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RUSSIAN
HORROR
BOOK

SHORT STORIES BY VICTOR BACAU

Victor Bacau

Russian Horror Book

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Аннотация

Scary urban tales have been popular in Russia for a long time, and I can say why – even through fear, even through horror, people are ready to believe that there is something more in the world than their everyday life. And perhaps this is also true for people all over the world. Fear gives rise to terrible stories. And in every story, as you know, there must be a monster. And a hero. So, that is not so bad, to feel fear, – for it's an occasion to find a hero. Once, maybe, even in you.

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Victor Bacau

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For as long as I can remember, I always liked scary stories. I've always been a geek, I loved Lovecraft, Edgar Poe, and of course Stephen King. I always thought there was more life in horror stories than in ordinary stories. A couple of years ago I just collected stories of different people of the world, I collected many old legends, urban stories from around the world, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the United States. I was wondering what people from different countries are afraid of. I searched and studied them for several months, that was more than just interest. It was as if something was pushing me to that, and I soon found what I was subconsciously looking for all these terrible stories similarity. Each country has its own flavor, its own special monsters, and at the same time there is some terrible similarity.

I excitedly told my friends about such similarities, for me there was some discovery :

Spirits – owners of waters and forests

Child-eating witches, vampires

Werewolves – bears and so on

And a lot of monsters, similar to each other, even if they were from different countries.

All those similarities, all those stories from different parts of the world, in which there is something common, they seem to give hope to the crazy geek that in the world there really is something more remote, something more than our everyday life.

One day I decided to make my own list of scary stories and in this book I want to share our horror, as if I was telling these stories to a friend, perhaps from the other side of the world.

Here in Russia we are afraid of many things, perhaps, as lots of other people are.

Our history has long been divided into two periods, before and after the revolution. From ‘before’ we own numerous ancient legends of monsters living in cold forests and terrible swamps; stories about the human cruelty of merchants and landlords during serfdom.

The Soviet Union and its collapse brought some confusion to our thoughts and left us a lot of terrible tales about the military development programs of the time.

The first decade after the collapse of the USSR brought us pain and disappointment of new military conflicts and our hard

lives.

While politicians and heads of states were arguing who was right and who was stronger, millions of people tried to survive on the brink of poverty, they learned to get used to a new life and, of course, they had something to fear.

The huge factories that had been accompanying us right from the Soviet Age had suddenly become awfully empty, staring at us with their black 'eye-sockets'. The architecture that seemed pretentious, had become eerily creepy. The great and controversial era was then off, and its former extent remained a gray faceless houses, which nowadays we have a symbol of urban horror.

We have almost no haunted castles left, but something else.

Old high-rise buildings and dilapidated barracks, Soviet hospitals and factories, crumbling and rotting.

Russian horror was born in the hopelessness and despondency of old abandoned buildings; in tiny Soviet apartments with their old furniture. It hides in cold deep woods near our cities.

Our horrors are controversial just as our history.

The horror, the otherworldly, the inexplicable are every time a test to understand what you believe and to know who you are.

I can say that scary urban tales have been popular in Russia for a long time, and I can say why – even through fear, even through horror, people are ready to believe that there is something more in the world than their everyday life. And perhaps this is also true for people all over the world. Fear gives rise to terrible stories. And in every story, as you know, there must be a monster. And a hero.

So, that is not so bad, to feel fear, – for it's an occasion to find a hero. Once, maybe, even in yourself.

Vuver Kuva

A couple of my friends, like most of our local restless youth, were looking for quick money.

But don't think badly of them. Quick money is not surely drugs or casinos or anything illegal or criminal.

There have always been traps for those who'd graduated from a university then found that can get only a place of a loader or a cashier in malls.

My friend, an economist, could not accept the fact that he has no prospects in our small town. He left for a big city and when had a fail there, he came back home unexpectedly and found some office, where he had been promised a lot of money. Well, who doesn't want a lot of money, and quickly and legally?

The "job" was to lure people into a private pension fund. Nonsense, of course, but Max was excited. Most of the time he was just visiting people, where he offered and offered. He was being scolded, but he was a stubborn guy as well, so sometimes he managed even to earn some money.

