

ANNA FOX

18+



NIGHT

PART 1

Anna Fox
Night. Part 1

«Издательские решения»

Fox A.

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Just one fateful encounter can destroy everything. One bite and you're a vampire. That was the fate that had befallen Francesca. What she had known before had fall apart. And now she is completely ruled by hunger, night and her ruthless creator. But when she is ready to accept this, a strikingly brave young man suddenly bursts into her life. An ordinary human who wasn't afraid to enter her dark world and give Francesca his love. And whatever the price, now he won't back down.

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Night

Part 1

Note to Reader



Dear reader!

I'm glad to welcome you, and to know that you're here! And before you open the door to the mysterious "Night", I want to share with you a secret... The book that now in front of your eyes is a part of my soul.

It is indeed so. Because when I was writing it, I input to it only what resonates in me. You will see a world that, like many other things in life, is multifaceted and ambiguous. It is captivating and beautiful, somehow idealistic, and somewhat even instills fear and awe. But it's real. It is filled with sincere emotions and feelings. And, of course, the main of these feelings is love, which so much is sometimes lacking in our world.

It is not enough just to say that the book is dedicated to love. I praise and exalt it because I believe it lives! It hides, trying to escape from rudeness and rough edges, from meanness and cowardice, from selfishness and hypocrisy. But it exists! It lives! And I am eager to give you, my reader, at least a small part of this love. I sincerely want you to experience it in the pages of my book, and your heart sang with mine.

Love! Create! And remember, you came to this world in order to overcome all obstacles and adversity, and be happy!

Yours sincerely, Anna Fox.

Prologue

I. Reborn

There's always special charm in night. It's like a guide to another existence, to another reality. This shrouded in darkness world frightens and attracts at the same time. Night gives a feeling of incredible freedom and independence. People open their hearts to unknown. They forget about worries, everyday problems, sometimes even about morality. They forget themselves or, on the contrary, find themselves. In soul of man awakens another being, not like one he shows to condemning public before sunset. Whether it's terrible or beautiful depends on what is behind eyes. It can be darkness. Or indomitable spirit of divine that breaks through borders and limits to freedom. And it flies like moth on trembling flame, forgetting about danger, while others become this danger. Revealing yourself, someone may inevitably get in set nets of ruthless fate. After all, it's night that accompanies transformation of man into animal – both internally and externally...

* * *

Once again, hurrying home in the evening, Francesca caught herself thinking that dark time of day instills in her inexplicable prickly fear. Not that she was afraid of dark – but rather of unknown behind veil of night. Black alleys, crooked shadows from the light of streetlights, people's faces hidden in darkness. And these sounds... Now they are floating and annoying with their dull monotony, then abruptly exploding with some horrific screech. *Ugh...* Even goosebumps ran over the skin. All this is so unfamiliar to Francesca – both in feelings and in character. She did her best to avoid such walks as this evening.

But she has the necessary obligations, which she had to fulfill. First of all, of course, studies, which often ended quite late. The rest of the time, she worked in a bookstore that closed at eight in evening. Her friend Tammy worked there too, who replaced her while she was in school. So, Francesca often had to work the last shift, which meant walking home in dark.

Sometimes Tammy accompanied her and even stayed at her place for night. No one was against it, because Francesca lived completely alone. Her parents died during the train crash just three months after she turned fourteen. Accepting this, she lived with her grandmother in a suburb for the first year, and then decided to move to a city. Here she rented an apartment until now.

It was on the outskirts. Small, perfectly simple, but comfortable – Francesca didn't complain. School and work were, one might say, two steps away. So, her routes seemed very short and simple. And as for the city center, she's never even been there. It was too far away and too luxurious to go there for nothing.

She lived on her own money, well, the grandmother helped her with what she could. Every day the girl was closely busy with household chores. There was almost no time for rest. Except for the nights when she was sleeping, of course. This, by the way, was also the reason for her dislike for such walks. Francesca believed, that night exists to ensure that people slept. She admitted that she felt some contempt for those incomprehensible to her personalities that stagger at night. And, of course, she was afraid of any criminal manifestations, that coming into force mainly at night.

All in all, she wasn't friendly set up to this time of day and moved her legs quickly to get home.

It was warm outside, and Francesca was already steaming from the rush. But it remains to pass quite a bit – now it will be the last turn and she will be at home. She will immediately take a shower and lie down in a soft bed to get enough sleep. This thought encouraged her, and smiling to herself, she quickened her pace.

But as soon as she reached to the corner of the street, a strange chilling feeling pierced her entire body. Goosebumps rapidly ran on her neck. Francesca froze, feeling someone's gaze on her back.

That's what she was always afraid of! *God, it's just a little left. If I hurry, I'll probably be able to... get away*, she thought. Although she sincerely wanted to believe that she's wrong and really her no one was watching. That it was just her fantasy played out. But, again finding the strength to move, the girl immediately darted around the corner and just in case sprinted from spot, running on the stone road to the house.

Surprisingly, while Francesca was running, she didn't hear a single sound of pursuit. And, slowing down, she decided to stop to catch her breath and listen better.

She leaned against a high brick wall and, trying to breathe as calmly and silently as possible, listened to the silence. Nothing disturbed it. Francesca stood there for a moment to be sure, and when she finally realized there was nothing to worry about, she chuckled softly:

"Silly," she said softly. "I twitch at every rustle."

