



Venid Mishin

ON THE STONE ROAD



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Аннотация

One inexplicable event that happened to Eric Lanter, right on the doorstep of his home, entailed the series of mysterious phenomena, which forced him to run away from home in the search for the answers.

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Chapter 1

Without hurrying, but looking at watches – Eric Lanter was coming back home, slowly walking along an empty street under the dim light of lanterns. In the town he was known as a guy with unnaturally pale gray color of hair.

Rising up the hill, Eric felt coming chill of autumn, which was blown by wind. Looking around, Eric observed the sad trees: the leaves were trembling, its fear was disseminating over the hill. Probably, it felt the death, which was coming. Diluting rustling sounds by steps, Eric thought about the last weekend of outgoing summer and about the school routine, that happens after the summer.

It was going to be the last year in school. Eric couldn't believe that he never had to come back there, that this stage of life is going to come to the end. He thought that that this stage of life is going to long eternally and the moment, when he reach the age of 16 is never to come.

Everything would be fine, but it left almost a year before this memorable moment. During this time it was necessary to get prepared for the exams, for graduation, and certainly, to make a choice with the college. Eric had problem with the choice, even the problem was serious. He didn't have any particular aim in life, he also didn't know, what he is going to do in future and he had no idea, which sphere he wanted to devote his life. He

didn't want to regret in future about his choice and experience the desire to turn the time back. At the moment he had an only option – to study in college, that chooses his best friend Konstantin Balington. Most likely, it's was going to be an economical or juridical college.

Konstantin's parents had owned a sawmill. In the childhood Eric and his best friend spent there almost all their free time. In unused space they were playing hide-and-seek, catch up, and sometimes they observed the magical process of conversion of huge logs into flat boards. When the guys grew up they visited the sawmill not for playing, but for working in order to earn some money for their daily needs. At least, one of them. Usually Konstantin was a company to his friend. Basically they did auxiliary work, and sometimes they helped Mrs. Balington with parsing documents in accounting.

Sometimes Eric thought that his friend is not excited about the future inheritance. It were not the best time for the sawmill because of bust of their town.

Silent Valley was an old town with forgotten history, which was slowly dissolving in nature. Some local entrepreneurs, who owned the chocolate manufacture or the ceramic plant after numerous crises stopped their activity. As the result, the work in mines has become the only occupation, which gave people a good income. The young people, who lived in the Silent Valley were intended to move to the big city because of the daily routine and the lack of opportunities. Those people, who had managed

to do that, never come back to the Silent Valley any more.

Nevertheless, there lived some people, who didn't want to move anywhere from this sinking into dormancy town. Eric didn't like bustling metropolis, he also didn't like places, where there are lots of people around. Lots of people everywhere. He was convinced, that it's impossible to stay alone with himself, even in his head, when there are always millions of people around you.

Opposite to Eric, Konstantin dreamed about leaving this panting from boredom province. Once Konstantin confessed to Eric, that he doesn't want to take the reins in his hands. He didn't want to run a sawmill in future. In reply Eric suggested with a smirk to replace Konstantin in this post, if he doesn't mind of course.

Sometimes Eric got angry to his friend, course he had so much, but he didn't appreciate it. Wonderful parents, who work all the time, trying to give their son all the best. In the childhood Konstantin had the best toys, the best clothes, and their house considered to be the most beautiful in the Silent Valley. The situation hadn't changed nowadays, but toys were changed by modern gadgets and by cool black and red motorbike. Eric, at the opposite, was brought up by his caring mother, whose troubles he all the time was trying to reduce and make her difficult life a little bit easier.

There was one more person in Eric's life, but about his existence Eric has dreamed to forget forever. It was his father,

who was a carefree sloven and the “killer” of Eric’s good mood.

Eric’s parents considered to be the representatives of the middle class, maybe even lower. They hardly had money even for moving. Karl Lanter accused of the lack of money all the family, but not himself. It was his principle to put the responsibility on others. Cause it’s so much easier to live. Mr. Lanter got very angry when someone was trying to hinder him, and he had never stunged by remorse.

The street, which was filled with darkness and slowly getting covered by fog, was faintly covered by dim light of lanterns. The view was gloomy, but exiting. Eric was impressed by this scene. The Hill street was shrouded in thick ghostly colors. The street got its name because of the location. Leading to the clouds hill scattered on the outskirts of the town. It was built by small white houses, which were similar to each other. All the house, except the house №17 were empty. Nowadays Lanter was the only family, who lived in this street.

The Hill street was shrouded by wild charm and filled with wonderful smell, which was disseminated by weak blowing of wind. Fragrant flowers and scented bushes emitted a pleasant smell and all the houses in this street were drown in this magic smell. Eric scared, that once someone will get to know about this wonderful place.

Walking past these empty windows, without hurrying, Eric came to his home. By the way, their house didn’t suit the general atmosphere. All the yard seemed to be a little island,

surrounded by high green trees. There were many garden flowers around manicured lawns. These flowers seemed to be weak and vulnerable to wild nature, which surrounded its yard.

Before stepping on the concrete path, green-eyed boy observed his dwelling and habitually thought "I love this place so much, but at the same time I hate it!"

Eric loved his dwelling, but at the same time he hated his house because he had to share it with his evil and useless father. He scared, that one day he will become familiar to his father.

Softly moaned, Eric moved to the house. Rising the steps on the porch, he looked back through the shoulder: thin subtle sound caught his attention. He turned sideways to the door and saw a ball, which was flying directly to him. In a second he was rammed the bright sphere: the hit was so strong, that Eric felt down and he flied through the wooden platform, then he hit his temple on the front door and went through it on the wooden floor of a small porch.

There was a flash inside and outside. Burning multi-colored contraption soaked in a teenager's body, like a drop of water in a dry land.

Pain. It spread from a single point on the entire body. It has spread and ruthlessly burned everything on its way. Eric opened his moth: he didn't have a force even for shouting. Poor guy spurted gained air and fought the neck to the floor. Then he began to choke.

Never before had he felt such unbearable torments. In this

time he thought, that he will never feel anything any more, that the pain is the last feeling, that he experienced in his life. Each piece of his body simultaneously punctured both inside and outside. The body was shaking, hands and feet overwound and writhed in convulsions. Then everything inside has been phased out and cuddle up to each other, as if rammed into a solid mass.

Finally the hurt stopped. Just as suddenly as it had begun.

Eric was afraid to make any movement, he was frightened and got stuck in one motion, not daring even to blink. He feared that if moves, everything will be repeated again.

When the front door opened, it hurt Erica's knee.

– What's happened? – shouted Mila Lanter, when she saw her petrified son with pale face. She immediately leaned over to help him up.

Eric did not respond to her efforts, he was silent, remaining motionless.

– Eric, dear, what had happened? – Woman was shaking her son, taking him by the shirt her small arms. Only after a few seconds Eric's glazed eyes spotted her in front of him.

When Eric comes out of the stupor, the he has facilitated the work of his mother. He abruptly jumped to his feet and Mrs. Lanter flinched in surprise.

– I fell down. – Eric quickly muttered to himself and walked into the house without further explanation.

The woman followed him. She couldn't understand what had happened, and just forget the fact that she found him hardly alive,

lying on the floor of the porch.

– Eric, wait! – she shouted after him.

Eric didn't wait her, he was thinking about what happened to him. But he was afraid to put forward a hypothesis that could explain the unexplainable.

When he run into his room, Eric immediately locked the door. He knew that his mother was about to rise to the second floor to arrange the questioning that he couldn't bear. He threw his backpack into the corner and immediately fell into bed, and buried his face in the blanket.

There was the expected knock at the door. Mrs. Lanter knocked on the door with his hands, sparing her new manicure, whom she was creating the last twenty minutes after cleaning.

– Open the door immediately! Can you hear me? – She had never been able to give convincing orders. She was very kind and polite woman, but that was not always good to her. – Eric, open the door! – Resumed Mrs. Lanter. – I want to know what happened to you! Can you hear me?!

No reaction has been reported. He continued lying on his stomach on the bed, with his eyes closed, and his mother didn't stop knocking at the door. A few minutes later, concerned about the state of her child, Mrs. Lanter decided to call a doctor. Her intention didn't please Eric; he didn't want her to do that.

Eric panicked even more. He would not, and could not tell anyone what had happened to him: at least because even Eric is not exactly knew what happened to him.

Eric was sure – if he tells anyone about the glowing ball crashed into him, he will be definitely considered to be crazy. Therefore, he firmly resolved to prevent the appearance at home people in white lab coats, so as not to leave it with them, in a white shirt.

Seeing as his mother is going to press the last digit of three-digit phone number, Eric barely had time to pull out the blue tube from her hands. His action came as a surprise for her again, and again she shuddered with fear.

– What are you doing?! I'm OK, I... I just tripped and fell. So because of this stuff we need a rescue service? Before his eyes everything was twitching as noise on an old TV screen.

Eric could hardly stand on his feet, because of dizziness, which was bringing him down.

– I'm your mother. – Loudly, but lovingly, said Mrs. Lanter. – For me, the slightest adversity happens to you, it's an emergency.

Realizing that she is going to hug him, Eric took a step back, and walked into the kitchen. He really wanted to go back to his room, but he couldn't do it. He had to convince his mother that everything is ok with him, in order she didn't worry about anything: and only then he could safely return to his room, don't worrying about her.

– How are you? – Asked Mrs. Lanter, going to the gas stove, intending to reheat the chicken breast.

“I do not know” – thought to himself Eric, anxiously looking around, sitting on a chair. He put his hands under the table,

in order to conceal its trembling from the mother.

– As usual... well. Not bad – as convincing as it possible Eric mumbled.

– Mom, I do not want anything, I do not want to eat. He was now not to meal.

– A little bit. – babbled petite Mrs. Lanter, similar to nice and pleading creation.

– Mom!

The breast remained in the frying pan untouched.

Mila Lanter brewed a cup of tea with raspberries and sat down at the table to his son. She drank tea from a tiny cup, the only survivor cup of the pale pink colored tea set. One day, Mr. Lanter returned home in even worse mood than usual. For his regular dismissal had to pay grandmother's porcelain gift.

– I won't be here tomorrow. I have some problems at my job, and I need to sort them out, so early in the morning, I go to the office, – she said.

Mrs. Lanter did the selection of staff in the agency hiring nannies and governesses.

Now in basket stork child necessarily comes with a nurse if this privilege you can afford.

The agency, where Mila Lanter has worked, was in a nearby town. Her family has not moved there, because of high rent. Poor women have to spend every day for two and a half hours to get to job, and the same to return back home.

– Your father returns tomorrow, after a night shift, – informed

Mrs. Lanter, putting the empty cup on the table.

– It is a pity that I did not have to work tomorrow – Eric muttered, barely holding himself in mind.

With every second his ability to pretend that everything is fine was volatilizing.

Weakness squeezed his eyelids, he could barely keep his eyes partly opened. The head has not stopped spinning, forcing Eric to hold on to the seat of the chair to keep from falling down.

– Well, dear, it's late, I'm going to bed. Today I am very tired, however, as usually.

Mrs. Lanter had chronic fatigue, so she went to bed early.

After his mother's words, Eric felt relief.