I told him, I warned him: it's a bad time to go peddling! Well, where could one find a dullard who would allow you to step in the apartment? Nobody would open the door, and if so, could you

say for sure that there hadn't been any maniac inside? One blow to your head, – and your face is now on milk cartons!

Max went missing three months later since he had been hired. Marina went missing the next month.

According to the official version, they were reported missing. Not dead, but gone... may still be alive. A vain hope of their families and friends, which is even worse than the truth, whatever it was.

It was strange and unpleasant, to feel that your friends were dead. It's not like when you know that they've just disappeared for a work or went out somewhere – Marina with her boyfriend, and Max with his girlfriend.

That sense was unexpected; you could remember them and realize they weren't alive anymore.

Something had happened.

“Their bodies were not found and will never be! Maybe some will emerge in five years, alive or dead,” said my friend over a beer. He was so cynical sometimes. For about three years he didn't manage to sleep enough. He did not like his work of the district police officer. “Maybe they went out somewhere

together. In love, they.”

“Nope, it’s bullshit,” I was trying to bring the conversation to what I had been thinking for the past two weeks.

I invited him to a cheap canteen, asking for help, and treated him to shawarma and beer. He slowly moved his jaws and he was looking not at me, but somewhere behind my back.

“I talked to the parents both of Max, and of Marina,” I went on. “The cops told, the last time at work, Max and Marina both visited the same house. You know, that three-storey building on ‘Prokhorov’? Near the shacks? Well, that very house...”

“Who told them?” my friend looked at me, and I stopped.

“Police. Well, your colleagues. You know.”

“Got it, got it,” the policeman said grimly, and looked pointedly at his empty beer mug.

I ordered more.

“The last time they were in this house, and then their trails are cut, you see! All that with a break of one month! Coincidence? I don’t think so!”

My friend laughed.

“Now tell me they disappeared at the full moon!”

He laughed even harder when he saw my face had changed. No, I didn’t check those things about the moon. But I was ready to test and believe anything, and it seemed to me that it was noticeable.

“Playing detective?” my friend concluded, having stopped

laughing.

“I was just thinking...”

“Look, what do you want from me, huh?” the district police officer spoke quietly, but so sharply and roughly that it seemed to me as if he was yelling. “Why did you call me? I’m like a dog at work, you know. And here you are! and your uncertain affairs! That’s not the case for district police officers, but for the Criminal division.”

At some point, my friend stopped noticing me and started talking as if to himself.

“I have a friend transferred to the Criminal division, so now he hasn’t any problems. At least he’s getting enough sleep. Sometimes. And the salary is good – he bought his own apart...”

He looked absently. He was overwhelmed with fatigue and self-pity, and I couldn’t blame him.

“I just want to get into *that* house, to see what kind of people lived there. And maybe to find there someone suspicious.”

“Our guys would have gotten all suspicious persons by now. But you – you’re kind of a hero. All suspicious people out there now, huh?”

He looked at me with a sad grin.

After all, I got him persuaded.

By the time we got to that house, it was getting dark. The officer sipped coffee from his thermos.

“So what? What’s the plan, hero?”

I didn’t have any.

It all came down to the fact we went around a few apartments for a stupid reason: to check whether everything was OK. Hey, they say that recently some people were missing here about. Sir, ma’am, did you notice anything strange?

My friend looked unhappy and gloomy.

I was dressed as a civilian, and people, who smiled politely to the district police officer, looked at me with distrust. Naturally, *we* looked suspicious.

“All this is some kind of a farce,” he said to me when we went to the second entrance. No-one answered the knock. When we reached the third floor, we were knocking the doors of three apartments there and were about to go down, as one of the doors opened.

There was an old woman, so decrepit, skinny, gray-haired – seemed about to depart to the other world. She was wearing

a plain calico dress, old and fade, probably being washed a thousand times.

“Yes, luv?” she said, staring with her colorless eyes at the officer.

The old generation is responsible, unlike young people.

In spite of the fact that I am young, I can honestly speak about it.