Lightly slapping palm against forehead, she lowered face, as if ashamed of her own reaction. *Watching... It's necessary to think of this!* – She was amazed at herself.

With sigh of relief, Francesca took a step forward and...

...bumped into someone. Searing ice wave covered her with an attack of fear and panic. Breathing froze, and a heart pounded wildly somewhere near a throat. And before she looked up, she struggled with herself for a long time.

A black silhouette of tall man appeared out of nowhere in front of her. In the dark he wasn't to be seen at all, and see facial features seemed impossible. He didn't move and didn't seem to be breathing at all. Francesca's knees shook treacherously. In confusion, she tried to pretend that she didn't notice him (in which she didn't succeed at all), turned around and wanted to leave the stranger. But suddenly he grabbed her by the throat with his strong hand and pulled her back against the wall.

Now her fear was definitely justified. She bumped her head against the wall, causing hundreds of nasty annoying bells to ring in her ears. The stranger moved closer and leaned directly into her face. But Francesca still couldn't see him: he squeezed her throat too tightly with his tenacious fingers so that her eyes were covered with a whitish veil and beads of tears stood out in the corners. She opened her mouth convulsively in a silent scream and pounded her feet on the stone wall and the pavement. He kept looking at her, as if studied. Her fear gradually turned into colossal horror, madness raging in her head.

But less than fraction of second his nimble hand slipped from her neck, grabbed the girl by the waist, and the stranger pressed burning lips to her carotid artery. Francesca didn't even have time to make a sound and at first didn't understand. She began to push him away desperately with her elbows, but then she felt sharp pain and instantly enveloping weakness. He bit her! He bit through her skin... to blood!

Suddenly, thoughts began to scatter, as discovered traitors, and the strength to swim away with blood flowing from a wound. She distinguished the quiet sounds of sipping among the indomitable noise created by a panicked brain. The stranger drank slowly, and with every drop of life leaving her, her eyes more and more closed.

Am I dying? ... this last horrifying thought came and stood at her right before she lost consciousness. Her body went limp in his arms and her mind helpfully sailed into a deep black abyss.

* * *

Francesca woke up early in the morning, before sunrise. From a sudden impulse in the body she suddenly opened her eyes and sat down on the bed. What a horrible dream she had tonight. So frighteningly realistic. She could still feel the thin fingers clutching her throat.

"Ugh," Francesca shook her head, trying to banish the thought of the dream. But still on a skin the small shiver has swept.

Head was spinning, the blood was throbbing in temples. She carefully put her feet on the cold floor, afraid that it would slip out from under her feet.

Looking around a modest room, she noticed that her things were hanging peacefully on the back of a chair in the corner. And then Francesca realized that she didn't remember how she got home. She began to think hard, trying to remember last night: she came out of the bookstore, said goodbye to Tammy, and walked down the street toward the house. She walked... walked... walked... That's all, everything she remembers – nothing.

Reflections tired her and, in order to relax a little, she began to massage the back of her head with her fingers at the base of the skull. But after this simple action, the hand involuntarily slid across the neck and touched the two small wounds that failed to heal.

At that moment it seemed to her that she was hit by a pile of books on the head. Eyes widened in surprise and fright. She rushed to the mirror, in a moment throwing back the hair from shoulder. On the other side of the glass the pale seventeen-year-old girl was looking at her, with long golden-dark hair that fell to the middle of her back, and fathomless gray eyes. Glancing her neck, she saw two red dots that brazenly flaunted on her skin under her ear. Hands fell limply, and mouth opened in a silent exclamation.

The gift of speech didn't return immediately, only after some time.

"Nonsense! After all, it can't be!" she told herself. "It was a dream! Doesn't it?!"

Francesca sank down on the bed with frozen face, plunged into a maelstrom of disorderly thoughts.

Confusion swept her with such persistence that she didn't notice how the sun rose and beat to her window. It seemed that unless an earthquake or flood occurred, she would never recover. But the earthquake wasn't needed. Just a monotonous rattling of a phone. And that trill made her turn around. On the nightstand was a black machine, signaling her with a red light, announcing the incoming call.

Francesca picked up the phone, but she didn't speak first.

"Good morning! Wake up, sleeping beauty!" Tammy's cheerful voice was heard. Francesca was silent.

"Hey! Can anybody hear me?" receiving no answer, cried the friend.

Francesca rubbed her temple nervously.

"Tammy, I need to talk to you..." she only squeezed out of herself.

"Speak."

"Uh..." stretched the girl. Probably not on the phone..."

"Well, let's meet after school?"

Tammy was talking about Francesca's school, of course. She had finished her studies a year ago and had a work now. For now, in a bookstore, but she always said with burning eyes that someday the whole world will know about her. Tammy dreamed of becoming a dancer. And I must say, she was really amazing at dancing.

"Okay."

"In the park?"

"Agree."

"See you then!"

"Yes..."

There was a long pause.

"Franky, are you all right?" finally asked the friend.

"Mmm..." Francesca ran her neck with the tips of her trembling fingers. "Yes."

"Okay. See you!"

"Yeah."