Soon it will be possible to leave the line, go back to the room and close the eyes. Climbing the stairs, Eric thought again about what had happened on the porch. The question didn't cease in his head. He didn't know what, and why, could this happen with him? Eric scared like never before. Fear even more weakened him and he almost crept to his room. When he turned out on the other side of the door, he stopped struggle with tearing exhaustion. As soon as Eric stopped seeing the moonlight, which was slightly getting to his room, his thin body sprawled on the multi-colored nylon carpet.

Meanwhile, Mila Lanter finished washing the dishes. Water from the tap is no longer knocked on the metal surface of sink. Wiping her hands with a soft towel, the woman went to her room. Horrified with the sight of the location of the arrow on the dial,

she decided to do without reading before bedtime today.

Mrs. Lanter loved reading, and if she takes up any romance, she undoubtedly reads its each word, even though the story predisposes to yawning.

The standing on a wooden bedside table lamp, went out, exhausted by the hard day, Mrs. Lanter fell asleep. Exactly five hours later, she turned off the alarm clock that stood on the same bedside table as the lamp. Shower, exhausting pulling the worn-out clothes, which over the years has become a size smaller, strong coffee, and now – she was ready to go to job to the office.

Before leaving, Mrs. Lanter wanted to look into the room to his son, but she didn't want to wake him up at such an early time, so she quietly, not without effort, passed by the creaking floor and left the house.

Wandering through the maze of consciousness, Eric was trying to escape from the brightly glowing ball, lying on his multi-colored rug.

Close to noon the web of weakness gradually began to dissolve, and soon it let the guy free. Seeing his room above, Eric almost immediately became blind: mild pain swept over all the bones. He no longer slept, but at the same time he didn't hurry to stay awake. He needed time to recover.

From rough kick hand, Eric suddenly opened his eyes, then closed, and his lips curled in disgust. His father stood in front of him, as always his face was swollen by irritation.

Carl Lanter returned from job later than usual. His team-mate

Oliver's car broke down, so Mr. Lanter had to spend three hours more at the cash register at a gas station.

– Oh, what a joy, you're back ... – Eric whined with a dejected tone, not looking at his father.

Eric was not sure exactly where he works. This was all because of his frequent change of activity. Changing job to job, Carl Lanter couldn't find proper employment for himself. Looking at him, Eric shuddered of the thought that some of the inherited genes will ever come into force.

– It is better for you to shut your mouth, bastard – omitting greeting, growled Mr. Lanter. He was never interested in the life of his only son. He was interested only in food in the refrigerator, and mindless sitcoms on TV.

– Where is your mother? The voice of Mr. Lanter had a special rate for Eric's membranes. His sound was so nasty and irritable that the young man felt tackle stomach contents into the throat. The same was with visual perception, Eric could hardly contemplate hunched creature with bulging belly and flanks; almost always he looked away as he spoke to him.

– Try to guess – through clenched teeth, said to him Eric.

He displayed the audacity and almost suffered from the punishment, but he managed to dodge, recoiling aside. Eric got up from the floor, in front of him stood Karl Lanter and poisonous whispered:

– Do you want I break all the bones? – Mr Lanter threatened his son.

– Oh, I'm trembling. You don't have to strain your imagination, coming up with a threat – they won't work on me! – With a straight face said Eric, carefully hiding the fear of the consequences of his statements.

One of the favorite ways of Charles Lanter to get his own way was blackmail. He regularly practiced it on his wife, demanding desired from her. If he needed money, he had to beg them by means of threatening to sell something of value, which, by the way was a little bit. Basically, Mr. Lanter attempted the electrical equipment: TV, video player, tape recorder, video camera, which he sold, despite the fact that he had received the contribution to delay the sale until the next fit of rage caused by a lack of finance for the next scrap. In addition, Carl Lanter was generous on the physical threat.

– Bald bastard worthy of your mother, the same bald stuff. Probably, you cover her again, you just don't want to tell me where she is, – loathing poured out of his mouth with saliva. By the crush, he had the worst wife in the world, Mr. Lanter vacated the room by his presence.

Eric hated everything associated with his father, everything, even his favorite things: whether the dish, color, or a musical composition on the radio – were associated with him, and he would like not to think about him as much time, as it possible. For a minute after standing in one place, Eric rushed to the cupboard for fresh clothes. Desire to get out of the house as quickly as it possible, made him neglect the morning shower. One of the most

native people was the most hated man for him.

Eric untied torn red sneakers and his eyes began to run around the room in the search of his mobile phone. He forgot where he put it. Eric in a rush climbed every corner of the backpack, and the desk, then he dropped to his knees and went on searching for the phone under the bed.

Instead of finding he noticed some kind of strangeness. Metal bed legs haven't been fixed; instead, they were bent away from the wall. Rising and looking around carefully, Eric began to feel that much in his room was slightly distorted. It wasn't so much caught the eye, but if you look closely, you could notice in furniture or in walls some kind of bulge. He began to feel that the room was shrinking. Eric convinced himself that all this nonsense, but then he immediately thought of crashing into him a glowing ball.

Thinking about the establishment of a notebook, where he could write the events that occurred for unknown reasons – Eric grabbed the black jacket, which was lying on a chair and immediately left his room, and then he left the house. He didn't want to stay there anymore.

“Anywhere but wouldn't hear him!” – that was the eternal principle of a fifteen-year boy. When he went out on the street, he stopped for a moment to check whether there were externally concavities at the walls of his room.

Everything was as it was yesterday.

Going down the hill, Eric walked briskly on dark blue asphalt.

The street was damp and the rain was drizzling. Disgusting and depressing. Maybe that's why his father was so angry?

On this point Eric didn't bother, he was much more concerned about the events of yesterday evening. Of course, he was still puzzled by the incident that happened to him yesterday on the porch.

"Maybe that was hallucination caused by spasm, or a heart attack or stroke? Rubbish!" – Going through the options, one more stupid than the other, Eric decided to turn to the Internet. The phone was hidden in the inner pocket of the jacket. He looked at the mobile phone screen, viewing a bunch of references. Nothing suitable. Not paying attention to anything, he was almost run over by a Pickup truck, which was driven by a young girl. Not finding an answer to his question, Eric decided to forget about it as it was a nightmare. Nothing worked.

Half an hour later, he stood at the entrance of a dilapidated cinema theater, owned by the parents of his friend Noah Holm. In drizzle color, ragged walls of the building looked sad, though, like each of closely pressed to each other construction in a quiet town.

He had nowhere to go; Constantine went to his aunt for the weekend, so Eric decided to look back to place, where once he worked a little bit, and had a good time.

In the Holm's cinema theatre worked exceptionally Holms. The head of the family Elton Holm economized on the absence of the staff. Noah had to persuade his father for a long time,

before he hired Eric to work. The Holms cinema has been a popular place in The Silent Valley due to its small cafes.

Local hard workers and elderly people often looked to in order to alleviate the heavy burden of the harsh reality. After going through the empty foyer past the closed cash desks, Eric slowly dumped the hood and went to the cafe. Hospital lighting and annoying blinking lights made the café alien body in the cinema theatre that radiated the heat of the old days.

The withered tables were empty, only Mrs. Clara Holm was there. Standing at the bar, a woman with a big heart and the size of clothes, wiped clean glasses.

– How is the day? – Eric asked friendly, sitting on a high chair.

– You're the first one who visited us today, – with a sad smile, said Mrs. Holm, adjusting a brown bundle on her head.

– It's not evening yet! – Eric encouraged her.

It was in the evening when the remaining people of the Silent Valley were running together to the cafe.

– Is Noah here? – Eric asked Mrs. Holm, watching as she was going to wipe the dust where it wasn't.

– Noah is going to come later. Maybe I'll bring you anything? – She asked, hardly have said the previous sentence. Looking at the woman Eric could see her bursting desire to occupy herself with something useful.

– Pancakes – on reflection said Eric.

In fact, he even didn't want to eat; he ordered pancakes only out of politeness to Mrs. Holm. Also, out of politeness, he

became to push it into his mouth.

The meal was delicious, as always, but he didn't want to eat at all.

In anticipation Eric watched through the panoramic window of the cafe as overcast sky gradually fills with frightening blackness. The street was dark, as if the night falls, although till the sunset was almost seven hours.

Ahead of heavy rain for a few seconds, Eric Noah came in empty restaurant. He was wound up and upset by something. Eric immediately guessed that the reason was Alice. In Eric's point of view she was a local beautiful girl, and no more. He didn't understand his peers, playing the game "I love you." Eric is sure that this feeling they simply can't experience, and those cutting the ear sweet words were a manifestation of childhood from which they so vehemently were trying to repudiate.

As it turned out later, Noah broke up with Alice. She left him, for the sake of a guy named William.

– What a foolish name! – Noah muttered resentfully. When he is angry, he becomes even funnier. – Who is now generally calls the child this name?

– Actually, no one! – assented Eric, just to calm down his friend.

– What have I done wrong? – Ruefully asked Holm.

– You did it! – Eric continued.

– Yes! I did everything right!

– Yes!

– She is bad!

– She is!

– Not me.

– Not you!

– Enough to you! – Noah cried out in exasperation at his friend.

– What? I just say what you want to hear – Eric stopped to act up, and began to behave yourself more seriously.

– I want to hear what you really mean to tell me – more calmly, said Noah.

– Come on. I have already said, but you didn't listen to me.

His friend didn't say anything. He lowered his head and ran his fingers through his hair, the same brown-colored, like his mother had.

– Unpleasant? – Eric asked, blaming his insensitivity, looking at each other.

– Not half...

Rain, with accompaniment of deafening clap of thunder, was so much beating on the windows, which began to seem as if they are about to be torn apart. Flown at Silent Valley wet night every moment was getting madder and more frightening.

– I'll be back – Noah rose from his chair and walked to the fridge for a soda. – Would you like anything?

The phone call didn't give Eric to answer.

– What happened? – Noah asked curiously, noticing the change in the face of his friend.

– It’s my father.

Holm immediately understood everything. He knew his friend was “lucky” with his father.

Eric was upset and he didn’t want to answer the call, but he knew that he must do that. Carl Lanter got furious when he was ignored by cellular. Most likely, he couldn’t phone Mrs. Lanter: it was not surprising: her old cell phone repeatedly hinted at the need for recycling. Perhaps Mr. Lanter has intended call her to inquire – whether it really is in the office, rather than in an institution encouraging adultery, in the company of a man generously treated her with cocktails. If Mrs. Lanter doesn’t answer the call – she certainly fondle in the alley with a scoundrel. From accusation to accusation the financial position and social status of a non-existent lover always varies. If the wife doesn’t answer the call, he should call her son in order to be convinced of her infidelity – it was turn-based strategy of “big mind” of Charles Lanter.

– I Listen, – said Eric, reluctantly holding the phone to the ear.

– Where are you, why so long ... – immediately sounded annoyed howl on the other side of the line. Eric immediately left the phone away from his ear, and rolled his eyes upward. His friend Noah gave no sign that he heard the cries of Mr. Lanter.

– Why doesn’t your mother pick up the phone?! – Still angry, he continued to shout in a rude way.

As he had expected – his mother couldn’t answer the bell for some reason, and his father suddenly decided to ask him: –

“Why?”.

– You seriously think I know it? – Eric said, almost screaming.

After the heinous insults, the beeps cracked. Angry parent hung up, didn't telling a word any more.