In the rest of the apartments in that building, nobody opened their doors, although we could definitely notice lights in their windows from the outside; so someone was there in those apartments. But the tenants could see a police officer in their peepholes and decided to pretend that they had not heard anything, and to lay low.

But that old lady, though could hardly move her legs, considered it her duty to open the door for the police. However, maybe she just needed someone to talk to?

In general, she was so friendly, she invited us in so persistently, and we decided to have respect for the granny¹ and stay with her for fifteen minutes.

¹ in Russia, you may address with this word to any old woman

The apartment was old-fashioned, clean and sparsely furnished; an old polished wall-unit of the Soviet age, and an old sofa in the only room.

The kitchen was just as simple and clean, with lace window curtains. The walls were covered with faded (and turned yellow in some places) millefleur wallpapers, that had been there for probably twenty years or more. Everything there seemed faded and yellow, within the light of cheap yellow bulbs. The whole apartment smelled damp rags and mothballs. The smell of old age.

We went into a tiny kitchen: a table, a couple of stools, a blackened gas stove. On the door of the old-type ‘Sviyazhsk’ fridge there was a huge number of magnets and square stickers that people collected in the nineties.

I noticed that my friend habitually, ‘professionally’ was glancing around the old woman’s apartment. She, meanwhile, warmed some tea and muttered something about the hard work of police officers.

“The Granny is a God’s dandelion²,” smiled the officer behind her.

² an idiom used for harmless, old people

She even named us ‘luv’, in a grannies’ manner, addressing to one, to another in turn.

“Whatcha looking for, luv? Walking, wand’ring... What’s the matter with us? This district is quiet as a swamp.”

She had a terrible lisp, because of many teeth missing.

“Yes, that’s my friend worries for his friends. No idea where could be...”

He looked at me, as if saying that it’s my turn to mess around.

And I began to talk, while the old woman was listening to me and pouring mugs with blackest tea and the boiling water.

“A meat pie, luv?” she asked, waving that pie in front of my face. She had pulled a whole pan of those pies out of her old gas stove.

The pie smelled bad, like it hadn’t meat in it – but God knows what, and we both said no. Everything in this apartment smelled strange, even tea and food.

“My friends worked in this district, in this house, too. They visited people, offered...”

“What offer?” the granny leaned closer to hear me.

“Their work was offering contracts for pension. Before they

disappeared!” I almost shouted the last words in her ear.

“Oh, I remember one of them, I do.”

“Really?”

“Yep. There was a young girl. Curly hair.”

“That was Marina. And the guy, d’ye remember the guy? Tall, short-haired.”

The old woman didn’t seem to hear me.

“She was walking here, too, as you same, knocking to every door,” the old woman nodded her head. “She went knocking persistently. She knocked at the doors, I snuck to see who was there. And there’s a young girl with a file... It’s dangerous to walk alone like that!”

“Did someone open doors for her?”

“Nope. Other apartments are in rent, youth live there... Maybe they were afraid of something – no one opened.”

“Did she knock on your door too?”

“No, she didn’t. I opened it before. I tell her, ‘Whatcha want, luv, whatcha walk alone?’; she began to tell me, too, something about my pension, as I say... I say – let me sign what you give me. And she says – you don’t have to, and you already have your pension. So she left. I don’t know who else opened for her. The district is quiet like a swamp, strangers are not welcomed. But still walking alone is dangerous...”

“She’s missing, Grandma. Several months she’s been looking for,” the officer said. We tried to drink tea, but no chance, it was too hot. Hot, boiling water.

“Oh, poor thing...” the old woman sighed and shook her head. “It’s dangerous to walk alone...”

After another five minutes we left, never having drunk a cup of tea, but for some reason very tired and exhausted.

“No sense to talk to that old woman... neither to the neighbors,” said my companion, heading to the car.

“I understand. But this house was the last in the bypass schedule of both Marina, and Max.”

“Was it the last time anyone saw them? That’s the last house in their schedule, so what? They could finish the job, leave papers in the office and go to a club, or somewhere else... some pub. And from that place they yet could get anywhere.”