Francesca put down the phone and twisted her face again. *Unbelievable...*

At breakfast she drank two cups of tea, but ate almost nothing. Thinking about what had happened, she paid no attention to anything around her, as if she was present in some other reality.

What kind of person could bite her first, and then bring her home, undress and put her in bed? At first, bad suspicions arose in her head. A man undresses a girl and puts her in bed... Francesca threw a stern, as if accusing, glance in the bedroom. But for some reason, an inner voice assured her that nothing of the sort had happened.

It's also possible that she unconsciously got to the house... took off her clothes... and went to bed... *Hmm, not very believable.* Maybe she hobbled back to the house, and there the neighbor found her, Mrs. Brown – an old, kindhearted woman living on the floor below – and helped her get into the apartment? *Yes! I like this version. I'll have to ask Mrs. Brown.*

Then her attention finally got to the word “bite” and she was horrified as soon as she realized its meaning. Before eyes immediately began to appear the images of bloodsuckers from old legends and tales, which she never really believed. Well, let's say he bit her skin. Then, most likely, he could be banal psychopath – this is a more like the truth option version. But he drank the blood... Francesca felt a pang of nausea.

“Okay, I'd rather think about it as little as possible,” she dismissed her anxiety from herself and went to school.

In the first two lessons, the girl couldn't gather her thoughts and concentrate on her studies. Every break Francesca sat in a school cafeteria, which she usually did only after school. But now she was a little worried. It's not every day you get attacked by psychos and even bitten.

She again began nervously rubbing her neck. Maybe she should inform the police? What would she tell them? “I was bitten!”? Would they send her herself to a nuthouse? Or maybe she should forget about what happened, and the end of it? Heal someday these foolish traces. And if he infected her with something? ... Now that has acquired a dangerous meaning.

A saving bell rang, clearing the mind of obsessive thoughts. During the break she drank a whole bottle of water and, taking with her another, came out of the dining room and began to climb to the second floor. How she wanted to forget everything. She's already pretty tired of thinking about it. But the screaming thoughts crowded queues into the brain pan. Some left and others came to their place, more intrusive and noisier than the previous ones. *Enough! I have English now. I need to focus on English. Nothing else!* – she was determined.

Entering the classroom, she sat down at her desk, put books on it and put the bottle of water next to it. Stared on the board, she tried to focus on the lesson topic, hand-drawn in chalk on a green background. A little later the teacher entered the classroom, said hello and began the lesson. But still, half of what he said, Francesca unintentionally missed the ears.

It became worse when twenty minutes after the start of the lesson her stomach ached. Maybe it was just hunger? She opened the bottle and took a little sip from it in order to relieve an unpleasant feeling. But the stomach ached even more. Now the unbearable pain was cutting and pricking all her insides. The girl wrapped her arms around herself, bent down and laid her head on the desk. *God, it hurts...* She groaned hoarsely.

“Francesca, are you all right?” suddenly, someone's alarmed voice could be heard. Seemed that it sounded through a thick wall, but the girl realized that it was the teacher, who was talking to her. “Are you not feeling well? Maybe you want to go out?”

“Yes,” she said in a choked voice, thanking the teacher in her mind. And, jumping out of the table, Francesca quickly left the classroom, slamming the door behind her.

Her eyes were dull, and she felt sick, and her legs carried her not to a medical center, but straight to a toilet room. Crouching almost in half, she finally reached the toilet, pushed the door with her hand and ran inside. Fortunately, there was no one there.

At first, Francesca rushed to a sink and coughed uncontrollably into it. A saliva mixed with blood flowed along the brilliant ceramic edge to a hole. In fright, she made a grunting sound and,

turning, jumped to the toilet. When she felt another push from below, she immediately vomited heavily.

But all she got rid of in such an unpleasant way was only water with a strange pink tinge. Just water, which she, without even noticing, managed to drink before noon. And, apparently, there was either some blood present. However, from this she wasn't as disgusted as expected. Yes, and the pain immediately gone.

She wiped her lips with her hand, washed off the water, straightened up and returned to the sink. Leaning on it, Francesca looked in a mirror. Her face turned pale, but otherwise she felt much better. *And yet it would be better to go to a doctor for an examination.*

Rinsing her mouth and washing her hands, she turned to the door. She can return to the class. There are still three lessons left, and she so wanted to talk about all this with Tammy. *But I can wait.* And with this thought, she left the toilet and, slightly swaying, walked along the corridor back to the lesson.

The waiting was becoming unbearable. Every break she went to the dining room and bought another portion of water. She had never been so thirsty. But for some reason Francesca still didn't seem to care about it. The only thing she wanted right now was to talk to Tammy.

When, finally, the last lesson ended, Francesca stormed out of the classroom and, not forgetting to drop into the dining room for a bag of juice, hurried to the park.

After walking a little among the trees of a shady alley, she came to her and her friend's favorite bench near the fountain, hidden in the depths of the park. They both loved this place because it had a simple, low-key beauty: crystal water calmed thoughts, gave rest to the eyes and emotions, all around smelled freshly cut grass and sounded the chirping of birds. There they like to chat about some unimportant matters or, conversely, about global issues, share news and secrets. This place has been humbly keeping their secrets for a long time.

