his lungs cams. She echoed, thundered, but as soon as Sasha left her in peace, silence returned. The guards did not want to hear no thunder, no Sasha's screams.

Viscous time flowed forward.

How many of them kept in a prisoner? Leonid did not care. It was he who will not be late, did not put anyone's lives at stake. Maybe he purposely brought her here? Wanted to separate it from the old man, from the Hunter? Tear of the bunch, trap, take her life the only goal? And all this just to ...

Sasha cried, buried in his sleeve: he absorbed and moisture, and sounds.

- Have you ever seen the stars? - A voice was heard, still drunk.

She did not answer.

- I, too, only in photographs - told her musician. - Due to dust and clouds they are now barely visible. And now, here awoke from your tears, and thought he saw a real star.

- This is a sight glass - she swallowed her tears before replying.

- I know. But what is interesting ... - Leonid coughed. - Who, then, before looking at us from heaven, the whole of a thousand eyes? And why turn away?

- No one there has never been - Sasha shook her head.

- But I've always wanted to believe that someone is behind us priglyadyvaet - thoughtfully said the musician.

- Even in this chamber before us no one cares! We're alive sgniem! - Her eyes are swollen again. - You are rigged, right? So we did not have time? - She banged on the door again.

- If you think nobody is there, why knock? - Asked Leonid.

- You do not care if all patients will die! You're not going to save anyone!

- This is from my impression, yes? It's a shame - he sighed. - But you, too, in my opinion, not the sick rveshsya. Afraid that if your lover will leave them cut, he gets infected, and no cure ...

- Not true! - Sasha could hardly stand not to hit him.

- True, true ... - Leonid squeaky mimicked her. - And what is it not?

Sasha did not want anything to him to explain, even to talk to him did not want. But she could not resist.

- I need it. Really needed, without me he will be gone. And you do not. You just will not play with anyone!
- Well, suppose you have requested. Not that much, but do not give up yet ...But you, why should he, the orderly forest? Villains attract? Or do you want to save the missing soul?

Sasha stopped. It hurt then, the ease with which a musician reads her feelings. Maybe they were not anything special? Or is it because she could not hide them? The subtle, intangible, that it did not work and put into words, out of his mouth sounded ordinary, and even vulgar.

- I hate it - finally she articulated.
- It's nothing I can also not specified, - Leonid chuckled.

Sasha sat on the floor. Her tears flowed again - first with anger, then from impotence. So far from it something depended, it was not going to surrender. But now, in a lonely and solitary confinement with a blind companion, she had no chance to be heard. Yelling does not make sense. Knock it made no sense. Was no one to persuade. Nothing made sense.

And then for a moment before it suddenly got the picture: the tall houses, green sky, flying clouds, laughing people. And the hot drop on her cheeks seemed to her the very drops of summer rain, which told her old man. Another second - and the delusion has disappeared, leaving only a light, magical mood.

- I want a miracle - stubbornly, with zakushennoy lip herself "Sasha said.

And then in the hallway loudly snapped rocker and the camera flooded intolerably bright light.

* * *

Tens of meters from the entrance to the sacred capital of the subway, the marble tomb of civilization, with white rays of the mercury lamps around Polis spread blessed aura of tranquility and prosperity. This is not cherished light, because they believed in his magic. The abundance of light reminds people of their former life of those distant times, when man was not nocturnal animals, was not a predator.

And the checkpoint on the border of the Policy was more similar than reinforcing, and the checkpoint at the Soviet Ministry: desk, chair, two officers in a pure form of staff and caps. Verification of documents, inspection of personal belongings. The old man fumbled in his pocket a passport. Visa seems to be abolished, difficulties should arise. Stretching officer green booklet, he glanced at the foreman.

Self-absorbed, he does not seem to hear the question border guard. Yes Was he even a passport, doubted Homer. But if not, what he expected, so hurry here?

- repeat the last time - the officer put his hand on the sleek holster. - To produce documents or immediately leave the territory of the Polis!

Homer was sure: the foreman did not understand what was wanted of him, and spoke only on the motion of the fingers, crawling to the button on the holster. In an instant came out of his strange sleep like a husk blasting wax crust immobility, which he had been fettered, Hunter threw a flash forward open hand and vmyal guard Adam's apple. That, blue, gasping, fell flat on his back his chair, and the second ran off, but he knew - did not have time. In hand Hunter, though the ace from his sleeve tricksters, there was burnished palachesky gun, and ...