“That’s what you think,” I shrugged. “My friends were interrogated, so I was. The police shook down everything, but no things were found neither in the office nor in their apartments. And if Marina had gone to a pub, she would have called her mother. She always called back, no matter what party she went to.”

The officer shrugged too, as saying that was “inconclusive.”

“Look, our guys aren’t stupid.”

“I know.”

“Our hunch is not enough. One cannot simply search every apartment, don’t you understand that?”

I nodded.

“Yes I know.”

“All right then, let’s go home.”

At that moment, his cell phone rang. He took, listened and said, “I’ll be right there.”

“Again!” he grumbled, getting into the car. “Do this, fix that!.. I’m filling in here for everyone! That’s killing me, I say you!”

I got home late.

My mother was awake – watching TV in her room. I knocked.

“Hey. Why aren’t sleeping?”

“Just watching the new series, quite interesting,” she rubbed her sleepy eyes. She was waiting when I get back, although I said her I would back later.

“Want some tea?” she offered.

“Yes, please. I’ll pour the water on, you can keep watching.”

We could talk about anything, but sometimes I reminded myself that she was not just a friend to me, she was my mother, to whom her old age was already so close. And it was a real beastliness to make her nervous about anything. But I could not simply be silent, my heart was restless. So to her question ‘Where have you been?’ I honestly answered: ‘Prokhorov’.

She frowned.

“That house among the shacks? What did you need there?”

I told her.

Of course she knew two of my friends were missing; because I had been summoned to the police station as a friend, to gather information. Then I was also talking about my suspicions (and my hunch), about how I went to ‘Prokhorov’ with my friend – the district police officer.

Mother poured the tea. Finally, I had some normal tea.

“Do you think if the police had found a hook, wouldn’t they have done anything?”

A hook! My Mom used words from her favorite detective series.

I raised my hands as if saying, “I surrender!”.

“Okay, you may laugh. It seemed to me that this way it was possible to find something. That district is creepy. And the old woman is strange...”

Mother raised her eyebrow.

“The old woman?”

I told her. And the more I was telling, the more worried my mother’s face seemed.

“Don’t ever go there again.”

“Why, Mom?”

She interrupted me.

“Did you take anything from her? Don’t take anything from such people. Did you eat anything? Tell me honestly!”

“We didn’t even have tea, honestly! Mom, what’s up? What are you talking about?”

“Okay. You may laugh if you want to,” Mother waved her hand.

It turned out that the old woman was considered to be

someone like the city freak, a local witch; and some people told different curious things about her.

“She’s a witch, everyone knows!” my mother said, and I smiled and shook my head.

“Yeah, everyone knows, except me.”

“Young people never pay attention to substantial things!”

Again – ‘young people’ and ‘not young people’.

Mother kept telling.

“Twenty years ago there was a story with that lady. In general, everyone knew she’s a witch, and there were people who went to see her, you understand why.”

“I don’t understand why.”

“Well, her work. I don’t know what exactly she used to practice. Taints, putting spells... She didn’t hide the fact of being involved with black magic. She hated hearing about God whatsoever, and didn’t name it anything but lies. Said, nobody’s ‘over there’...”

Mother was silent a bit, thinking deeply.

“A strange sort of people. They never believe in God, but do believe in magic. What nonsense.”

“Yeah, that’s stupidity,” I agreed. “So what happened to her? to the old lady.”

“Well, she was said to be rather rich. Perhaps she could earn a lot due to her magical practice. That wasn’t evident, but rumors were about that she had some cash. One day fellows visited her...”

“What fellows?”

“Tall fellows. Mighty, and drunk,” Mother threw up her hands. “Just guys who needed to make money easy way.”

“Ah, they were looking for money?”

“Yes, they did. And even they found some, I say. Neighbors told later they heard the noise from the witch’s apartment, then the guys ran out and everything came still. The old woman was dead.”

I couldn’t understand a thing anymore.

“How’s dead if she’s alive?”