Tammy wasn't there yet. Francesca sat down and slowly began to sip a scarlet cherry juice through a straw, drawing out patterns on the grass with a boot cape. Five minutes later, in the distance, a familiar figure loomed. Francesca was approached by a pretty girl of medium height with tanned skin and large waves of brown hair, gracefully lying on thin shoulders. Tammy smiled warmly from afar, hurried to her friend and flopped down next to her on the bench.

"Long wait?" she has begun to babbling in a cheerful voice.

"No."

"Well, what did you want to talk to me about?" she asked.

And at that moment Francesca suddenly realized that the desire to talk about what had happened left her without a trace. The serene atmosphere cooled her ardor, and all she wanted to do was sit and be quiet. She slowly drank the juice and looked puzzled at her friend. But under the watchful gaze of Tammy, she still pulled away from the straw.

"You know, nothing special. I panicked in vain," Francesca smiled tightly.

Tammy squinted in disbelief. There was a pause.

"Hmm... I know. Have you got a boyfriend?!" cheering, asked a friend.

"No," Francesca said lazily.

"But is this clearly related to the guy?"

"No."

"You're not lying?"

"No," the third time, the answer was firmer.

"But I met..."

And Tammy started her regular long story about a new boyfriend. Francesca has long ceased to count these guys because her friend has never been stayed long with them. She charmed them, dated them for a while, and then became interested in someone else. And so, it was repeated endlessly.

In fact, Tammy wasn't a heart breaker. No one was hurt by her love. She was just very funny, but a flighty person. Francesca loved and valued her as a friend. She was at peace with Tammy, even if she chatted incessantly. Tammy, of course, knew that Francesca was listening to her halfheartedly, but she wasn't offended: they understood each other well, as if they were sisters. And when her friend looked especially happy, Francesca even tried to pretend that she was listening very carefully, although at this time involuntarily hovered somewhere in clouds.

She didn't even really understand, why she was so suddenly unwilling to talk about what had happened. This is probably intuition. Francesca felt that she had better say nothing. So, relaxing, she continued to slowly drink the juice and look at carefree shining Tammy.

Suddenly, after some time, Francesca felt the growing pain somewhere in the solar plexus. Her eyes widened involuntarily, as soon as she realized what it threatened.

The pain intensified and became unbearable, as if her organs, all cells and tissues were torn apart. In the eyes darkened. She bent, her head buried in her knees. From afar was coming the troubled voice of Tammy, but her words were muffled by the ringing noise in her ears.

Somewhere in the depths of her body there was a dull crunch, and the first push hit the throat. Francesca slid off the bench and fell on all fours. Nearby, her scared to death girlfriend was shaking her shoulder. And inside, as if a bloody battle unfolded, not for life, but for death. The ribs seemed to be cracked now. Then invisible knives pierced the lower abdomen – it seemed as if the meat grinder was working. Another push and she vomited on the smooth emerald grass near the bench.

The ringing in her ears stopped, and Francesca heard her friend's exclamation:

"... did you get drunk yesterday?!"

And she felt better again. Francesca saw the same water in front of her, only now with a more pronounced red tinge. Tammy lifted her up, put her arms around her shoulders, and quickly dragged her along. Almost running, the friend pulled Francesca out of the park, still supporting her waist, thinking that she could fall at any moment.

"I'm better. Better!" Francesca slightly raised her voice so that Tammy would let her go. They stopped.

"Sure? Bring you home? How're you feeling?" Tammy's voice trembled. She was seriously scared. And there were reasons for this.

"Yes. For sure. I'm fine."

Francesca didn't dare to say that this had already happened in school.

"Can you walk?"

"Yeah."

"I'll take you home after all. And don't you dare argue!"

She wasn't going to. Contradict the friend? No, the consequences of this even an enemy doesn't wish. And in her company, in any case, it was much calmer and better. Tammy threw her arm around and looked at Francesca with a worried look. Girl was taken aback.

"What? I'm alright."

"Are you sure there's nothing you want to tell me?"

"Yes, of course. I probably got poisoned in the school cafeteria," *if you lie, then lie to the last.*

"But you wanted to talk to me about something this morning. Didn't you?"

Francesca lost in thought. She didn't like to deceive, and, in fact, didn't know how. What would she have to think of so that Tammy would stop worrying?

"I just wanted to ask you to help me with my homework. I began to lag behind a little," she felt, as on a forehead the inscription in large letters emerges: "I am a liar".

"Well. If you don't want to tell me now, don't tell," after a short silence Tammy said.

She postponed the sentence for later. But Francesca was grateful even for that.

Francesca was walking to the bus stop this morning, so she didn't have a chance to walk past the place where she met that psychopath last night. More precisely, he met her. And if more precisely – attacked. But now she and Tammy were walking along this road. Francesca recalled the trajectory of yesterday's path. Here she turned the corner and ran. Then she stopped to check if anyone was watching her. And she blundered when she decided that she herself was imbued with this fear.

She looked at the brick wall. The same smooth, silent, mute, not giving out their secrets... As if nothing had happened yesterday. There're so much people don't know. Although every day can pass by the scene of another crime and not even know it... There was a bitter sense of injustice. She wanted to shout: "Here! Here! It was here that he grabbed me!". But she was silent. All this seemed ridiculous, implausible and even stupid.