- Wait!

Brigadier hesitated for a moment, and ran her warrior enough to climb onto the platform, roll over and hide from the bullets.

- Leave them alone! We need to Tula " You should ... You asked to remind you ... Wait! - The old man gasped, not knowing what to say.
- At Tula ... - Stupidly repeated the Hunter. - Yes. It is better to suffer Tula. You're right.

He sat down heavily on the table, put it next to his heavy gun, hung. Seizing the moment, Homer, raised his hands, ran forward, jumped out of the arches towards the guards.

- Do not shoot! He resigns! Do not shoot! For heaven's sake ...

But it is still tied up, tore off a respirator in a hurry, then just gave an explanation. Brigadier, once again fallen into his strange stupor, did not intervene. He allowed them to disarm themselves and dutifully went to a monkey. Sat on the bench, looked up and found the old man sighed:

- You need to find one person here. His name is Miller. Bring him here. I'll wait ...

He nodded, zasobiralsya nervously, began to squeeze between the pillars at the entrance to the guards, and curious, and then it caught up with hail.

- Homer!

The old man paused, startled: never before Hunter did not address him by name. He returned to the bars of reinforcement bars welded to the unconvincing. Homer took the bars, looked at Hunter, as if in a fever embracing themselves with their huge ruchischami. And the lifeless, dull voice spurred him:

- Not long.

* * *

The door opened, and timidly looked into the soldier - the one that a few hours before selflessly musician lashed across the face. Kick - and he flew into the camera, I almost fell to the floor, straightened up and looked back uncertainly.

In the passage stood a lean military glasses. Epaulets on his jacket were covered with stars, thin brown hair licked back.

- Come on, critter - he hissed.

- I ... I ... - bleated border guard.

- Do not be shy - has encouraged his officers.

- I'm sorry for what he did. And ... you ... you ... I can not.

- plus ten days.

- You can hit me - the soldier said Leonid, not knowing what to do with his eyes.

- A, Albert Mikhailovich! - Squinting, musician smiled officer. - I have been waiting for you.

- Good evening - he also pulled the corner of his lips. - Here, come to restore justice. Revenge will be?

- not vindictive - a musician stood up to stretch the lower back. - I think you're punishing yourself.

- to the fullest extent - nodded, Albert M.. - Month of the guardhouse. And of course I subscribe to the apology that fool.

- Well, you is not out of malice, - Leonid rubbed his bruised cheekbone.

- It's just between us? - The metallic voice of the officer treacherously creaked.
- I am here, you can see, output the contraband - the musician shook his head in Sasha's side. - Make an indulgence?
- Draw - promised Albert M..

Offending border guards threw straight into the camera, sliding it toward the bar, the officer took them to a narrow corridor.

- I'm with you on not going, - said loudly Sasha musician.
- And if I tell you that we really go to the same Emerald City? - Mash, faintly asked her Leonid. - If you say that I am not by chance know more about it your grandfather? I saw it myself, and not just seen? What happens there, and not just happen ...
- You're lying.
- And not without reason that he - a musician continued unruffled, nodding at the steps ahead of the officer - both in front of me fawning: know where I am, knows and fears. And that, in the Emerald City would surely find your medication. And go to his gate there were only about three stations ...
- You lie!
- Do you know what? - Angrily told her, Leonid. - When you ask a miracle, we must be prepared to be believed. And then overlook.
- We must also be able to distinguish the wonders of tricks - Sasha snapped.- And you taught me.
- I knew from the start that we were released, - he answered. - It's just ... I did not want to rush things.
- Just wanted to draw a time!
- But I'm not cheating! Remedy exists!

In the meantime, approached the outpost. The officer, from time to time with the curiosity to look back at them, handed musician to his belongings and returned ammunition, and documents.

- Well, so what, Leonid Nikolayevich, - he saluted - smuggling with a take away, or leave the customs?
- With a - Sasha cringed.

- Well, then advice and love - phlegmatically admonished them, Albert M., seeing past the triple series parapets, by jumping from their seats, machine-gun crew, past the grating and welded rails of urchins. - With imports, I think there are no problems?
- break through - smiled at him, Leonid. - I should not say this to you, but fair officials never happens, and the strict regime, the smaller amount. It is only necessary to know who enters.
- You think that's enough, and the magic word - snorted the officer.
- While not acting at all, - Leonid again touched the cheek. - What is called, I'm not a magician, I'm just learning.
- Since you will be pleased to deal with ... When learn - Albert M. bowed his head, turned and walked back.