“They saw an ambulance driving up to her house, and then the police and the ritual service. They carried out her body, blood all over; her head was bashed. That day she was about seventy, nobody believed she would survive with those injuries. Someone heard that the ambulance confirmed her death, so she was taken to the morgue. And imagine that, there she regained consciousness!”

I chuckled, though I didn't like to hear it all.

“Toughest lady, uh?”

“Indeed she is. She didn't write the application, refused any treatment, cursed the police and went home dressed in a nightgown only, the same she wore when taken to the morgue. She was pale blue, like she was a real cadaver, and blood all over her clothes, can you imagine? Looking like that she walked along the streets... Those guys, by the way, went missing, four persons. That days, word got around she'd turned into a vampire. Vuver Kuva.”

“Kinda Baba Yaga?”

“Well, something like that. Vuver Kuva. The locals call it this way.”

“And it's been... twenty years ago?”

“Something about.”

“So she's ninety now, isn't she?”

“It appears she is.”

“And is she ... well, is she still doing magic?”

“I don't know what she's doing,” Mother shook her head, “but you just promise me you won't go back to that house either. Nothing to do with that nonsense. The police knows their business.”

“Okay, okay, got it,” I said. “But you know that everything you told me about that hag – that's a story. It's not a bit true!”

“People wouldn't just gab.”

“T’is impossible to trust everything people tell.”

“Yeah, right...” agreed my mother and left her half-full mug.

She looked upset.

“Come on, mom, I’m going to be okay,” it was me who started the conversation, and I had to calm her down. I hugged her and kissed her gently on the top of her head, as she used to do to me fifteen years ago.

“Everything will be okay,” I said again, “you know I don’t get into murky waters.”

I calmed her down and sent her to bed, and sat down in my room at the computer and began to look for information. I didn’t believe I was looking for that.

Vuver means ‘vampire’ in our region.

Regions are different, people are different. In our country, each region is dominated by some native, local ethnicity. Each ethnicity has a legend or a story about vampires. Such an old exploitive subject! We’re in the twenty-first century, and we still believe in magic, in Baba Yaga, and in people who can revive after death and drink blood!

Century twenty-first.

Outraged, I still kept googling it – about vampires, and about the cases people could suddenly wake up in the morgue and so

on and so on. I tickled my nerves with scary tales, morgue stories and all that stuff, and then somehow it imperceptibly happened I began to look through our pictures in social networks, pictures of Max, Marina, and other friends. Our class, our prom, our first day at uni.

And that hag kept coming to mind. Everything about her was weird. She was kinda hard of hearing nevertheless she managed to hear Marina was knocking at the wrong door. She said Max and Marina never came to see her... No, no, – she didn't say anything about Max.

She never said a word about her grandchildren, but old people love speaking about them! They are happy about having grandchildren, and feel pity if they don't have any. Older people like to talk about themselves also, but that one didn't say anything about herself, not even a word.

I leaned back in my computer chair and closed my eyes. Suddenly I remembered the moment as once went to the kitchen when Mom was drinking tea, and for some reason I asked her, "Mom, where's the garlic?"

I don't remember why I needed it. She looked at me like I was a dope and said, "Garlic's in the fridge. Look for a wooden stake in the cupboard."

We then laughed to tears. My Mom could have pulled a joke like that.

And then I found myself in a cold sweat.

The fridge.

I saw something on the hag's fridge! The same I saw in Max' pictures!

I started flipping through them again, clicking my mouse like a madman.

Not here.

Not there.

Maybe Marina's pics?

That's right. Marina had posted a picture from her office, their whole working team all together. The table, some documents on it, business cards and...

Cards. Green and white business cards. I saw a card like this on the hag's fridge. A small card, clamped under a magnet. I, too, had those cards, – Max brought me alot of them when he got that job.

The hag definitely met one of my friends.

Maybe Max. He would never refuse to drink tea for free and he could talk endlessly to anyone, even to annoying old ladies. He could have left a card for her grandchild, or just forget it. He

was there anyway!

Unless, of course...

It had to be found out. Definitely. I didn't care if I would be called paranoid, I had to go back to that house.

On the way there I was sure of being ready for anything. But when I was finally close to her house I realized that I was afraid. It was about half past ten. Not a window in the house was lit.