Approaching the door of her apartment, Francesca turned and looked at Tammy. In the eyes clearly read: "Thank you for escorting, then I can handle it myself." Friend, understanding everything without a word, nodded.

"If anything, call me anytime."

"Good."

But Tammy was in no hurry to leave and was still looking at her anxiously.

"Everything is good. True."

She clearly didn't believe. But didn't insist.

"Okay. Get better."

And Tammy turned and walked down the steps.

Taking a deep breath, Francesca entered the apartment and closed the door behind her. The ringing sound of her friend's heels reflected from the walls of the entrance, moving farther away. Francesca sat down on the floor in the hallway. She didn't want to think about anything. Not only that she has heavy heart, soon ached and the body. Her stomach ached again, and, with a tormented expression on her face, the girl went to the toilet.

The rest of the day went terribly. Mostly she did only two things: lay in bed or in a fit of nausea ran to toilet. It tired her not only physically, but also mentally. In the late afternoon, Francesca was lying down flat in bed under the blanket, waiting for the next burst of pain. It was gradually getting dark outside the window, and there was less and less light in the room. It pacified.

She extended the trembling hand to a water carafe on a bedside table. Francesca was already drinking straight from it, ignoring a lone glass. For some reason, she couldn't connect the two obvious things: the more she drinks, then more often she vomits. But she was thirsty. Unbearable thirsty. And the head had completely refused to work. The whole body was weak. And besides, she couldn't fall asleep, no matter how much she wanted to.

After another visit to the toilet (she was throwing up just clear liquid), water disgusted. And folding her arms across her chest, Francesca emaciated looked out the window.

Night was slowly falling on the city. Like a predatory beast, it sneaked through streets, shrouding houses in black veil. Sounds faded, lights turned on. In the east the sky has already disappeared into darkness.

About an hour later, as expected, a noisy company of young people passed under the windows. Among them, of course, was a couple who lived in a nearby house – Bunny and Kevin. They often gathered friends and got drunk, after which they were necessarily dragged to some club. It so happened that friends brought them back in an almost insane condition and unloaded directly under the entrance door. It seems that Bunny worked in the supermarket, and her friend was either a porter or someone else. He changed jobs like socks, and because of this they made such scandals that screams rang along the whole street. Every passerby heard them. However, afterwards they still put up and also usually not without emotions... And now they are going to the nightclub again.

Francesca didn't like night clubs. *A bunch of unhappy, lonely people who flood their lives with liters of alcohol and dumber minds by drugs...* she thought indignantly. After such a terrible day, all thoughts took quite a negative color.

She turned to the side, closed her eyes and diligently tried to sleep. It didn't work out... And closer to three o'clock, when the torturous insomnia was completely fed up, Francesca despaired and decided to resort to sleeping pills. Pulling the dusty jar out of the drawer, she put two pills in her mouth and washed down with water. She fluffed pillow, warmly covered himself with the blanket, lay down, unmoving, and closing eyes, waited for a salutary sleep...

It seemed that already not enough strength, and the air becomes treacherously less. Lungs burned and convulsive breathing broke from the lips. Her legs carried her along unknown dark alleys. There was no sound behind her, no hint of pursuit, but she knew *he* was there, that he was catching up with her, that he was watching her. Francesca felt his presence with all the cells in her body. It seemed to her that the faster she runs, the inevitably closer he to her. Frightening, unwelcome meeting followed her like her own shadow.

Moving was almost impossible, the body wouldn't obey. But ahead loomed the faint outline of a door. Is it really her salvation?! She ran up, grabbed the handle and, turning, without looking, jumped inside. Relief... And then the inevitable meeting with bright blue eyes...

It was the dining room. Very dark. Only the place where a long rectangular table stood was illuminated. Behind it would fit a man fifteen, but it was empty. Only a vase with large white flowers, a decanter filled with wine, and two crystal glasses were on the wooden table-top. At the table, in the far edge, sat on a high chair... *A Stranger*.

The face wasn't visible, the darkness enveloped all its features, hiding them under itself, as if under a veil. All except bright eyes. Only eyes; but Francesca recognized him. A shiver ran through her skin. She staggered to the door, fingers gripping the air in search of a handle, but it already there wasn't.

The Stranger stood up and walked slowly to a carafe with a slow, smooth gait. With long fingers, he wrapped around its neck. Francesca flinched, swallowing nervously. He filled both glasses to half-full, took them in his hands and walked slowly towards the girl. Fear gripped her. She leaned against the wall in the hope that it will allow to fall through it. But for a moment – and he was already standing right in front of her. And just as intently, as at that time, looked at her face.

And suddenly Francesca seemed to be under the influence of his captivating eyes. When he handed her the glass, she obediently raised her hand, accepting it. The Stranger stepped forward and was so close, that if even a little bit more, and he would have fully pressed against her trembling body. He gently lowered his head to her shoulder, hiding his face in smooth, dark-golden hair. His warm breath caressed neck exactly where two small wounds were gaping.

Heady sensation suddenly flooded Francesca. Fear remained, but it ceased to have its former significance. Heart pounding with mad power, and breathing increased. Head was spinning, knees went weak. At that moment, The Stranger let go of his glass. Sliding, it rapidly was falling to the floor.