The last soldiers opened the gate in front of them done in a thick lattice, which is partitioned off from the top down the tunnel. For she was beginning to empty, well-lit stage, where the walls were singed in places, places vyscherbleny, like many of the shootings, but in the end could see new bands and fortifications stretched from floor to ceiling cloth banners.

When one of their form of Sasha's heart beat faster.

- Whose is the gate? - Abruptly stopping, she asked the musician.
- How to whose? - He stared at her. - Red Line, of course.

* * *

Oh, how long dreamed of Homer again to get here, how long have not been in these wonderful places ...

On intellectual Borovitskaya with its cozy apartment, arranged directly in the arches, and a reading for the monks, Brahmins in the middle of the room - littered with books long plank tables, low-hanging lamps with fabric shades, with its amazingly accurately recreate the spirit of the discussion kitchens crisis and pre-war years ...

At the royal Arbat, vyryazhennoy in white and bronze, almost under the Kremlin Chamber, with its strict rules, with businesslike military, which has continued to lighten up, so if they were not involved in the Apocalypse ...

On an old, old Lenin Library, which is too late to rename, while this was still at least some sense, which was already as old as time, when Nick had just arrived in the metro boy on the Library, with its romantic the bridge go exactly in the middle platform with its hard, but clumsily restored stucco ceilings flowing ...

And Alexander's Garden, always dim, angular, similar to slepnuschego gouty pensioners, who all remembers his Komsomol youth.

Homer was always curious, like a station on his Pygmalion? Can I assume the station self-portraits of those who drew them? Do they have absorbed a particle of those who built them? One thing he knew for sure: the station of its inhabitants left their mark, sharing with them the nature, infecting their own mood, and disease.

And Homer himself with his mindset, with its eternal thought, with his incurable nostalgia, belonged, of course, not harsh Sevastopol, as bright as the past itself, Polis.

Life decided otherwise.

And even now, when he finally got here, he did not leave extra minutes to walk through these hollow halls, enjoy the stucco and cast, to dream ... He had to flee.

Hunter barely managed to rein in and sit in a cage for someone inside, the worst being that he occasionally fed human flesh. And as soon as it razognet bars this inner cage, in a moment there is nothing left and on the flimsy bars outside. We must hurry.

Miller. Nickname? Or perhaps your password? Paunchy captain reluctantly agreed to hold the old man to a man with that name. Spoken aloud, it has had a guard on the inexplicable action: talk about the tribunal over the foreman caught hushed, and handcuffs, which had almost clicked on the wrists of Homer, back in the drawer.

An old man with a guide up the stairs and passed through the crossing, reached the Arbat. There, the doors, behind which started a string of official iron maidens bellied Homer asked to wait while he stamped down the corridor. Less than three minutes as he got back, the old man looked surprised and asked him to go inside.

Narrow corridor led to an unexpectedly large room whose walls were all draped with maps, diagrams, notes and overgrown with coded messages, photographs and drawings. For a wide oak table sat an elderly man with a bony shoulders so wide, as if he was dressed in a burqa. From under his jacket was thrown over work loose only one left hand and, looking closer, Homer knew what it was: the right was taken away almost entirely. Growth had been athletic - his eyes were almost level with the eyes, stood an old man.

- Thank you - the owner of the cabinet dismissed the attendant pot-bellied, and the one with noticeable regret to shut the door on the other side. - Who are you?
- Nikolaev, Nikolai Ivanovich - confused old man.

- Stop the circus. If you come to me, saying that with you, my closest friend, whom I buried a year ago, you must be a reason. Who are you?
- No ... - Homer meant it. - But it's not about me. He's alive, really. You just need to go with me, and soon.
- Right now I think it's a trap, stupid joke or just a bug - Miller lit a cigarette and let the smoke of the old man's face. - If you know his name and came up with this is to me, you should know its history. Need to know what we were looking for him every day for over a year. They lost because of this few people. Must know the devil's sake you how much he means to us. Maybe even the fact that it was my right hand - he smiled wryly.
- No, nothing like that ... He did not tell - the old man vzhals his shoulders. - Please, let's just go on Borovitskaya. Time is short ...
- No, I did not run. And I have a good reason.