Eric was so ashamed that such a disgusting person directly participated in his birth.

– I hate him – he admitted in a drooping voice.

Noah was silent; perhaps he didn't know what to say and how to comfort him.

The sounds of bendable metal rang in the empty hall of a cafe. It became very hot around; Eric's hands began to shake.

– Eric! – called him Noah in discouragement.

The guy didn't take his eyes from the melting phone in the hand of his friend.

Glass screen pieces spilled from a solid body, which began to look like crumpled clay. Because of the panic the mobile device fell out of the hands of the owner. Another terrible abnormality messed frustrated teen from a place, and ran away in the storm.

Holm didn't understand anything; he remained standing under the blinking fluorescent lights. Coming to himself, he couldn't find his friend. Eric was far away.

The streets of the Silent Valley were deserted, its residents hid in their little houses, frightened of the lightning storm. Running through the sinking town, through the thin walls of water, Eric was trying to understand what was happening to him. His body

was overpowered by anger and fear. Thoughts become darker as the clouds, filling an entire sky.

His mood has deteriorated immediately. His hands were clenching and twitching with anger. Eric wanted to run away from the bad things that happened in his life. He could no longer stand it.

Throughout his life, he watched as his father accuses his mother of betrayals, which, by the way, had never happened. As he spits at the sight of the bastard with gray hair, which he considers the conclusive evidence of adultery.

Eric dreamed that it was true, but, to his regret, it wasn't. Carl Lanter really was his real, the vital father: for this fact Eric hated him even more.

In front him Eric saw flickering golden light. The lamppost, which was standing by the ruins of the arched gate in the town park, was similar to a lighthouse, which lures the travelers. The wet trees, which had arisen before his eyes, put Eric in impenetrable darkness with its rotting branches. The same blackness came out of the corridor in his old apartment. In addition to the suffocating darkness of the corridor, Eric could hear terrible cries.

The little boy was hiding his head under the pillow so as not to hear the pleas of his poor mother, who was desperately defending her face.

The sparks flew away behind Eric. An iron lamppost was bent like a dying flower stalk. The lamp struck the masonry of bricks

and then shattered.

The nasty memories ruthlessly pushed through Eric's head. There were so many, that soon there was not enough space for them.

Without pausing, he continued to walk along the tall trees, the winding path, past the benches, which were absorbed by vegetation. Suddenly Eric heard the crash; he looked up and saw, that one of the largest branches, standing next to a tree, was about to crash down on him. Acting as quickly as possible – Eric jumped to the side. He didn't have time to catch his breath, as gloomy trees of the deserted park attack him again. Broken twigs rained down on his head with bendable to the ground branches.

In a panic, Eric ran forward, trying to escape from a wooden hail. He ran between huge bushes, which wound the elm around; ran a large maple tree with sharp leaves, and some aspen, and then Eric slipped through the arch of interlacing oaks. The giant branch of one of the oaks almost crushed him.

Eric Run out to a small glade, and then he began to stagnate in a circle, in the same place, looking as the memories were breaking his patience, and splashed out the pain destroys everything around him.

With the rending crash branches continued to bend and fall to the ground.

Eric's exposure has exhausted. He screamed and fell to the ground, clutching his head in his hands. "I'm getting crazy..!" – Screamed the hysterical voice deeply inside of him, drowning

out the sounds of a raging downpour.

Chapter 2

When Eric plunged in silence, he heard his heartbeat. Then, when he slowly removed his hands from the opened eyes, he saw a gray wasteland under the dead sky. Around the ground protruded stripped tree trunks. They rose completely naked; lost offspring scattered at their roots. Everything was colored with empty graveyard shades.

It looked as if over a beautiful park mocked hurricane, which spared nothing but boy, who was shaking on his lap and smeared with mud. The storm was over, the sky was no longer crying, and the wind was no longer howling. The inky darkness left the Silent Valley, leaving behind a lifeless leaden sky.

Eric slowly stood from the wet grass and went into the jungle of the wet debris. Without looking anywhere, and not to thinking about anything, Eric moved out of the town city park, wading through littered broken branches with difficulty. Eric, every now and then fell, slipping on the eroded ground, which was covered with a layer of wood chips.

He went round the large grid, which enclosed the passage; then Eric felt a stone path beneath his feet. He almost got out the park, where gathered almost all the inhabitants of a small town at the exit.

As soon as Eric was noticed, the two men ran up to him.

– How are you feeling yourself? – asked him a bearded man,

who ran up to the boy, who was marching indifferently.

– Are you okay? – Immediately asked him the other man.

Erik nodded absently in response.

– Do you need a help? – asked the first man again.

Eric was silent again; he just shook his head and walked away.

All residents of the Silent Valley couldn't take their prying eyes from the young men with gray hair, who was passing by them. Eric accelerated the pace. He began to feel himself worse among the people. It often happens with him. When he is in the spotlight, his brain begins to lose control. Eric wasn't a closed guy, but there were not many people, whom he allowed to come beyond the wall, which he constructed around himself.

Astonished citizens left their houses in order to see the unusual sight. Looking at the ruined green wealth of the town, each expressed his assumption, how this could happen.

“It's so strange, the wind wasn't so strong,” – said Wilma Nilsson his elderly neighbor, Mrs. Persson. In respond she said: “Yes, it's just impossible!” – the old lady was completely bewildered, she began to correct her color shabby wig.

“It was a tornado, I saw it!” – a little boy told to his buddies. “You're lying!” – They shouted at him. “Tornadoes would have ripped trees from the roots!” – Little boy Thomas Valine, lashed out at his friend, who had a good imagination.

The clouds dispersed and the sun has almost disappeared behind the horizon. Now, every day daylight hours will be reduced, depriving people of a couple of extra hours, when they

could enjoy the sun. It looks pretty sad.

Erik looked back, holding his breath. The place that considered to be the place of a free rest, has become a frighteningly repulsive. Crippled trees seemed to be telling him: “It’s your fault!”

Now and forever, this way for him is closed.

Soiled and wet through clothes were hanging from the thin body. It wasn’t visible the red soles on his white sneakers because of the layer of sticky mud on it. Drooping Eric decided to go home, because he had nowhere else to go.

He didn’t want to return to the cage, in which his house has distorted in the presence of Charles Lanter.

Gradually the town streets were filled with people. Some people moved to the side of the park, to find out the cause of accumulation of the crowd around it, and someone was going to the cafe to Holm in order to discuss what they had seen.

Eric regretted that it wasn’t dark. Passersby hit him with wide variety of curious glances. He had a terrible sight! His eyes were full of shock, his clothes were stained and torn – this ensemble looked not very charmingly. Some people at the sight of Eric moved to the other side of the road. They weren’t afraid; they did it from a sense of disgust. Eric was very surprised. He always struck by the fact that ordinary people, such as the residents of the Silent Valley could behave yourself with arrogance.

“Interesting, who they took me?” – he thought with a grin.

Despite the condemning spitting, Eric tried to cheer himself.

Though it was impossible, after what had happened. Trying not to pay any attention to staring in his direction people, he kept going, hiding his eyes under the long gray bangs, sticking out from under the wet hood.

Turning into an empty lane in order to avoid possible collisions with Noah, Eric stopped and pressed himself against the brick wall of an abandoned house.

He couldn't suppress the thought, which accused him of madness any more. It squeezed his brain, convincing him in frenzy. He didn't understand what it could be: What has decided to spoil his hard life?

Eric passed by the lively place of the Silent Valley, then he sighed with relief, that was unlikely to last for long time, because soon he will have to breathe differently.

He will have to spend time with person, who causes a desire to stop breathing at all.

The man, whose increased self-esteem wasn't supported by any life's achievements – but he constantly pestered Eric with reproaches. To hear it from the loser wasn't the most pleasant thing for him.

In his youth, Carl Lanter played bass in a band, which was popular in the nightclubs of the town. Not having had time to disperse properly, he shifted gears, making one mistake after another. As a result, his star didn't succeed: the birth occurred at the stage of collapse. Mr. Lanter proved not those, who gets up after the fall, he continues to lie and wait for someone to help

him to overcome his problems.

Eric, by the way, couldn't understand, how his mother could love such a man? And why didn't she left him after all that he had done and did not. Eric thought that, most likely, she is simply afraid of him. She is afraid of his hands, which have repeatedly made her hurt. Or maybe the whole thing was in her excessive kindness and faith in a hopeless?

“How can I convince her?” – The desperate hope seemed inaccessible to Eric.

The wind directed straight forward. A gentle breath of wind enveloped the Eric's body and ruffled his wet hair. It was already dusk, lights in the street began to light up in a random order. After rising to the top of the hill, Eric, as usually, stood some time outside his home. He was thinking about what would happen if he turned back. After a few seconds, with sadness in his eyes and weighed down by his thoughts, Eric continued to go, promising himself that he would soon get rid of despotism.

Not having had time to open the black door, he immediately heard the disgusting, soaked rage scream of the tormentor.

– Who is it? – The resentful voice of Mr. Lanter came out of the living room.

Ignoring the nasty sounds, Eric walked into the corridor. He heard Carl Lanter gets up from the couch – quite rare thing for him- and goes to him. His heart started to beat the countdown, preparing for defense.

– Where is your mother? – Monster came out of the shadows

into the corridor, which was lit by dilapidated lamp. – Why she doesn't respond to my calls?! – His breath was as nasty as his words, which poisonous hatred all around him.

– I have no idea – Eric said dryly, no longer able to tolerate the disgusting creature beside him.

As soon as he tried to escape in his room, Karl Lanter grabbed him by the arm, not allowing to move.

– I didn't finish with you!

– Really? – Eric asked irritably, in a loud voice.

– Well, shut up – growled the monster, clutching Eric's wrist. – Quickly tell me where she is, bastard? – His eyes bloodshot with anger.

– Go to hell! – Angry shouted Eric, tearing his limb from his fat paws.

After changing the direction, he went to the kitchen.

– Give me your phone! – Demanded the tyrant, following directly behind Eric.

In the hope that the ringing contraption will help him get rid of the madman, Eric shook out everything from his pockets in search of a mobile phone. Being killed by the ecstasy, he had forgotten what had happened to his phone.

– I don't have it, – recalling the shrunk piece of metal in his hand, said Eric.

At the moment, he didn't care how this could happen.

– You are lying to me! You don't want I call her! You cover her! You do not want me to know where she is and with whom! –

Becoming drunk on his own malice, Carl Lanter was losing his mind, and began to tell the full absurdity.

Sometimes Eric thought that blames of the oppressor in these absurdities, happened just because he would do that. Inadequacy persuaded Mr. Lanter in his right, that his actions might be inherent in other people around him.

– I really lost it – Eric tried to speak as calmly as possible, trying not to let his feelings that were inside him to spray out.

The boiling from anger bubbles were escaping from the mouth of Mr. Lanter.

– Who are you kidding, bastard?!

The back of the hand of Charles Lanter slid by Eric's temple.

His hands were shaking, his eyes were watered. His heart was torn by hatred for the man that stood in front of him; to the person who spoils everything within his radius. He wasn't even a person, he was a creature – not able to take care of anyone, and certainly, not able to love someone! This consumer eats every day more and more energy: he is dangerous, and he spoils the life!

– It's ok, if only she ... – his threats continued.