Instantly covered with cracks, the glass shattered into fragments, giving freedom to its contents. Red liquid splashed onto Francesca's legs. And only then did she begin to realize that this wasn't wine at all.

Not allowing the girl to think about anything else, his strong arms wrapped around her waist and pressed to the slender male body. Lips clung to the drumming of the artery, and sharp fangs pierced two scarlet dots that didn't have time to drag on. From the neck under the skin spreading the sweet, but poisonous pain. Francesca looked up, but her eyes closed involuntarily before losing consciousness. One hand clenched the glass, the other tightly squeezed the shirt on his back.

Fingers weakened, and the second glass, slipping from her palm, landed with a clink at feet...

Francesca abruptly jumped up in the bed in shock. As immediately, her skin and eyes suddenly pierced with burning pain. Falling back onto the pillow, she quickly covered herself with the blanket over her head. All this happened in just a second.

Immediately in the morning nothing could be grasped. Before eyes still stood the gloomy dining room and what she took to be wine spilling on the glossy black parquet. She did not even notice that there was a large red spot on the pillow. Blood dripped from her neck, soaking the fabric and her hair. On right cheek stood out scarlet stains. Francesca realized this only when she smelled a distinct metallic smell.

She'd never given much thought to a smell of blood before. But now this distinct feeling is downright cut into the brain.

The girl carefully checked her neck with her hand – the wounds opened. Francesca began to stop the flow with her fingers, but the pungent smell hit her nose, strangely, insidiously affecting her appetite.

In fear, she again threw back the blanket and jumped up. And again, a burning itch ran through the skin. She fell to the floor behind the bed, where there was less light. Pulling the blanket off and wrapping it around her, Francesca hurried to the bathroom.

She even forgot to turn on the light – everything is so perfectly visible... in the dark. Opening the first-aid kit, she hurriedly began to look for cotton and plaster. Blood was running down shoulder in a warm trickle and had already stained half of shirt. Hands in search of fumbled very quickly and deftly. Finally, having found what she was looking for, the girl opened the tap, soaked the cotton wool and wiped the wounds, immediately gluing them up with a piece of plaster.

And then her as if pierced by lightning. The hand with the bloodstained cotton trembled, willfully reaching for the nose. Francesca took a deep breath, lowering her heavy eyelids. A strange sensation stirred her entire being. The miraculous life smell, like warm molasses, spread in the lungs. A taste of salt and metal with a soft chill penetrated deep into the gums. It seemed to Francesca that she was surrounded by an alluring red haze, which asks her to be let inside. Oh, that sweet smell of human life...

Blood flowed out quite a lot. Fainting was inevitable. She understood this, but stood motionless. Thoughts flew at the speed of gunfire. But there seemed to be an invisible wall in her head that didn't allow all the facts to be tied together. Francesca so stubbornly didn't want to believe in what she could become... That she might have become... a creature... that had an uncontrollable thirst... for human... *blood*...

“No. It can't be. This is unreal... I'm sleeping,” – she whispered, convincing herself.

The skin was burning, the bones was aching, and the ground beneath feet was starting to shake. The air, soaked with blood, filled her lungs and slowly dissolved into them.

“No. I'm sleeping... Just sleeping... It's just a dream...”

Francesca staggered, fell to her knees, and collapsed onto the shiny ceramic tile floor.

II. Instincts

At noon, the sun stood at the zenith. It scorched a ground and a grass with a bright light. An air was heated to the limit, it became hot, stuffy, unbearable in the city. People were fussing, hurrying, running. In short, life was in full swing like an anthill.

But the bedroom of the girl named Francesca was silent and empty. Only in white rays of light danced small weightless specks of dust. In principle, it was supposed to be like that at this time of day – because she was usually in school. But today was different.

The exhausted girl slept in her own, shrouded in darkness, bathroom. The white sheet and pillows on the bed were dappled with red stains and patches of intricate patterns. There was a bitter taste of shock and despair. Minutes swiftly passed; one took turn to another.

The bell rang. The phone rang once, then a second, a third time...

“Hello!” responded the answering machine. “You called Francesca Dewan! Leave your message after the signal.”

A beep sounded, followed by an alarmed voice:

“Hey, Franky! How are you? You weren’t at school. Today I came for you, but your teacher said that you haven’t been there all day. Did something happen? You okay? Whatever happens, call me. I’m worried about you... Uh... Don’t be a stranger, okay? All right. Bye. Be sure to call! Bye.”

Tammy hung up the phone.

And time went by. The sun had already begun to set off. But nothing changed in the room. Only the light falling on the walls and the floor moved smoothly. Closer to five o’clock, the phone again reminded about its existence, but wasn’t heard. Another beep:

“It’s me again. Will you come to work? If not, then I will say that you are sick, okay? I’ll cover you, don’t worry. Just call me! I hope this has nothing to do with what you wanted to tell me. If you need my help, just tell me. There was no one to look after you, except for me,” there was a short and kind of gloomy chuckle. “Anyway, I’m really worried about you. You let me know about yourself as soon as you can. I’ll wait. Bye.”