Miller put his hand under the table and made it a strange move, and surprisingly moved back, not getting up. Only a few seconds Homer realize that he is sitting in a wheelchair.

- So let's talk quietly. I want to understand the meaning of your appearance.
- Lord, - the old man is desperate to bring anything before this idol. - Just trust me. He is alive. And sitting in the monkey on Borovitskaya. Anyway, I hope he's still there ...
- I'd like you to believe - Miller stopped and inhaled deeply, and the old man heard the crackling, folding and burning, paper. - But there are no miracles.reopen ... Okay. I have my own version of the one who took me to mock. But check them will be specially trained people ... - he reached for the phone.
- Why is he so afraid of black? - To his own surprise Homer said.

Miller carefully laid up, and did not utter a single word in it. Inhaled the entire cigarette before the end, he spat a short stub in the ashtray.

- To hell with you, ride up Borovitskaya - he said.

* * *

- I will not go there! Let me go! It is better to stay here ...

Sasha was not joking, do not flirt. It is hard to say who her father hated more than the Reds. They robbed him of power, they killed him back, and instead simply kill him, they are out of pity or chistoplyuystva condemned him on many years of humiliation and suffering. My father could not forgive the people who betrayed him and rebelled against him, he could not forgive those who inspired and podnachival, those who supplied them with weapons and published them leaflets. The very red color caused him fits of fury. And though the end of his life he said he did not keep anyone harm and does not want revenge, Sasha thought he was just justifying their own powerlessness.

- It's the only way - in confusion Leonid said.
- We went to Kiev! You're not there I led!
- Hansa decades of war with the red line, I could not admit the first comer that we go to the Communists ... had to invent.
- You're not that at all, you can not!
- Gates are for sport, as I said. Sports - the last station of the Red Line to the collapsed bridge subway, there's nothing about it.
- How do we get there? I have no passport - she did not take a musician's wary gaze.
- Trust me - he smiled. - One person is always able to negotiate with others. Glory to corruption!

Do not listen to her objections, he grabbed Sasha by the wrist and pulled behind him. Searchlight second line of defense made a huge blaze kumachovye banners hanging from the ceiling, tunnel Draught worried them, and she seemed: she sees a two gleaming red waterfall. Sign?

Judging by what she heard about the lines, they should have been riddle on the approaches ... But Leonid calmly strode forward, and a confident smile never left his lips. Meters thirty roadblock to his chest rested bold, tangible spotlight. Musician, just put the tool box on the floor and meekly raised his hand. Sasha did the same.

Approached checking - sleepy, surprised. It was unlikely that they all happened to meet at least someone on the other side of the border. At this time the musician had to withdraw in the direction of a senior before he asked Sasha documents. He whispered softly in his ear, barely audible voice rang brass, and he returned enchanted, peaceful. Personally led them through all the posts, and even sat on a hand trolley waited and ordered the soldiers to take to the Frunze.

Those took up arms, and puffed, pushing the trolley with the place. Sasha, frowning, looked at the clothes, the faces of those whom my father taught me to call enemies ... nothing special. Jackets, faded mottled cap pinned with stars, prominent cheekbones, sunken cheeks ... Yes, they shone like sentinel Hansa, but the human in them

was definitely nothing less. And in their eyes flashed very boyish curiosity that those who lived on the ring that was generally unfamiliar. These two have hardly even heard of what happened at the Avtozavodskaya almost ten years ago. Enemies Are they Sasha? Can we did not formally and sincerely hate strangers?

Rider to talk to the soldiers dared not only pokrhythyvali measured, leaning on the levers.

- How do you manage it? - Asked Sasha.
- Hypnosis - Leonid winked at her.
- And what kind of documents do you show them? - She looked suspiciously at the musicians. - How can it be that you miss with them everywhere?
- Various passports for different occasions - he replied evasively.
- Who are you? - That no one else it is not heard, Alex was forced to sit down to Leonid close.
- observer - with his lips he said.

If Sasha is not clamped his mouth, the questions would just gushed out of it, but the soldiers too much trying to catch the meaning of their conversation, even squeak levers trying to be quiet.