I scheduled a day and lied to my mother about going on duty at night. I took with a flashlight and a knife with me, as if I'd going camping. I was ready to record everything and, among other things, I bought a small recorder, just in case.

And though I had not fear inside, the closer I was to my goal, the more I was shaking. Literally shaking, with the rush of adrenaline.

The door of the second entrance was wide open – there was no light.

I enabled the video mode of my smartphone, putting it in a special pocket. I turned on the flashlight and went up the

creaking stairs.

Those stairs! When we visited the house together with the district police officer (by the way my friend is a real giant, unlike me) and the bulbs were lighted up at the entrance, I didn't pay attention to the stairs. But *that* moment, with every creak giving a deafening echo from every corner, – I remembered the stairs from my childhood nightmares; I ran, choking with fear, and the stairs fell under my feet...

In was chilly inside – that made my skin crawl badly.

What nonsense, I repeated to myself, I am only going to visit a lonely old lady to learn a little more than I know now.

When I reached the third floor, I knocked her door. My heart was pounding like a tambourine. I heard a small shuffling, then a faint creaking as she looked through the peephole to see who was knocking.

I pointed the flashlight to my face and waved my hand.

“Hello!” I said, trying to do loud enough to be heard from outside.

There came a clang of keys, and finally the door opened.

“Electrician?”

There was no any light in the whole house, so the hag’s apartment was dark as a grave... I put on the flashlight the way it was bright enough, but without bothering eyes.

“Hello! Remember me? I was here with the district police officer, you treated us to tea!”

The old woman looked at me with her big, colorless eyes.

“So what?”

“I am... I want to thank you. And ask a few more questions.”

“Can’t you fix the light?”

“Well... I’m not a master at this, to be honest.”

The old woman looked at me and was silent, as if waiting for something else. Then she shook her head and waved her bony hand.

“Come in then, don’t let the cold in here.”

I was tempted to ask her, “Aren’t you afraid to let me in? What if I’m some kind of maniac?” but I kept my mouth shut.

There was pitch black everywhere, and if I hadn’t my

flashlight, I would have tripped over something and smashed my nose. The old woman shuffled to the kitchen, and I followed her.

There she lit the candle. She struck a match, and it became even lighter, and it turned out that was the third candle she lit. Two short candles had melted right onto the table.

“Some tea, if you want,” she muttered, but I refused.

I felt uncomfortable. I felt stupid, blaming myself for coming there!

What’s going on in her old brain? She’d probably already thought of something wrong. If the tale my mother told me was true, even a part of it – that poor old woman didn’t have expect anything good from a guest like me. She knew, for sure – what kind of rumors were about her. And she might think I’d come to ask more stupid questions, pumped up with those very rumors.

I could tell by her sad sunken eyes that it was true.

“What have you got to say, luv?” she asked with some sad resignation. “Well?”

The candle on the table lit our faces.

I lowered the light of my smartphone and threw the beam on the fridge. So there it had been: on the fridge’s door. A business

card of the pension fund. I carefully pulled it out from under the magnet adorned with the name of some far city.

“This card,” I sat opposite her again, “my missing friends had a lot of them.”

“That girl, a friend of yours gave me it,” the hag nodded.

“The girl? Not a guy? Are you sure none of them came to see you?”

The old woman looked at me with longing in her eyes.

“Luv, do you know how old I am?” she pointed a finger at her head, with a light white hair on it. “Imma ninety-two, luv. And I’ve seen a lot over the years. You wouldn’t believe the things I heard, the things people did to me... Different people. It happened, they could offend me, an I could, too. But what do you think of *me*? I’m an old woman. No need to keep being angry with me, if so... I know they say I’m old and crazy. And when you’re ninety, if you are, you’ll be the same like me.”

She sighed.

“Well, maybe I’m crazy... I don’t have anyone at all... I’d forgotten how young I was. I can’t remember my own face. And if anyone came to me – maybe I forgot who’d came to me... or not. But you’re young, do you really think that I’m able to do

something bad? The old woman...”

Her lips trembled and she turned to the window.