A red-hot orange ball was disappearing over the horizon. It was less visible because of the tall buildings. The sky shimmered with all the colors of the rainbow – from bright pink to dark blue. At the very edge of the earth, slowly disappearing golden arrows stretched into different ends. Strips of planes divided the endless expanses of the sky into parts, resembling cracks in the glass. A cool breeze blew from the north, cooling the air heated in a day.

But Francesca didn’t see or feel any of this. Now she felt only a distinct smell of blood. Even in sleep.

She felt tingle under the ribs. From suddenly surging feelings, the girl immediately woke up. Before her eyes stood the darkness, diluted with a slight gloss of ceramic tiles. Covering her face with her hands, Francesca rolled onto her back. Near the sink and shower – it means that she is in the bathroom, lying on the blanket, under which was hiding when she ran here. She didn’t want to get up. The body didn’t obey. The head was buzzing.

The sun, at parting, flashed a fiery scarlet edge of a shining disk and disappeared beyond the horizon. The sky immediately became cold shades of twilight.

Francesca turned back and went down on all fours. Crawling to the doorway, she tried not to breathe, so as not to feel the frantic heady aroma. Looking out and glancing at the window, she realized that the day had already gone to give light to other lands. All the better.

As an outbreak, immediately appeared an idea to hide away smells that irritated the brain. She stuffed the blanket into the washing machine, then walked into the room and, quickly going to the bed, took off the pillowcases and pulled off the sheet. She went back to the bathroom, quickly

pushed everything into the machine and slammed the door. It became easier quite a bit. In the air, the persistent smell was still soaring.

Francesca grabbed a bottle of cheap perfume from the glass shelf near the sink and began to spray around its contents. Instantly, the sweet candy-floral aroma dissipated within of the apartment. It permeated the walls and floor, and seemingly hid the irritant in a fragrant fog. But only the blood still invariably was felt by surprisingly sensitive nose. From that the stomach went in knots.

Then she unscrewed the lid of the bottle and in a rush spilled liquid throughout the apartment. The progress has been. But it was too poisonously obvious. Now she decided that it was better to open the window and let the air out, as the smells increased ten times, if not more, and unbearably burned nostrils. Francesca opened the window wide and let in a wave of fresh air into the room. *Well? Will this war with smells end or not?* She sat down tiredly on the floor and wrapped her arms around her knees, pressing them to her chest.

It's disgusting. And it's a shame. Francesca was scared, angry, and confused. Everything that happened to her was more like madness. It couldn't be real.

She looked at her hands, fingers, nails. Straightened and studied the legs, knees, feet. Everything seems to be the same. Only the skin became smoother and lighter. Flawless. Well, in general, there is no change. Warm, so not dead. But the body felt terribly oppressive fatigue, as if she hadn't slept or eaten for a week.

Probably worth a look in the mirror...

Francesca stood up and walked slowly to the mirror on the wall beside her bed. She walked timidly over to the glittering glass in the wooden frame and looked into her eyes. Her shadow-shaded reflection, in turn, looked at Francesca.

The usual gray iris, with a blue rim around the edges, was now dark purple. Deciding that this is an optical illusion, she pressed her hands to her face, rubbed it and, removing them, looked at herself again. It's purple. Almost black. The girl frowned, but she didn't have enough strength to think rationally, so she just continued to examine herself. Nose, forehead, hair, neck – all the same as before. But after all the main, of course, were far not these features.

She put her index fingers under her upper lip and, looking intently at her mouth, as if afraid to miss something, lifted her up. White, smooth, beautiful teeth. And just standing out, like a prima ballerina on stage, two long...

“Ah...” she gasped out of her chest.

...razor-sharp...

“Ahh...” she monotonously stretched.

...animal *fangs* glittered in the gloom.

“Ahhhh...” groaning, the girl was sliding to the floor.

It was as if she saw a monster. All veins have pinned down by ice chains of fear.

“No. No! NO!” she repeated. “I don't want! This can't be happening! No!”

And the forces, as before, quickly left. And soon Francesca collapsed limply on the cold floor, but slowly and quietly continued to repeat:

“No... no... no...”

After a while she began to shiver. A small shudder ran through the skin, the girl began to shake from within. She felt something very much like hunger. Or rather, thirst, only multiplied a hundred times. Deep down, Francesca knew – it wasn't hard to guess – what she needed, what her body required, but the last thing she wanted. It's unfair. It's cruel.

Francesca fought hard, but in vain. And gradually the mind began to leave the girl. And its place was taken by instincts. They didn't argue with her. They've established that between her life and someone else's, they choose her.

She looked like a somnambulist: the body was moving, but there was no consciousness. It slept, fell into a slumber. But there was no emptiness inside either, not at all.

Rising from the floor, she walked slowly to the closet. Hands reached for the brightest and most attractive clothes – what else is necessary for search of a victim? A translucent blue blouse with a plunging neckline, black leather shorts in sequins and rhinestones – all these clothes gave her Tammy, deciding to play a joke on her once. They laughed for a long time, because even without words it was clear that Francesca wouldn't wear such thing. Black patent leather shoes with metal rivets showed off on the bottom shelf. Part of the same story. Now, a friend's gift will serve well.

A creature that was born inside wasn't waste time on preening. And so, dressed, the girl immediately went to the door.