I had to wait for the station Frunze - shrunken, faded, pale and rouged red flags. Chipped mosaic on the walls, columns poglodannye time ... Dark Waters spots - feeble lamps hung from wires stretched between the pillars just above the heads of low local residents to prevent splashing or wasted precious ray of light. It was amazingly clean: the platform fro several restless cleaners. At the station was crowded, but that's strange: in what direction or Sasha would look under her eyes all began to move, nervously twitching, and behind him there and then sank and was taken to rustle hushed voices. But when she look back, like a whisper ceased and the people returned to their cases. And nobody wanted to look into her eyes, as if it was something obscene.

- There are rarely strangers? - She looked at Leonid.
- I'ma Stranger Here Myself - musician shrugged.
- Where do you own?
- In the place where the people are not so deadly serious ... - he smiled. - Where are aware that one man can not escape grub. Where do not want to forget yesterday, though the memories and deliver them to the pain.
- Tell me about the Emerald City - Alex asked softly. - Why they ... Why are you hiding?

- governor of the city do not believe the people underground.

Leonid paused to explain to the sentries on duty at the entrance to the tunnel, and then, plunging along with Sasha in the thick darkness, hoisted a light with an iron on lighters wick oil lamp and went.

- Do not believe, because people in the metro gradually lose their human form. And because among them there are still those who started that terrible war, even though they are afraid to admit it even to his friends. Because people in the metro are incorrigible. They can only be afraid of the party who watch over them. If they know about the Emerald City, it will eat and vyblyuyut it as devouring everything what reaches out. Burn paintings of great artists. Burn paper and all that she had on. Be cut off the only society which has reached the justice and harmony. Bloodless collapse of the University building. Will sink a great ark. And nothing else will. Barbarians ...
- Why do you think that we can not change? - Sasha was a shame.
- Not all think so, - Leonid squinted at her. - Some people try to do something.
- Not very much they try - sigh Sasha - once even my old man did not hear about them.
- But some people hear their own - has dropped significantly, he said.
- You're about ... music? - Alex guessed. - You - one of those who are looking to us to change? But how?
- Forcing the beautiful, - smiled musician.

* * *

Chair rolled aside, and the old man walking nearby, barely keeping up with from time to time looking at was set personally to him a tall guard.

- If you really do not know the whole story - told Miller - you are ready to tell her. Will entertain her fellow inmates, if Borovitskaya I see wrong ... Hunter was one of the best fighters of the Order, a real hunter. Feeling he was just a beast, and the cause he devoted himself without reserve. He smelled the year and a half ago, these black ... The Exhibition of Economic Achievements. Surely this did not hear anything?

- At ENEA ... - absently repeated after him the old man. - Well, yes, invulnerable mutants who can read thoughts and were able to become invisible ... I thought they were called the Dark?
- It does not matter - cut off Miller. - He was the first excavated the rumors sounded the alarm, but then we had neither the strength nor the time ... I turned him down. Was busy with other things - he led the stump. - Hunter went there alone. The last time when we are contacted, said that these creatures will depress, inspire fear in all neighborhoods. A fighter Hunter was just incredible, natural-born, one platoon was worth ...
- I know - Homer muttered.
- And never afraid of nothing. Posted to our little boy with a note saying, goes upstairs to deal with black. If lost, it means that the threat of worse than he thought. Disappeared. Died. We have our own alarm system. Everyone must live weekly report. Must! He says nothing more than a year.
- And what about black?
- We carefully flattened the whole area "tornado". The black ever since, too, nothing more is heard - Miller chuckled. - Do not write, do not call back ... Exit at ENEA closed, life there is normal. In this boy just happened to insanity, but as far as I know, waste. Currently lives a normal human life. But Hunter ... on my conscience.

He slipped on the steel ramp to the stairs, scattering the crowd at the bottom of the monks, bookworms, turned around, waited panting old man, and added:

- The latter is better not tell your cell mates.

A minute later the entire procession has finally got to prison. Unlock the door to the monkey Miller did not, he leaned on his adjutant, gritted his teeth and stood up, pressed to his eyes. He had enough and split seconds.

Haggard, as though all the way to the Arbat, he and his injury has come on foot, Miller sank into a chair, slipped on the old man's eye gone out and announced the verdict:

- He is not.