Rotten tongue faltered and fell into the pharynx. Eric didn't hear from him anything any more.

The click in the head said, that the glass was full.

The eyelids shut.

Silence.

A sec.

Blurred loops quietly rushed for racing in different directions

furniture: the kitchen tables with a crunch flew into details from merciless blows and its contents flew out and broke into pieces. In the air floated a variety of figurines, which were made of different material. Aluminum forks, spoons, knives, and other utensils —its all bent and compressed in lumps. The dining table was off the floor; it crashed into standing on a shelf picture and then broke in two parts.

All that were in the kitchen were pressing the ceiling, the walls: it seemed, that a little bit more – and the room will fall apart. Whirlwind didn't stop! Gas stove flew up, then fell down and began to cuddle up to the plinth, periodically tapping on the corner. Poison gas hastened to fill the air. Fifteen years old boy didn't pay any attention to it.

Eric stood with his eyes closed, as if nothing had happened. The only thing that he has deigned to respond for all time was a solid dull sound. In the hallway the sound of the merger with the wall of the skull of the person, who offended him, was interrupted by frame advance of occurs, replacing it by hurricane of events. In an instant mute knocks turned into a deafening cacophony.

The last chord was the spark of the crashed incandescent bulb, which surprisingly hold out so long time among this chaos: the whole room became decorated in the bright blue color.

The explosion.

The room sunk into the orange-red storm.

Along with shards of the glass door, Eric was thrown out into

the cool evening, right on the flower bed of purple asters. His body shook, and his mind was somewhere else, but the instincts of self-preservation were trying somehow to revive the fragile flesh and pull as far as possible from the flame.

The house looked like a torn shirt, from which holes the flame was burning. The fire began to grow, taking more and more of small dwelling for yourself.

Scrolling to his head the occurred things, the instincts shouted to Eric, "Run!".

In a panic, he covered his mouth with his hand so as not to choke of the huge flow of oxygen, he did it. Eric was all ragged, he got up and ran off into the woods, into the darkness, into the emptiness of the hopelessness of the further normal life.

The poor guy didn't know what happened and who is to blame? Who killed his father? Who pursues and tries to kill him?

Besides Eric and his father, in the kitchen there was no one: who made furniture to dance in the air and blew up the house?

"What could it be?! Who did it?!" – Eric yelled desperately, still running in deep darkness among the trees, constantly stumbling about almost everything, what was lying on the ground. He made himself not to think about anything and ran forward.

Sticking out from all sides hooked branches scratched his face and hands, which were paving the way in the darkness of the fugitive.

“Whoever it is, he won’t catch me!” – The words didn’t stop from the moment when Eric woke up after the explosion. These words burnt the heart, they blinded eyes, choked, knocked down. He didn’t realize how fast he run, and whether he was running. In the darkness of the forest he couldn’t see anything, and without stopping Eric was looking for a way – but just where? Where could he get away from what he didn’t even know?

Now, Eric didn’t know how to be, how to live. Everything has become a nightmare. A couple of seconds divided his life on “before” and “after”.

Caught on the right foot by protruding from the ground root of black alder, Eric fell and rolled down. Moving by somersaults almost a minute, frightened boy rolled with from a small slope; committing another somersault, he ran by his shoulder on something sharp. There was no pain, fear didn’t give place in his body any other feelings or sensations.

Coming out onto the highway, Eric didn’t have time to navigate before the surge of boat blinding light. Eric was dumbfounded by the unnatural rubber squeak, his thin body collapsed like a rag doll.

Eric shook immobilized in the shine of white light, until someone’s hands rose him from the wet asphalt. In his eyes everything mixed up, the images around Eric were illegible. Even the feelings were not able to perceive anything.

There was a pause, it lasted so slowly that is already began to seem as if it will never end. The storm has stopped – there

was not a single word in his head, just calm, silence and a bird, which was flying in the glass sky. Flickering lights dimmed in the endless expanse of emptiness. After a while it disappeared too.

Light alternated with darkness, reality mixed with fantasy, everything was mixing in Eric's head. He was killed by tragedy, Eric didn't understand: he is sleeping or awake, lying or sitting, or standing, or even hanging. Everything was viscous and hazy. Stupor didn't leave him even for a second. Without moving, he kept looking at one point.

Flames. He liked looking at it, lying on a sofa under a warm blanket. That night was very cold, and the only thing that warmed him was the fire in the fireplace. It warmed his naive child's soul.

It was nearly midnight; everyone had gone to bed, except for the little boy. He didn't want to miss a minute of the fabulous night. Getting out from the bulky blanket, the child decided to hide under the tree that stood in the living room. The tree was magically beautiful; he couldn't take his green eyes from its small flashing lights. Closely pressed to the wall, the boy carefully walked fluffy fir, and crept under her thick prickly needles. He lay down on the soft carpet, waiting for a miracle. The lights of shimmering garlands, which reflected in the Christmas tree lulled the boy. He fell asleep, right under the Christmas tree.

That Christmas was the best in his life! Because in the Christmas night there was no man that enveloped a wonderful holiday in shattering loud moans and abominable complaints.

His father's face, contorted with surprise and fear, his long,

and, at the same time, a short flight, kick, crunch, death. In his head flashed the image of the White House, which was dissolving in the fire. The devour guilt, the horror of what had happened shook Eric. But somewhere deep inside, what he was ashamed and afraid, it was simply unacceptable to admit even to himself, come to enjoy from the liberation of the heavy cargo.

– No! – Angrily shouted Eric, without acknowledging the shameful joy. – No, – much quieter, he repeated, pressing his head to the knees.

He wasn't happy about what happened. On the contrary! It was much worse!

“Where am I?!” – Eric was stunned, when he looked around.

Chapter 3

– It's not necessary to scream so much – reproached stranger. – At first you seemed quiet and peaceful, and suddenly such a stir.

Eric didn't remember what happened, and in the confusion he tried to understand – where he is and how he got into the car to a stranger? He looked around – he was not familiar with district. Wherever he looked – everywhere people moved quickly on the sidewalk. Cobbled paths stretched on both sides, along the wide street, crowded with noisy vehicles. The frantic pace of the big city didn't cease even behind closed windows of the car. The boy bugged out eyes of bewilderment, Eric panicked, pressed against the leather seats, intently examining the stranger.

Behind the wheel of two-seater car sat a broad-shouldered young man, in the view he was twenty-seven. The abundant bristle was sprawling across the face, and also emphasized the lower part of the cheeks. His hair was like coated by dry oil, it was a little worn and pushed to one side, and fell below the eye line. The golden edges of bow tie, strongly stood out against the deep black shirt, they were merging with trousers, jacket, shoes, hair of a stranger, as well as to the vehicle interior.

Without taking his eyes from the young man, Eric strove to understand what was happening here. Assumptions about the abduction disappeared. The victim is usually hidden in a closed

room, but not free carried during the day on a busy city street. However, Eric found it necessary to flee as possible. The internal lock of the car door clicked; Eric turned to the man, he closed his eyes and shook his head.

– Don't hurry, we haven't really got acquainted, – with a smile, the stranger turned away, and watched the truck, blocking the road.

– I am not interested! – Angrily told Eric, not losing hope to open the locked door of the machine.

– My name is Anders – briefly introduced the young man, without mentioning his surname. – Last night, we literally encountered on the road. Can you remember?

Blinding headlights, grinding sound of tires on wet asphalt: memories pulled behind a terrible fire picture – bright flame obscured little house on Holm Street, and along with it his father Eric. It was hard to breathe...

– I heard your town is famous for its peace and tranquility – continued to say dark-haired man in a lazy tone, Eric almost didn't hear him; he was busy with the tightly closed door. – I wanted to find a place to live. As it turned out – rumors are not so true. He turned to Eric, he froze with fear, quickly pulling his hand from the dull panel buttons, thinking – what this person hinted at?

Eric's thoughts jumped from place to place: "It is unlikely that this oddball was walking on Holm Street in the evening, when I ran into an incomprehensible thingy and I don't think he

was in the park, while rainfall lashed out at Silent Valley. And certainly, he wasn't in my house!"

– Your timid, puts me in an awkward position. Be so kind, don't look at me like that – bristly Anders frowned from dissatisfaction. Although his eyes remained indifferent.

His eyes were iridescent and multicolored. As soon as he moved, his eyes immediately sparkled with dark blue color on dark-green color with splashes of golden molding near the pupils. They sparkled like stickers with fairy tale characters that Eric used to collect when he was a child. He had never seen such unusual eyes before. He decided that it were lenses.

– What do you mean? What do you mean, talking about the untruthfulness of rumors? – Said Eric, suppressing the shiver in her voice.

– You don't really know? – The man portrayed a surprise.

– No, – calmly lied Eric.

– Yes of course! I understand – he obviously didn't believe. The strange man pursed his lips into a smile, then took colored eyes, and continued his way.

The driver of the truck was able to budge a barely functioning machine. The road has cleared; the motionless cars finally drove off.

– I want to assure you, that you no longer need to judge yourself with anxiety. You're lucky, and this is enough to calm down.

– That's really!... – Not without sarcasm, Eric responded to this

nonsense.

The words of bursting with enigma man seemed absurd to Eric! He twitched as if he was poured with cold water. He was not lucky, most likely he was unfortunate teenager, who was pursued by something terrible. Apparently, Anders didn't know this, if he thought otherwise.

– Almost all of us had to wade through a swamp of doubt and misunderstanding, alone.

It was not clear that he had in mind this time. Eric didn't touch by his statement, as well as the young man didn't listen to his advice, and continued to stay alert.

– Where are we going? – he asked.

In fact, Eric would like to know when was going to be the nearest stop. He was still determined to leave the stranger.

Pressing the brake, Anders parked near a small cafe. Before getting out of the car, Eric asked him:

– Who are you? – Finally, Eric still wanted to understand the intentions of person, who picked him up off the road. And maybe he will be able to comprehend the meaning of his hints.

– Just someone who wants to help you. You are need in support; you need it right now, as never before. And there are not many people, who are able to provide it – quite seriously explained Anders.

The gratitude didn't follow, because Eric didn't believe in the help of strangers. His own father had never helped him, why the stranger should do it, especially if he doesn't know Eric?

– Maybe the way it is, but why do you need it?

Everything has a reason – Eric believed. For example, his friend Noah Holm persuaded his father to take Eric to job not only out of friendship: Noah just didn't want to spend his days in the company of his parents and brothers, who didn't care about him.

All events had its reason; Eric considered unselfishness the product of fiction, he wanted to find out why Anders helped him.

– I understand what you're trying to handle now...

– I doubt it! – Immediately said Eric, without giving Anders the chance to finish. He was sure that no one is able to understand what he was that moment.

– I just want to return my duty! – The man admitted, with the different facial expression and tone of voice.

Eric didn't understand his words again.

– But you I don't owe anything. I see you for the first time! Maybe you made a mistake? – For the umpteenth time, Eric was in disarray.

– No one said that I owe you! – Explained Anders with a grin.

Despite this, the questions didn't end there: to whom he wants to repay the debt? He could only guess. Though Eric didn't care, he decided that he didn't relate to the quirks of strangers, and that it was time to leave.

– Why are you running? – Suddenly asked Anders, as if he knew the Eric's idea.