I felt sorry for her, my heart ached. She was defenseless in her old age. For some reason she reminded me of my mother.

My mother was still young, with a rosy face, with only few wrinkles, as tiny rays, near her eyes and lips, and on the forehead. She always looked younger. She liked to joke and to laugh, but she sometimes cried. My mother was not afraid of her future old age. But it certainly was incomprehensible and frightening for her to think that her time, too, someday could pass.

I reached out to the old woman's hand and touched her cold dry skin. Feeling my touch, she turned to me and smiled.

And that moment I felt I was going mad.

A black shadow was rising in the corner behind her. Not a trembling shadow of candlelight, but something that had become a dense blackness, a darkness that moved on its own. I felt some chilling fear had awakened within me. The adrenaline hit my brain at the same moment and made the heart beat like mad. I was afraid to look upwards, I was terrified. That was a truly deep fear that made every hair on my body standing and

made me want to get on all fours and to howl with fear like a frightened dog.

I saw that. I looked up though, and it seemed to me that something was shifting in my head, as if trying to protect me from madness.

I saw a face coming out of the blackness.

I saw *a* face. My friend's face. She silently shouted to me, just with her lips: "RUN!"

I jerked my hand away a second before the hag rushed towards me across the table. I fell down from my chair with a crash. The light in front of me jumped up and went out – I dropped the flashlight. The candle, too, was out, and immediately there came the crash of the table falling. In the flickering light I saw something even more terrible than a ghost. I saw the hag's face changed dramatically, how it becoming bestial, indescribably dreadful.

All that happened in one moment, in a second. I yelled. I didn't remember what I had grabbed then – thought that was a broken table leg; and poked somewhere in front of me.

She prowled towards me on all fours, across the broken table. The wooden wreckage were crackling beneath her. I yelled again, and crawled back because I couldn't get up for fear. Everything was too fast. Too scary. She followed me like an animal, I tried

to hit her and at the same time to crawl away.

Finally I jumped up and ran. And there was nowhere to run in the tiny apartment.

The hallway was cramped. The front door was locked and wouldn't budge – and I didn't remember the moment the hag had closed it. I had a feeling that she, or it, was about to creep out of the kitchen, and I rushed into the only room.

As soon as I ran to the far corner, I realized that she was already there in the room. Slowly she got up from her haunches with broken movements, as if she had more joints than there should be... The moon was shining through the window, suddenly brightly, on a part of the room, so that I could see the hag's face. Young, smooth, thin face. Unnaturally round eyes, bared teeth. Blackest hair.

“A meat pie, luv?” she looked me straight in the eye and laughed.

I put my hands over my ears.

Her laughter tore my eardrums apart.

A meat pie. I felt sick and about to vomit.

She rushed at me, and I saw her face turn back into an old woman's when she came out of the moonlight.

It was like a nightmare. I ran, but I couldn't run, I hit, but I couldn't hurt her, like I was hitting something soft. My blows were drowning in the viscous darkness. My screams drowned in silence. My voice was gone as soon as I opened my mouth.

I fought back with the table leg. Vuver Kuva was wiry and strong, as if she felt no shock. She was reaching for me, trying to jump on me, but I kept dodging.

The smartphone popped out of my pocket and crashed to the floor. Miraculously it was not broken.

I rushed to take it, fell to the floor and grabbed the gadget, frantically trying to go into the phone book. My sweaty fingers were sliding on the glass – the touchscreen did not respond.

Finally it seemed to me that I had dialed the number of the police officer and after a couple of rings he picked up...

All of that was happening as if in one second. All eternity. Vuver was getting up again, approaching to me.

I yelled into the phone: "I'm here! HERE! PROKHOROV!"... I didn't scream like a human. Like a pig, or a cow probably... I couldn't recognize my own voice.

She pounced at me, and I only had time to put the table-leg forward as a barrier. Kuva clung to it with both clawed hands and pressed me to the floor with her weight. And she weighed like a grown man. She screamed triumphantly. And she was reaching for me with her body, with her face and huge, crooked teeth, which seemed to grow towards me and became even bigger.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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