* * *

- I do not think my music is mine, - said Leonid unexpectedly serious. - I do not understand, where does it come in my head. I think that I - just a channel ... just a tool. In the same way as I offer a flute to his lips, when I want to play, someone else brings me to my lips - and the melody is born ...
- Inspiration - Sasha whispered.
- Call it so, - he threw up his hands. - Whatever it was, it's not mine, it comes from outside. And I have no right to keep it to myself. ... It travels over the people. I'm starting to play and see how I was going around all these rich and poor, scab-covered and glowing from fat, and angry, and miserable, and great. Everything. And something my music with them, from which they are configured on a single tone. I like a tuning fork ... I can bring them into harmony, for a while. And they will ring so pure ... There will be singing. How do you explain this?
- Are you a good explanation - thoughtfully said Sasha. - I am so very felt.
- I must try them, it is sown, - Leonid added. - In someone dies, someone in the sprout. I did not save. I have no authority.
- But why should the rest of city residents do not want to help us? Why, even you are afraid to admit that you do it?

He was silent and remained silent until then, while the tunnel is not buried in the station sports, such as pined, pale, strained, solemn and sad at the same time, but still low, close, as the bandages on his head, heavy. It smelled smoke and then, poverty and pride. By Sasha Leonid was immediately the charge of fat, which is hanging around in exactly ten yards from them, wherever they went. The girl wanted to immediately move on, but the musician besieged it.

- It is impossible. Will have to wait - he find room for oneself on a stone bench guest, flicked locks on the case.
- Why?
- The gate can be opened only at fixed hours, - Leonid looked away.
- When? - Sasha found a dial, or if it was true, had already left measured at less than half her time.
- I'll tell you.
- You're pulling back! - She frowned, bounced off him. - Do you promise to help, then try to hold me!
- Yes - he summoned the courage and caught her eye. - I want you to hold.

- **Why? What for? ..**
- **I do not play with you. Believe me, I would find someone to play with, and few would refuse. I think I fell in love. Wow, sounds like sloppy ...**
- **Do you think ... You do not even think! You say that, that's all.**
- **Is there a way to distinguish the love of the game - seriously he said.**
- **When the cheat to get a man - this is love?**
- **True love breaks your whole life, she spit on the circumstances. A game can they enter ...**
- **I do this easier - Sasha looked at him askance. - I have not had any life. Take me to the gate.**

Leonid stared hard at her, leaned against a column, separated himself from her arms folded. Several times gaining air, as if intending to give her a rebuke, but he took his, so nothing saying. Then wilted, darkened and admitted:

- **I can not go with you. I will not be allowed back.**
- **What does this mean? - Incredulously asked Sasha.**
- **I can not go on the ark. I was expelled.**
- **expelled? For what?**
- **For business - he turned away and now he was very quiet, and even standing a step away from him, Sasha disassembled everything. - Me ... insulted by one person. The superintendent of the library. Humiliated in front of witnesses. That same night I got drunk and burned his library. Two died from suffocation. The superintendent had hanged himself. Sorry, we do not have penalty ... I earned it. I just drove. Life. No turning back.**
- **What if you kept me here? - Alex clenched his fists. - Why do burned yet and my time?**
- **You can try to reach them, - Leonid muttered. - In the side tunnel, twenty meters from the gate, there is a label with white paint. Similarly, under it, at ground level - the rubber boot, under which the bell. Need to press three times short, three long, three short, is a prearranged signal for returning the observers ...**

He really stayed on the station - only helped Sasha to get out all three checkpoint and walked back. In parting, tried to foist her old machine, which had already managed to get somewhere, but Sasha did not take. Three short, three long, three short ... that's all that she can now come in handy. And the lantern.

Tunnels of Sports began the dark, dull. The station is the last inhabited in the entire line, and each checkpoint, through which it conducted a musician, more like a small fortress. But Sasha was not scary at all. She thought only of that one hour or one and a half will be on the verge of the Emerald City.

And if the City does not exist, fear and did not need it.

Lateral tunnel was exactly where the promised Leonid. Fenced off crippled lattice, in which Sasha easily found a fairly wide gap, a few hundred paces, he did end up a steel wall germovorot - eternal, unshakable.

Sasha diligently counted out from it its forty steps ahead of him and fished out of the darkness a white label on the wet, like a sweaty, wall. The casing is also found immediately. Turned down the rubber and felt a call, checking the clock, which gave her a musician. Succeeded! Succeeded! Barely waited several long minutes, she closed her eyes ...

Three short blasts.

Three long.

Three short blasts.