– You said that you know what I'm struggling, so you should

know the answer.

– I only know what you have got – the emphasis sounded on the last word – but why are you running I don't know.

– And what have I got? – Eric also highlighted the last word.

– I asked first! – Said the young man.

His question was not so simple as it might seem to be. There was no exact explanation. Eric didn't have anything at all, he didn't really understand, why did it. After a little thought, he tried to give the answer not only to his companion, and also to himself:

– Maybe... maybe I'm guilty in... something, something terrible. I want to make sure – he admitted.

Only that moment, Eric had the courage to put forward the assumption of his own involvement in the incident with his father. A bright ball, the smashed phone, a hurricane in the city park, the explosion in the kitchen: all pieces of the puzzle had common constant. This constant was Eric.

– What are you going to do if your fears confirm?

– I don't know, but I won't come back!

If it turns out that it is really his guilt – the return will be impossible.

– Your turn – reminded the scruffy teenager to the new acquaintance.

– Before I answer, I would like to know what do you think about everything that happened to you in the last days?

Anders continued to amaze by his awareness that he possessed. Perhaps he deliberately unsaid, so Eric excluded the

specifics of his response, leaving only the impression of his experience.

– The only thing that comes to mind is his loss. It is likely, I'm going crazy – sad Eric with a grin, and then he hid his eyes behind gray bangs. Eric didn't want to show his fear.

– My story is similar to yours. Once, I had to run away from home. It was many years ago. I thought I was the threat to my family, so that for the sake of their protection I had to abandon them. It was quite a difficult dilemma.

The surprise flashed on Eric's face, even before the serene voice of Anders had stopped.

– Indeed, very similar to my story! How can I know that you are telling the truth? – Eric demanded evidence.

– I have no idea, just believe! – Anders advised. It was strangely, but it seemed that he didn't care: did Eric believe him or not.

– It is not simple! – Eric opposed.

It was too recklessly to trust a stranger, who even behaves yourself eccentrically and sometimes spooky.

– Yes, make a person believe it's a heavy task, but I will try, – judging by the expression on his face and manner of speech, it's hardly believed, that he was at least a little bit interested in it.

Because of this fact the mystery has loomed – why did he want it?

– You are still didn't tell me.

Anders distracted Eric from thinking.

– What exactly? – Eric didn't understand him again, gradually he began to get used to it.

– You are so much concerned about the situation, that you haven't introduced yourself yet.

Eric always was not very friendly; it was connected with his positive indifference to other people.

– My name is Eric Lanter.

Before getting into a cafe, Eric had warned that he had no money with him, so that he couldn't pay for his order. The demarche of the fifteen-years old boy caused discouragement and a very sincere smile on Ander's face.

All the tables in the cafe room were occupied, so Anderson and Eric located outdoors. A tiny waitress in a white apron brought the menu and immediately ran to the other visitors, who were impatiently waiting for the service.

Today is the boom in the cafe "Blah Bar"! Shaking his head, Eric noticed how much he and his new friend distinguished among other people. Unnatural black Ander's clothes devoured the light, which was falling on it. He hid his eyes behind sunglasses and waited for the next arrival of the waitress to make an order. Intently examining the proposed food, Anders refused to a main dish, and immediately asked for a dessert – pancakes with lingberry jam. Eric didn't determine the choice, so that he asked to bring him the same dish. He put the menu aside and looked at his hands, they were soiled with mud: also they beautifully harmonized with a torn jacket, smeared with wet

ground.

– We are going to the north – declared Anders.

Eric hasn't decided, whether he would go with him yet. On the one hand – he had nowhere to go; he had no shelter at the time of clarification of the mysterious events. On the other hand – it was unwise to go who knows where with a stranger.

– Why is the north? – He asked, sticking a fork in a pancake.

– I live there for many years – said Anders, scouring jam by fork. His impressively smooth movements combined with detachment, which increasingly commanded his appearance. At least, Eric got to know the motive for selected destination.

– Tell me about yourself – briefly bestowing with a smile, asked Anders.

His facial expressions was constantly changing from friendly, but not always plausible, on the detached, sometimes slightly sinister.

– You already know my name – Eric didn't notice how he turned to him to “you.” – I am fifteen years old. This year, I had to leave school and go out of town, where people believe that on my head was poured a jar of gray paint, when I was a child. With the first I'm afraid, that nothing will come, and with the second, as you can see, there were no problems. How all this came up, I don't want to explain – he felt uncomfortable. Anyway, Eric doesn't have a tendency to revelation.

– And you don't need to do that, I know everything – calmly said Anders – anyway, I understand. Perhaps, you will fell

yourself be easier when I tell you the truth. But maybe you will not.

– Really?! Why so? – Eric became indignant.

– People are extremely unpredictable creatures.

– I promise to be restrained! – Eric insisted, squeezing his lips and making a resolute look, as much as he was able.

– You should really try – his voice sounded in a mandative tone. – Well, let's suppose, that everything in this world has a certain energy, due to which it exists. Whether it is a person, animal, plant, and even star in the sky: all has its own key to life. Also, let's suppose that someone honored to receive a share of someone's energy by chance, for example of our planet.

The only word that forced Eric after hearing was:

– Suppose...

– Assume – continued Anders – the energy source of our planet – the flame that never dies, but can only grow and grow. And when its size exceeds the allowable, there occurs an emission – the release of excess energy.

– Like a volcanic eruption? – Eric puzzled, trying to imagine, what Anders said, and also trying to suppress a smile.

– A kind of, but not so big and spectacular. When the source is getting rid of excess energy, it emits a tiny beam that carries the incredible strength. If the release doesn't happen, the source will continue to grow, resulting in a burst.

– And how often there is an emission? – Eric asked, solely to maintain the conversation.

– Every time when the same month replaced the thirteenth time.

Anders silenced and watched the stupor, into which fell Eric.

– That is... every twelve years and one month? – He said.

Anders nodded.

– Are you saying – we live on a bomb? – Eric couldn't help laughing, but then stopped fun time, making out potentially possible surge of anger.

– This bomb always disarms itself, don't worry – calmly explained Anders, while Eric spun uncontrollably, digesting his words, not the food.

What Anders said was unthinkable, though it sounded convincing, but it was crazy!

– Even so, – for a second, Eric imagined that this is possible – what I'm involved in this?

Anders's expression became stern maliciously. The waiting has dragged and the tip of the index finger of Eric was thrashing on a circular table top.

Leaning forward, dark-haired man finally spoke:

– Usually, when the beam escaped from any ejection, it disappears in the vastness of space surface, but sometimes, this ray can hurt a person. Its invisible invasion of the human body creates the illusion of appearance: lightning, flash of light, and much more.

All Eric's limbs froze, as if he had fallen into a tub of icy frenzy. He immediately remembered what had happened to him

on the porch of his house, on the last day of summer. A glowing ball, which had fallen from the sky, crashed into him. After this phenomenon, with him and began to occur unexplained events, which were accompanied by devastation and death.

From the Ander's words followed, that there was no balloon, it was just an illusion, caused by the emission beam. Unfortunately, all that happened after it was the reality.

No, no, no! Is Anders hoped that someone would believe it, in all this nonsense? Eric couldn't decide: believe it or not?

– And what will happen if ... “suppose” – Eric blurted, thus expressing doubt – emission beam gets into a man?

– He should cease to believe and just accept it!

– No. Do you mean to tell me, that I was influenced by some kind of ray emission? – Eric came to the conclusion that he didn't believe a single word of a madman.

Eric lost his confidence in Anders. The guy reached for a glass of water. Taking the vessel in hand, he raised it to his lips, intending to make a couple of sips. For an instant, the glass scattered on the gravel, all the water in the glass spread over sweatshirt and jeans crotch of Eric.

– Not only you was – Anders said coldly.

His focus remained unnoticed by the public eye. The visitors of the cafe kept carefree chatter or hastily tucked into lunch, so as not to be late for job. Nobody paid attention to the guy with the gray hair spilled over the water.

– You are afraid because you don't understand. All we tremble

in horror before the unknown, but the feeling must be overcome, otherwise the question would be deprived of the answer – Anders said.

– The point is not in it!

Eric didn't want to believe Anders for one simple reason.

– So, it's...

“My fault, I killed him...” – Eric finished by himself; now he knew the truth, cruel, intolerable truth.

Eric didn't have the strength to put up with the murder. He felt unbearably sick of himself. He remembered the sound that told him of the death of his father, how he smashed his head against the wall. He killed him! That terrible night he will never forget. The hope of innocence has extinguished, like a flame on the candle wax, which was flowing down a candlestick. Eric's feelings out of desperation moved into general indifference.

– I'll help you, Eric, – Anders pulled him a hand, which was clad in coal glove without fingers, and stopped half way, before reaching the middle of the table.

In any other circumstances, Eric would have considered him the crazy fanatic. Perhaps he really was, but then he was crazy too. The delusional explanations of Anders were delusional explanation for the events that occurred to him: there were no other explanations.

Taking advantage of the general silence, Eric began to comprehend all that told him Anders: an energy source, emissions, and other unimaginable things. There was something

ticking inside him, likely it was a shock. After all, not every day is said that the beam from the heart of the planet gets to you. If it had not unfortunate consequences may be Eric was drowning in admiration.

– How... how are you going to help me? – He asked quietly, staring at colored eyes, through the sun glasses.

– The same thing was with me, as with the others. An ugly moment in life became a transition to a different reality, with other rules and regulations, – slowly said Anders. – We've all got the power: someone found it for free, while others thought that it was curse.

– And who we are? – Eric asked.

– Just the carries of an extra source of energy, – easily and naturally Anders ranting, as if he was talking about something, which is taken for granted.

– Is there a shorter name? – Eric growled.

– If you want, you can come up with yourself: there is no objection. Judging by your appetite, we can leave. – Ander's eyes pointed at untouched pancakes in Eric's plate.

– I haven't given consent yet, – reminded him Eric.

In response Anders chuckled, then spoke sternly:

– My suggestion is not an invitation.

– If so, what's the point was to persuade me? – Eric puzzled.

– This option is not as troublesome – it was obvious that for someone like Anders, this reason was considered quite significant.

– Why do I think this is a threat? – Ironically asked Eric.

– Most of caution, but certainly not a threat! I'm sure you've had time to inquire about the strength, and of course the danger that carry the energy carriers, – his words forced Eric to think about her father; he immediately darkened. – Apparently – yes. Then you must understand that control is needed.

I did not realize what I was doing ... – justified Eric to nowhere, not knowing exactly to whom it was: to himself, to Anders, to father?

– Now it is not important, important not to let this happen again. And I'll help you, Eric. However, for this you have to stay with me for a while, and I will teach you to control your energy.

In fact, this need was a real gift for Eric, though he didn't recognize it. He will be provided with the time and place to glue himself after the fall.

Of course, he wanted to go home, he imaged how his mother was going crazy because of his loss. Eric thought she should know that he is alive, in order she could live in peace within herself. But just what to say to her? What if Eric's plan won't work, then he won't be able to subdue the energy and it will subdue him, how then to be? He didn't know how to act, how was better to do.

Immersed in himself, Eric wondered: how not to soil his soul with blood once again.

– How much time it will take? – He asked, still thinking about his mother, who didn't know where her son was.

– It depends on you, – Anders said in didactic tone.