Somewhere in a depth of this body remained Francesca's pathetic crumbs of mind. She wanted to stop herself, but she didn't even have the strength to desire anything. The animal that had found its way into a world was suppressing her more and more, growing and taking its place. It absorbed her body until finally Francesca fell into a deep sleep. And the monster nothing more interfered.

Once on the street, she stood in the shadow near the entrance. Wait, now it only remained to wait.

Soon, the sound of footsteps and loud laughter swept the street. Yes, it is the red-haired Bunny, the bully Kevin and their friends – her companions and best friends for tonight. Where at night is the biggest gathering of young people full of life energy? Naturally, in clubs. Francesca didn't know a single club, and the neighbors, who loved to have fun, of course, went to one of these places. Her luck. After waiting for them to pass, Francesca stealthily followed them.

With bottles of alcohol at the ready and loud shouts, the company waddled along the dark street. Their black figures were almost invisible, but Francesca was guided by the smell.

Of course, it was possible to catch one of them right now, but she clearly understood that then she would fall under suspicion. The creature inside her body behaved extremely intelligently. If she tries to take away any of their company and *kill*, then there is a chance that Kevin or Bunny will recognize her later, when the police find out about the loss. Besides, they live next door to her. No, it's risky. Why should she attract too much attention to herself? So, it would be better to find a stranger, and in a place where almost no one remembers anyone because of the amount of alcohol consumed. And if they remember, their testimony is unlikely to be taken seriously. So, it's better to use this couple and their friends as guides to the night world.

Francesca followed them very slowly. Her body was weakened by hunger. But companions were in no hurry. All night ahead, where to rush?

The club, to which they reached, was a kind of provincial-looking, but without payment and security at the entrance. A concrete wall with peeling paint and a massive iron door, from which came the bass of music banging on the ears. Above the door hung a glowing sign with the name of the club "Fallen Angel". It's very poetic. Only a few light bulbs burned out. Near the entrance, people in bright clothes crowded and cars parked. Bunny's company rushed there. Francesca trailed behind them.

When the door opened and she stepped inside, her ears were pierced by unnaturally loud music. The girl involuntarily frowned from discontent. She was only a couple of times in discos and it seemed like it was quieter there. But suddenly the sounds began to range from unbearably loud to barely audible. Are they so bad with the equipment? Or is it DJ's fault? But no one around this weren't noticing. It seems that all the changes happening in her ears.

All had fun, were ecstasy. The youth partied. Most likely, most of them are under the influence of drugs. Francesca was even able to put a finger on who exactly. She defined it not by dilated pupils or something like that. No. The light around was very little, in such circumstances, people's eyes are difficult to see. She just felt them somehow. She didn't know how. And yet she knew for sure that more than half of them were high. Which means, a blood is dirty.

There was no point in looking around. And in the eyes everything floated with the general movement. She was terribly hungry. It is time to decide on a suitable victim. Francesca moved forward, guided by the smell of purer blood. The girl on the left is drunk, the guy on the right is a regular drug addict, and the couple at the bar stand are HIV-infected.

The music in the ears has changed to a quieter tone, and the situation in front of her has cleared noticeably. She felt “pure” people, which means that there is hope. The best goal would be, of course, the guy. And attract easier and lead. This will be a clear win. So, she defined the task. “Where are you?” – sounded in her head. Francesca knew, she had to be drawn to the victim like a magnet.

“Think... think...”

She increasingly immersed herself in a homogeneous mass of people in order to understand who is who. Understand who suits her. As time went on. It wasn't enough. And it worked against her.

“Breathe in, breathe out... Heart... Heartbeat... Pulse...” she whispered to herself. “Not this one, not this one... No, no, no...” she moved slowly deeper into the dancing crowd. “Not this... No, not this. No...”

Francesca turned her head to the right and suddenly caught the right smell. Eyes wide open:

“This one!”

She moved through the crowd to the chosen victim, not even seeing his face. The source of the smell was getting closer and closer. And so, near the back door, she noticed a tall young guy. Yes, he is the one she was looking for.

Without a doubt, Francesca, staggering, was walking toward him. Coming close, she stopped and looked straight at him. Her body was curved like a spine of a snake. In anticipation, she brought her hand to her mouth and bit the nail of her index finger. The guy looked at her and reacted quite predictably what was into the hands for her.

“Hi, baby! Do you want to dance?” he smiled broadly, clearly feeling the influx of excitement.

The guy was disgustingly cute, but quite healthy looking. He, rather, belonged to the category, so to speak, ladies ' man. This is a very good find for the first time. Francesca did not answer, but studied him carefully, most of all paying attention to the pulse drumming under the skin.

“Well, what do you say, cutie?” he winked.

When the inspection of the “food” was over, she took the guy's hand without talking and led him to the back door.

“Wow! That fast?” he exclaimed in pretense surprise. “All right!”

He obediently followed her. Probably also thought that the evening was a success. Stepping outside and going down the concrete steps, Francesca led him along the gloomy alleys farther away from the witnesses. Making sure that they were far away from the club and in the depths of the city, where there isn't a single soul, she let him go and wearily leaned back against the wall.

Somewhere in the subconscious, the image of the Stranger emerged, pressing her by the throat against the brick wall. His cold silence, smooth movements, his strength. His tooth. Bite... Now for her it was like an instruction. She should remember everything in detail and try to reproduce his actions.

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