Eric imagined how his emotional pain completely dissolves, freeing him from the heavy shackles. “No, of course not! Nothing can heal me! Guilt will stay with me forever. It is a worm that eats the apple from within. It will destroy me . . . ” – donated by self-doubt, it grinded a tiny hope of a happy ending.

However – it worth of trying.

The rays of the sun gently fell to the ground; passers-by every now and then denuded: they rolled sleeves, took off their jackets, unbuttoned cardigans for the greater contact with the warm reflections of light.

The Ander’s car, as he himself, stood out the lack of certainty. It is hard to understand to what decade it belongs, and to what brand. Polished to a high gloss car shone in inky-black tones on the convex hull, and on the lid it shone in a silver color.

Eric didn’t examine the car; the reason for the lack of enthusiasm was not so much in indifference, as in hatred. Throughout his life, he had to watch as Karl Lanter with great joy squandering money on rattletrap, rather than on his family. The obsession with machines had forced Mr. Lanter acquire new goner, and in connection with the meager income he had to get rid of the old one. Thus, he changed a rotten to another, desperately trying to find the same car that would fully meet the high demands of his ego. Despite the hostility to his father, Eric also hoped that soon he would find his dream on wheels, because debts grew from year to year, but not his salary.

Eric fell into the seat and closed his eyes, embarrassed in front of the wonderful weather. After twenty minutes, Anders left him alone with himself. During this time the dark-haired man didn't utter a single word, it seemed, that the limit of revelations was exhausted. Eric sat and looked at his knees, trying to put things in order in his head: but his trial has failed.

Anders returned to the car, holding a few cartons.

– Here it is, – he handed the bag to Eric – I bought some clothes for you. For your clothes it's time to go in the trash. You look... in a very inappropriate way.

– Come on.

Eric felt worse than he looked. Eric forgot that he was not alone, he was silent, until they left the big city behind. The travelers moved on the endless road that ran to the Arctic Circle. The nearer they approached it, the darker became ash cloud, which were stretching to the sky above them.

The free landscape behind glass windows gradually turned into the high mountains.

– Maybe you want to ask something? – Anders said, after a few hours of the road.

All this time there was silence in the car: the young man realized that Eric needed time to get used to the thought of what he had become. Therefore, he didn't want to disturb him, and he didn't do it after a silent response to the question. Eric wanted to stick to the quiet, hovering within him. The silence protected from verbal sounds, which attracted reflection on memories.

The music started in the car, Anders turned on the radio and immediately switched the radio wave, when the leading spoke about the missed teen.

– Sorry.

The radio announced about the disappearance of fifteen years old Eric Lanter, a resident of the small town of Silent Valley. The last one who saw him were local citizens, who stumbled on him in the ruined city park: it was about 20:30 p.m. The leading started to say that in the same town, there was another tragedy, because of this fact the teenager so quickly declared wanted. By the time he was going to clarify what kind of tragedy occurred in a small town, Anders pressed the switch button.

Carl Lanter burst without warning, angrily saying: “Don’t even think, just to forget it!” The torments of Eric fivefold increased strength.

The silence didn’t help, and then Eric has chosen a different strategy – to drown in the world, about which he hadn’t heard previously.

Unexpectedly, he realized what a strong sense of curiosity was bursting him.

– I hope you picked up a warm jacket for me – he started talking, looking out the window at the snow-capped mountains that grew out of the ground.

– You won’t need a jacket – said Anders, turning off the main road, on a country road, that led through the fields.

– Explain —asked Eric with a grin.

Perhaps, the surprising was foolish, but he still wanted to know – why he didn't need a warm jacket in the middle of the north, which was shrouded by the cold?

– Excess energy source much warmer than down jacket. It is like a fire that settled in your blood and bones. All the energy is concentrated in it. Due to this, such as we don't feel the cold at all.

– What about the heat? – Inquired Eric, when he was already surprised, in order to marvel even more.

– In this case, the body temperature normalizes energy, and will also continuously maintain the balance of body fluids. By the way, if you use the energy of sources for a long time – the media will be weakened and will need to meet the normal human needs: such as food and sleep – until the energy is recovered. So, many carriers avoid places, which are known for its hot climate. There their energy consumed much faster than in any other place, and they can't affect it. With increasing temperature the energy is consuming automatically, without the consent of the carrier. While with decreasing energy is not consumed.

The car continued to drive straight through path, approaching the dark bottom of the mountain, with pure white tips, the ends of the mountain hadn't been seen. They were somewhere in the clouds.

– So we almost don't sleep, well, that's... that's great news, don't say anything – sleep deprivation meant for Eric loss the only possibility at moment to disconnect from the madness, which had seized him. – Tell me something else. What's more, I no

longer need? What's on the air through? Surely we don't need ... – Suddenly, Eric had an idea. – Don't answer, I'll check! – Immediately he said.

Eric hold his breath, he pressed his lips and blew out his cheeks. Anders saw, as his eyes were bulging and blushing and interrupted silly experience.

– Stop it, without air, we can't do. In order to spare you the cost of precious time, I'll try to explain it all at once, – hurriedly said Anders. —By air we breathe, by water we quench our thirst and we inhabit the land, and by the energy we live. All of the above are attributes, without which the existence of the carriers is impossible. Don't worry about anything else. Well, about almost everything – his bristly face broke into a smile.

Baring white teeth, Anders replaced mercy to anger and slammed on the gas pedal: the car roared, increased speed and raced forward, easily climbing a steep slope. Eric, who was sitting next to him, was a little nervous, though, he was trying not to show it.

– When you said that we would go to the north, I didn't think so literally! Why do we climb the mountain? – Eric asked, not taking his eyes from the window.

They continued to move up, moving on a winding trail. Incredibly, the cobblestones, which were lying on the path jumped to the side as soon as the wheels of the machine approached them. It seemed that they were ordered to clear the way and they obeyed unquestioningly. The trail narrowed,

leaving to a steep cliff. Sharply turning, the car raced along it, and almost gathered down.

– I live here, – said Anders hurriedly.

Here, on top of the mountain? – Eric was amazed, still glancing out the window at a frightening precipice, which was fenced by miserable rotten fence. It's like closing a lion into a brier cage.

– No, at the foot of the cliff, with the adjacent upland – Anders pointed to the mountain, which looked like a giant tower.

It was unclear: how he was going to get there? Indeed, in order they could get to it – they must overcome very wide gulf between the snow tower with a mountain on which they are moving right now.

The engine was almost silent; there was only the sound of the tires, which run into little pebbles, and the roar of the wind, which was wafting everywhere. Without dropping the speed, passenger transport continued to drive tailwind: the trail began to zigzag, leaving to the right. After closer inspection, Eric noticed a huge overhang in front of him, which stretched to the rocky snow tower balcony, to the mountain – where was a house of Anders.

– No! – Eric shouted, recognizing the obvious.

– Don't worry, it'll be great!

Surprisingly, but Anders glowed with joy in anticipation of the upcoming flight. But Eric on the other hand, wasn't amused by the coming leap across the chasm. He thought again about the

mental state of a new friend, whether he did the right thing, when he trusted him?

Jumping on a horizontal platform, Anders put pressure on the gas again and steered the car straight ahead! Frozen in time, the guy with the gray hair looked the icy desert, so large and incredibly beautiful and then he jumped from a hard landing on a nearby ledge. There was a quiet rasp of metal, most likely the bumper suffered from the crazy jump. Eric hoped that this single race stopped on it: of course he was wrong! Absolutely indifferent, with the same crazy mood – Anders continued to pull the transmission lever, picking up more speed. The car flew faster than the wind; this time is not up, but down on the uneven rocky path, leading through the cleft. The pile of blocks of ice on the rocks eerily evoked a deadly threat because of its massiveness. In the fear of being walled by avalanche, Eric clenched his fists in fear, trusting in the mercy of heavy depths. He worried that any movement of the car will cause an avalanche.

As a result, it ended without incident; the undulating trail cleft brought them out of the clutches of the stone to a spacious terrace of a snowy tower. The brakes squealed, and the car slowed; Eric decided that Anders was lost, that they fell into a dead end. Instead of obstacles they had a clear path to the mountain terraces. And when he realized that the car was still moving, albeit slowly, but moving – fifteen years old guy howled in displeasure.

When they reached the cliff, the black car slowly banked,

allowing passengers to admire the breathtaking view from the top. The rear wheels came off from hard stone and the car flew down. Eric cried aloud, looking at the tip of the hood, which was rushing into the snow. No matter what was down there: if the car collapsed with such a great height, the car wouldn't had chance to survive; Eric and crazy Anders had even less chances. But Anders, apparently, didn't care about it.

Before they had to stick into the ground, like a knife through butter, the car stood in the air, in inches from the frozen surface. When the car stopped, Eric with all the dope hit his nose on the dashboard: the blood immediately gushed from the reddened nostrils.

– Oh, yes ... – Anders said, looking at Eric, who was trying to stop the bleeding by means of his sleeve. – Don't worry, our wounds heal very quickly! In no time!

The trunk has lined from hood on one level, after which the car fell to the snow-covered ground, but at a much lower altitude.

Chapter 4

The squall of incredible feelings of joy and excitement overwhelmed Eric at the sight of endless spaces, which were hidden from the high mountains of the horizon. Snowflakes quietly fell from the sky on stony ground, which was covered with a white veil, where the sharp spears protruded out of depth.

– That’s my house – Eric heard a peaceful voice of Anders behind.

When Eric turned, he couldn’t see the Ander’s mansion: hid home was disguised as a rock, which was strewn with non-viable land, gravel and snow. Among the natural grandiose construction it was impossible to see the elements of an artificial construction.

In the distance of a slate landscape could be seen a sparse forest. Its sparse vegetation situated on a hill at the foot of the mountains.

– Are we on the edge of the world? – Eric marveled.

He had never seen anything like this. Previously, he had only hoped that in the near future he will be able to see the world from various angles.

– You can say so!

Going down from desert slope, Eric landed in a deep snow. Eric startled by the sudden collapse, he immediately rushed to get out of the quagmire of snow, which was concomitant with an unpleasant feeling of snow by the collar. Frozen icicles didn’t

burn with cold fire. Eric hasn't felt the icy touch, if only a touch of snow on the skin.

– Something is wrong? – Asked Anders with a serene expression on his face, when he drew attention to the thoughtful Eric.

– I don't feel it ... – indifferently said Eric, looking at snowflakes on his hands.

He felt by skin was, how chilly air, which was rushing around the body, was.

He felt its icy ferocity, but he still only felt, but he didn't feel truly at its touch.

– And you won't feel until you have an extra energy. Cold is one of the items in the list of unwanted feelings. The extra energy will protect its carrier from everything, except itself. And of course, it won't protect of clumsiness – Anders added.

– But it is not the protection; it is deprivation of liberty, the senses! Am I not right? – Indignation captured the young man with gray hair.

Anders looked sympathetically; at least, he has tried to portray compassion, then he moved on to the valley, which reflected the night light by thin coat of frost.

They stood counterpart: at such a close distance Anders seemed even higher. It was quite funny to look at a man, which was dressed in light clothes in the middle of the mountain cold. The fierce blizzard, which suddenly appeared, has mercilessly blinded Eric and his friend. Finally, the weather taunts ended:

snowflakes didn't stop falling, they just froze. There were so many that they closed all around; Eric and Anders stuck in its web. Some later snowflakes budged, but in the opposite direction. The frozen fluffy drops rose skyward. A layer of snow underfoot was reducing; it climbed to the top, followed by the rest of the crystals. The rate has increased, Eric looked at his feet – he almost saw the earth, which was hidden from the eyes by the snowy mass. When Eric looked around, he didn't see anything, even Anders, he saw only a continuous dark veil.

– Oh wow...! – he amazed.

It couldn't fail to impress!

Eric heard a sniff of Anders. All the snow, which took off, instantly fell back to earth. After a few seconds, Eric brushed the pilings up of snow from his head and squinted grimly at Anders. The dark veil has disappeared, and then he could see the bristly beard: they once again stood on the flat valley, which was dotted with snow. – Very funny, I hope you will show me not just tricks – although he liked the focus, but that moment it wasn't important. – You'd better to tell me how you control it, how do you manage it?

– First of all, you need to realize and accept the existence of energy in your body. Only after that, you can manage it. All the necessary levers for this are here – Anders touched his index finger to his temple. – Your mind controls the energy.

– That is, the energy takes whatever came into my head? – Eric tried to understand. – Energy is not a magic pollen, which grants

wishes – said Anders, assumed a mine. – With the help of the energy source we can manage any matter, without touching it. We can move it, or break apart. Our mind works on the subject due to the energy source, but for doing this it needs to know and understand what a given object, how it works, what it consists of. Without this knowledge it is impossible to control the subject – he walked away and leaned on a small boulder, – he hid his hands in his trouser pockets.

– Really? What a shame, and I was hoping that you can get it by clicking fingers – Eric upset.

– Not so easy.

The silence lasted just a minute, and then Anders said:

– Come on, try something!

– Do you want me to repeat your trick? – Eric shrugged. – But I have no idea how to do it. And I don't understand what I can do? What is our strength in?

– In a move – pointedly said Anders.

– Manage your power in the same way as the parts of the body. Send commands from here – Anders again tapped his index finger on his temple – use your imagination.

Eric began to think, what he would try to make. He didn't try that did Anders – it was unlikely he will succeed; probably he won't manage to do anything. Eric shook his head in different directions; his attention caught nothing. Then he just decided to lift into the air a small clump of snow. Moreover, it was a very simple task. After all, according to Anders, he could use his

energy on the sole, whose nature was known for Eric. And what was the snow – Eric undoubtedly knew, like any other!

Mentally Eric began to present the outlines of a lump of snow, its size, how it was raised. Nothing happened. Even when Eric pulled his hand in front of his imaginary lump – the result didn't change.

“If only my friends have seen me... they would have a good laugh!” – Self-doubt didn't leave him for a moment. Discarding the thoughts, he began to concentrate all his attention only on the snow pile again. Eric began to imagine how cold and light it is, as he takes it and lifts. He began to feel it; he believed that he could do it: thus, Eric believed in himself.

Something moved. Noticing this, the young man tried to focus even more. A little snow separated from the land and then headed straight into his face.

– Damn it! – Eric angrily cursed. He had to shake off the snow again.

Suddenly he heard a laugh, Eric stared at Anders, but he just gazed peacefully somewhere in the sky.

– Just don't be so; I know it was you laughing! – Eric angrily uttered, wiping his nose.

In fact, the failure of Eric looked very funny, but the laugh Anders teased him, as it was with any other laughter, which was directed at him. He hated to look foolish. He always tried to avoid such situations; they are unbearable for him.

– I have no idea what you're talking about?! – With a straight

face Anders rejected Eric's accusations in schadenfreude.

Of course, the teenager didn't believe him. Eric definitely heard his laugh, and he didn't doubt it, although Anders tried to portray apathy.

– Well, you already have at least some idea of how your energy works, and how to use it, – Anders summed up the success of Eric.

– Probably, – he mumbled doubtfully.

He really managed. The main thing was that a little result happened. A little snow really took off the ground; and though it subsequently flew straight into the nose. By the way, Anders was not lying – the nose quickly stopped hurting after hitting the bar, and since then, it was no longer bleeding.

– Try again! – Anders ordered.

– I should to pick it up in the air again? – Eric said, turning to him.

– Try... to give it a shape.

Eric nodded.

“If only I knew how!” – In addition to this, Eric began to think, what kind of form to give a handful of snow. The choice fell on the most common variant – the ball. The main difficulty of this assignment was completely different.

“To believe, you just need to believe, to perceive your ability seriously” – it was not the easiest task, especially for an uncertain person. The thoughts of madness were constantly wandering somewhere nearby. Sometimes it was hard to resist.

Eric tried to abstract from all those things and focus on the goal. Little by little he began to do it. Snowflakes whirled one after the other at a small distance from the ground: they chased faster and faster. When one overtook the other, snowflakes combined, and then the new players joined the chase. It lasted until the snowball didn't appear in front of Eric. He was of small size, below the knee.

Happened! He did it! He did it, he did it deliberately, controlling entirely the whole process.

– Okay, you're done! – Anders immediately praised Eric, when he saw the embodiment of his efforts. He didn't even stinged with the approving smile.

– I don't even know what to say ... – Eric was glad and he could hardly talk, he was amazed by himself. – Is that the control of which you spoke?

– No, – cut off Anders. The smile on his face disappeared. – Control – this is not a skill to sculpt a snowman, it is much more. – Anders took a couple of steps forward.

– Then why am I doing this? – Erik immediately got angry. He didn't want to waste his time.

– This is the path to what you really must do.

Anders came to the stone, reminiscent of the parapet, and raised his left hand over it. Under his hand, which was slowly moving, built rectangular figures from the snow, like dominoes.

– The great begins with the small. The path to the desired lies through overcoming difficulties, laziness – he kept going – and

of course time. The main thing is to keep on and not give up – Anders hand stopped – otherwise everything will be in vain, – he pointed to the last figure, which was created by him, and the whole chain has fallen to the ground.

– That is, it needs a very long time? – Eric mournfully pursed his lips and lowered his head.

Anders rubbed his nose and said:

– I didn't mean it that way, but in general you caught my meaning. Eric, you have to practice to use a source of energy, in order to learn, how to control it. If you don't want it to control you – he flashed his colored eyes. Even in the night Eric could see its shine. – In this case, it will occur the things, because of which you're here.

Eric didn't answer; he decided to keep silence. Fire and death crunch squeezed his throat, cutting off access of oxygen. Memories.

– What happened to you? – Anders noticed haze in his eyes. – Is something wrong?

– Oh, you're very obvious! – Barely holding back, grunted Eric. – I need time. I have a feeling like I was stuck in something sticky... It seems that I'm sleeping! – He walked from place to place. – I find it hard to take, and so easy to get used to the idea that all of what you tell me, Anders – the truth!

– I perfectly understand, through what you have to endure now. But know this, you're the lucky one; other people, who faced with the madness, experienced it alone.

Indeed, Anders was right: Eric should be glad that he was not alone. The loneliness would destroy him! Eric said nothing, but in his eyes could be seen gratitude.

Without any reason, he flopped back in the snow and stared at the sky, which was painted in dull black tones. The iron clouds overshadowed the shine of stars; tiny dots occasionally were shown between the sliding through the air smoky blocks.

It was so strange, Eric couldn't see anything ahead. Earlier it was different. He always adhered to the stability, he was afraid to be in an unpredictable position. Much of what he had done before, was sent to the steppe. After the school followed the entrance to college, then was a future job, then a career, and so forth on a sloping, which was the existence of the average person's life. He didn't want to become a lawyer, together with Constantine, but at the same time he understood that this path will lead to unwelcome particular destination. This, as he always thought, was mandatory! Even if it didn't suit him.

And now he just looked up at the sky, which was closed from his eyes with saddened clouds. Eric had no idea what would happen next.

– Do you have a family? – He asked, still staring at the sky.

– Yes, I have, – said shortly Anders, brushing snow from the shoulder.

– Where are they? – In his voice didn't sound any notes of interest, except the manifestation of curiosity.

– There are a lot of places, the family is big. All have parted

on corners of our hopeless planet – Anders continued to respond in the same hurried manner.

– Do you communicate or meet with anyone of them? – Lifelessly continued to ask Eric.

– I meet; or rather I sometimes watch them. How do they spend their time; whether all of them good. But all of this I do at a distance nobody of them knows about me. After all, I officially died more than six hundred years ago – Anders said, with a grin. – To be more precise, I disappeared, I went missing.

Swallowing information about carriers Eric couldn't imagine what it was like, so many years in the shadow. Eric hoped that all this time he was not alone there.

– So, we're immortal ... – Eric exhaled and mumbled dryly.

– No, but we live a very long time, if we are allowed – ending sounded cruel and hard.

– It hurts?

Eric decided to go back to talking about the family; he wanted to find out what he had to experience.

– Over time, you start to think that this way of life is the norm. And that another way can't be. Only time can make us come to terms with the objectionable acts for us.

– I have a small family. I have to part only with one person – Eric decided to share his story with a new friend.

– With whom exactly?

– With those who are still alive – Eric pulled barely from himself. He knew that sorrow will overtake him because of his

desire to share.

– And who is it?

– Mom, – instinctively replied Eric.

– What happened with your father? – The question of Anders caught Eric off guard. Anyway, it was like a blow to the bruise.

Kitchen, explosion, and self-loathing – that now calls the word “father” in the sad Eric.

– He died – he quickly muttered, lifting his head from the ground.

“I killed him” – while Eric couldn’t admit it to anyone. It was hard to do it, even to himself. Let the best Anders won’t know what a boy of fifteen had done.

– I sympathize; it’s awful to lose loved ones. I know this firsthand.

Eric was undermined by the condolences, and he couldn’t resist:

– It is not necessary, he was rare... I don’t want to say, – Erik half rose from the ground. He hardly resisted not to express what he thought about his father, who never was for real.

– It is not unusual when a native person becomes strange and hateful.

Although Anders said all right, his words caused a desire to thwart it.

– He was not only a stranger, he was the one who broke the TV remote on the head of his son, because, he fell asleep and didn’t turn it off. He did it because the sound of the movie disturbed

his sleep.

At the same moment Eric turned away from Anders, and looked into the distance, at the high mountains, he wanted to get on them and hide there from all that had happened to him. He wanted to be on the brink of infinity, naively believing that this way he will be able to escape. Eric regretted that he spoke about the immoral act of Karl Lanter. Now Anders probably guesses what Eric tortures himself.

To his delight, Anders didn't continue the conversation and left him alone. Eric went on to test the newfound opportunities, but alone: he raised fallen snowflakes in the air and made them spin around. He was in the center of a small tornado. His fantasies started to turn out to overcome the barriers, which were built by conventional laws of impossible. Although he still didn't give a full account of his actions. Its results were made at random, like a computer game, whose control you haven't fully learned and you are trying to lead the way in it blindly, to the touch.

Returning from a curve hill, Anders stopped the training of Eric.

– I think you have enough for today, – he said, approaching him.

– Ok, – Eric nodded.

Artificial tornado crumbled to the ground.

They returned to the rock, on the hillock. Anders absented to hide his car; he disguised it under a thick layer of snow.

When the broad-shouldered man closely approached the rock,

he moved his hand a little bit, and then there was a roar. The gnarled barrier was split into two parts, and then budged: the moonlight filled a cave, in response it threw out the stale air, which was trapped in it for a long time.

– Very cute – Eric whispered.

Moonlight froze in the cave twists, the tunnel began to fall, Eric and Anders continued to walk down the corridor, hiding in the darkness. A few minutes later they were at an impasse.

– Are we lost? – Eric wondered when he saw nothing in front of him.

Anders awarded his question with a heavy sigh; he pressed his hand to the barrier: the ebony doors opened wide.

Four giant stone columns supported the sky; the domed ceiling was decorated with bright stars, which were sliding on the supports. Marble women in marble coats shrouded columns over the full height, holding a cup, from which was emanating a bright golden light.

Under the ring of mezzanine, between the columns, were placed the archways. In total there were four through passages in the corridor, which were allocated with metal frame: a thin thread sprawled the arc on the wall, like the veins on the exhausted hands. One passage led into the dining room, the other in the living room, and the third led to the library. The fourth passage led to the exit of a luxury home, through a non-illuminated long tunnel, through which they had just stepped inside the mansion.

A spiral staircase gently poured into the balcony circle, standing out from the center of the hall. Following the dark-haired Anders, Eric climbed the stairs, looking at the bas-reliefs of people and animals, which were hidden in the shadow of the mezzanine. The bulges at the basalt walls displayed the proud ram, a mighty bull, half-naked men with swords in his hands, a huge cancer.

– This is the image of zodiac signs – Eric guessed by looking at the stone embodiment of the majestic lion.

– For the former owner of the mansion they were the symbols of faith – without turning notified Anders.

Eric wondered who owned this matchless house, which was reminiscent of the medieval cathedral, which interspersed with ancient temple. He wasn't going to wait for a long time to find out the answer:

– And who previously owned this house?

– The man who saved my life – Anders quietly satisfied the curiosity of Eric.

– He died?

Eric somehow was convinced that it was true.

– Yes.

Once Anders confirmed his thoughts, Eric asked:

– How?

The man stopped and turned to Eric with a stern face. He regretted that he touched the wound, which he obviously was trying to forget.

– When a person stands in the way to achievement of one's dream, that time dedicated to his life is significantly reduced. My advice to you, Eric – don't destroy someone else's dream, because you can lose your own.

– So, he was killed. – Eric didn't ask, he commented the meaning of the words of Anders. He nodded.

Without saying a word, Anders turned and walked away, and Eric followed him.

Along the upper mezzanine were placed twelve doors in a circle. Each of them was decorated with a symbol of the zodiacal constellation.

– Oh, Yeah. Probably for your friend zodiac really played an important role in his life. If we consider, how many images are here.

– It was his faith – reiterated Anders.

– You mean religion? – Wondered Eric, when he finished examining one of the doors.

– There, where he was born, the stars – is the belief, art, life, and the law.

After Anders finished, he stopped at the door, where two babies were pictured. Eric was surprised, because he was born under the sign of Gemini, at the first day of summer.

– And where he came from, your friend?

– Already out of nowhere – briefly replied Anders. – This is your room – please! – He pulled the handle and opened the door. – You should put yourself in order, so I won't interfere you.

Anders foisted to Eric the bags with clothes, he was already going to go, but he suddenly stopped.

– Sorry if I made a mistake with the size.

– Come on, – Eric closed the door, and then opened it. – Thank you, – he growled at last, and as soon as possible, shut the door behind him again.

In the room, which he was granted, easily could fit all the property of his family. Rough bronze statue glittered like foil from candies. Its arms and legs unnaturally bent, and the head rushed up and followed by eye into shrouded with clouds sky, which was flowing above the transparent ceiling. Curved humanlike creatures without a face and without gender were randomly leaning on the ghostly wall, which surrounded the dial, which was spreading out on the floor. The acute second hand was moving in the opposite direction around the marble stool, which enchanted by the presence of ideal simplicity.

– It's funny.

It was the only thing that Eric was able to utter, thus expressing his perplexity to freak show atmosphere.

After a couple of tentative steps forward towards the reclined bronze statue, he saw glittering gold handle, the door of cream shade color was barely noticeable, hiding behind a bathroom. In the center of the white square was a huge granite boulder, turned out to be a real bath. Outside the reservoir for bathing looked clumsy, and even a little dangerous: sharp edges of the cleavage didn't inspire confidence. But inside the bath was

a continuous smooth surface.

Throwing his bags of clothes, Eric went to the mirror: for long time he carefully examined every bit of his face. Running his finger along the jaw, high cheekbones, lips – he couldn't understand what has changed? Everything was as before, but the reflection looked different, not as usually.

As it turned out, he didn't notice that his green eyes almost drowned in the cold colorless, which was surrounded by galvanized streams. Pupils also sparkled, like Ander's eyes. Despite the beauty he acquired, Eric didn't like it: it was neither his eyes. It was the eyes of monster, who had killed a man.

The guy with the gray hair washed and no longer tried to look at his reflection.

"Even it was different. Perhaps only here I remained the same" – Eric thought, clenching his fist over his heart. He didn't believe that thought; because there is deep inside everything fell apart.

The guy immersed in the fresh water of rock bulk, Eric got rid of the remnants of a reminder of the hard day. However, the water has cleaned him only from the outside, it couldn't penetrate in his soul and cool the accumulated there agonizing despair and fear. The pain was there the most, but Eric has denied its presence.

The size of clothes, which Anders selected, fitted to Eric, but to style it was in defiance with Eric's preferences. He has resigned with narrow trousers, shirts and shoes, but he left to lie on the floor tie and the eccentric cylinder. Eric didn't understand why

Anders has bought all of them. In other packages with clothing it was exactly the same, except for the color and model.

The lights had lit up in the sky, through the glass ceiling Eric could admire the stars without going outside. Dropping to a marble seat, Eric lost in thought of a new life. He couldn't understand – how such a thing could happen? How for such a tiny amount of time his life could abruptly turn around and give up all that was left behind? Almost everything that had previously at least some value, has ceased to exist, was relieved to second place, and even a third.

“So, what we have: I am an incomprehensible threat to others, and I'm not the only one. I can something, but I don't know what exactly... the eccentric Anders didn't explain to me everything yet. The strength inside me is my greatest danger; I should subdue it, but how? How can I subdue what is inside of me, to myself? I hope, Anders hasn't lied to me, and he will really help me, or... I don't even know what will happen to me if his help turns out useless.

How to live with it and not go mad? I don't know, but I'll ask Anders, he doesn't seem crazy, but who knows? He lives on the edge of the world, in the bizarre, eerie mansion, sometimes secretly watches his descendants, but still chooses to himself in the care a stranger youngster – it doesn't look like a normal person's life!

But what is like a normal life? Every person understands the word “normally” in his own way, and it is his right. The main

thing is that this right won't harm to anyone. However, what for one person doesn't mean anything for the other is a threat.

What can unite all the people? Nothing. Maybe, a common goal? Perhaps, but only till the moment, as will originate disagreements with the choice of a way to achieve it. So, it is inevitable, unity is impossible! "– starting with the one thought, Eric didn't notice that he ran away from one thought to another.

He sat and attentively followed the movement of the second hand – the black arrow, as before, was moving in the opposite direction. He wanted this to happen not on the floor, but in reality.

It was quiet, he couldn't hear anything: the second floor was empty. Eric went to the stairs, intending to talk to Anders: there was no one to talk with. He wanted to know when he will begin to teach him self-control, or even tell anything.

From the living room Eric could hear a crackling sound. Slowly, passing the shadow of the columns, Eric walked through the archway, and finally came to a crowded room. All the people, except one, were not real. Anders sat motionless by the fire, watching, how the bright embers were slowly fading into black gold of soot.

– You want to ask a question – what is going on here? – Without turning around, he asked.

– I'm tired of asking this question – Eric walked into the room, looking the lifeless visitors.

Across the living room were scattered black mannequins

in dull robes, they looked like tired people, who didn't withstand exhaustion. A woman in a dress was lying on the silk carpets; a scrawny man cowered in a corner, covering its face with its hands. Eric came mighty close to the piano, in order to get a better look to artificial little girl, which held tight by its tiny hands the leg of the tool: it seemed as if its glass legs will soon be destroyed.

– I won't hide – I am not own – confessed Eric and stayed near another dummy, which was looking thoughtfully out of the window, holding a curtain. – By the way, I hope – you will give me a room with a bed. Because we sleep, sometimes for no reason, I want to lie down sometimes. Eric sat on an elegant settee, which was upholstered in dark green jacquard. On the edge of the sofa sat a woman, which was wrapped in saffron rebozo with a wide black hat on her head, covering the artificial face.

– There's no time! – Anders snapped, remaining petrified, he continued sitting in front of almost extinct hearth.

– Okay, okay ... – Eric muttered. – My eyes have changed, why? And why only they have changed?

– I don't know the answer to this question. One thing I can say – our eyes are the reflection of our soul.

“It is not surprising that they have changed their warm color to a lifeless. After all, now I have such a soul ” – Eric didn't stop lamenting.

Exactly above the black table hung iron roots, they enmeshed

angels with black and golden bowls. The saddened chandelier, which was fixed on a high ceiling, reflected in glossy round tabletop, which was kept on a sharp leg. The only support of the table pierced in polished anthracite floor. Its boundaries etched in dark rough walls, which were similar to the rock, mixing with the ceiling of a similar appearance.

There were only eternity and gloom around.

– How long have you lived here? All this luxury... sculptures – from which he was not himself, – its cumbersome and unclear. It's snazzy, but, at the same time, it's repulsive.

– Loneliness. There is nothing worse and more painful than loneliness, Eric. Tit was a single woman, the presence of silent statues somehow fill the void in her life.

Until that moment, Eric thought Tit was a man, not a woman.

– Tit had to leave her people; she went in search of a new home and family. Everything was not as easy as she thought. Admired people left her very quickly, because they were ordinary mortals, their life were short. Titus tired to experience the loss of loved ones, and ventured on spending her time in mire of loneliness. This house and everything in it is a reflection of crippled souls, of disappointment.

Despair and sadness overlapped each other by layers; it has been seen in every subject. From more luxury items came more suffering and sorrow.

– But she was not always alone, she met you? Didn't she?

Let the whole story remained behind the curtain; Eric was

very sorry Tit, even though he didn't know her.

– We met when I was trying to get away from life. Having part of the power source of energy, I decided that I was turning into a demon. You know, in my lifetime obsession was at its peak, so I ran away. Abnormal fanatics kill anyone who they thought was the devil incarnate. In fact, they were themselves. And I needed to protect my family from these righteous geeks – a stern voice of Anders Eric could hear as if from far away, even though it was very close. – I remember this feeling, I remember the pain, the fear... and of course intolerable anguish. For over twenty years I had to spend on the margins of the world, hiding in the shadows, to ignore the existence of people, and indeed any life. In general, I had to learn how to get pleasure from the loneliness. Naturally it didn't work out and then I went to the rocky shore. When despair overcame hope for the best, and the unwillingness to commit a mortal sin – I jumped, – the story briefly interrupted. – Then I was on the beach. I don't remember how I was brought there. For a time, it seemed to me that I died – Anders was silent again.

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