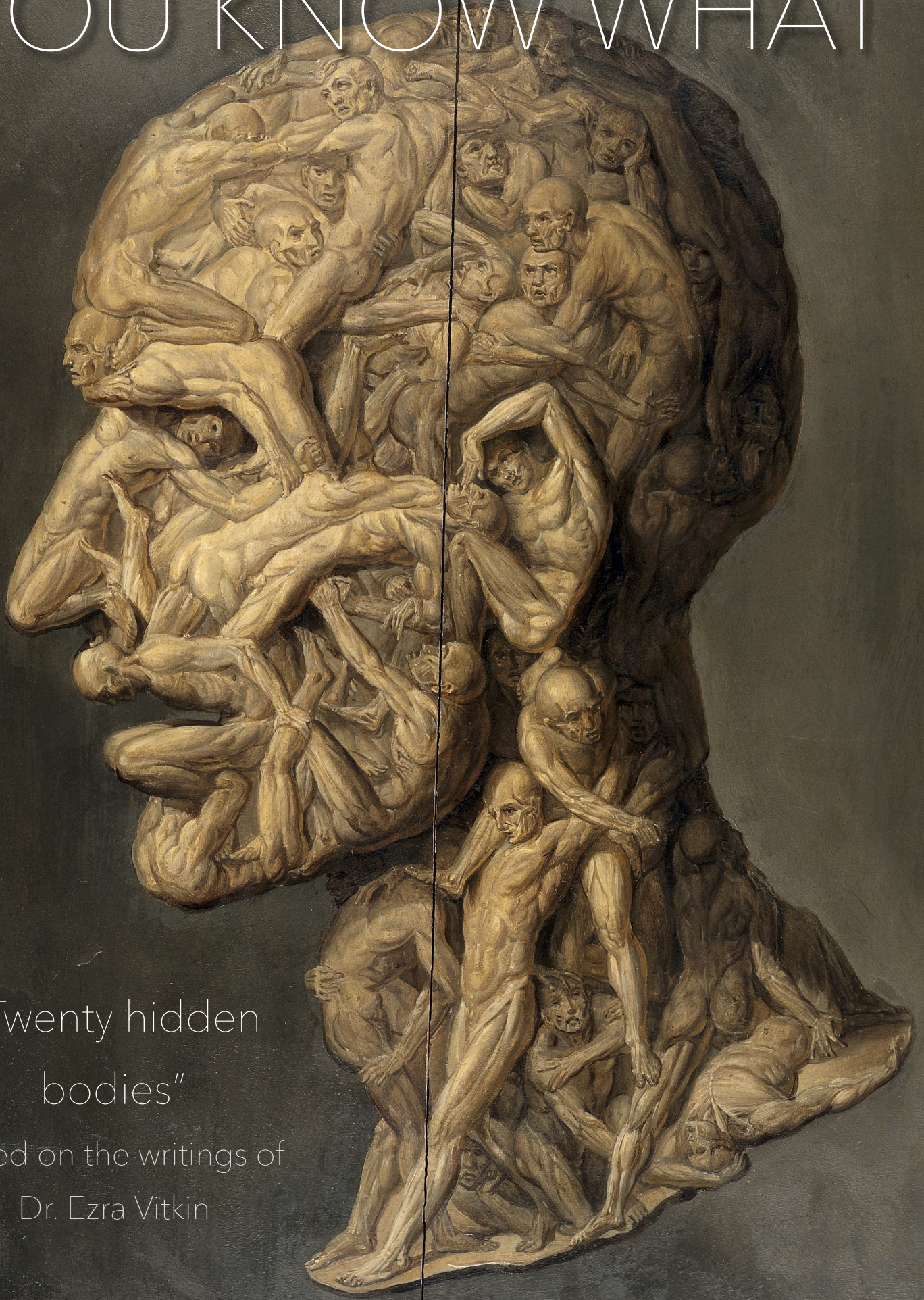


YOU KNOW WHAT



"Twenty hidden
bodies"

based on the writings of
Dr. Ezra Vitkin

Chapter I ; New Beginning

I'd like to say something absolutely special happened when I was born. I don't know... birds started to sing in human voices or a rainbow wrapped the hospital with colorful ribbons. However, nothing happened. It was raining cats and dogs and the storm was raging.

This summer was also full of storms, but everything else changed. I was reborn or I died. Actually, what's the difference?

A small room I was put in was painted white except for a wide grey strip on the height of a fly. I remember the bed was hard (which really bothered me, I've never liked hard beds) and I was strapped to it. The worst part was that my nose was itchy and I couldn't reach it. It lasted for at least an hour, maybe even longer. I heard somebody's gibberish behind the walls, another guy just kept on repeating 'this field, this field, this field'. The third guy from yet another room was saying things that sounded like 'pne', or 'fne' – it sounded like an inept attempt to pretend a ram bleating. Finally, a nurse came in with a doctor and a big guy in a white apron.

'Is he causing any problems?' the doctor asked.

'No, he's gentle as a lamb', the big guy answered, while another 'pne' or 'fne' could've been heard.

The nurse have injected the PVC and hooked a drip. A moment later, everything just started to fade away. I fell asleep.

‘Alfred...’ the doctor addressed me. I saw him very clearly again!

‘Alfie, for fuck sake, ALFIE! Everybody calls me Alfie!’ I screamed. I’ve always hated being called Alfred!

‘So be it Alfie. You were sent here by the court ruling to examine your sanity...’ the doctor was reading this formula almost worshipping his own voice.

I didn’t bother listen to his babble and could finally chill myself out. A monstrous (post mortem I guessed) bust of a woman whose hair looked like a horrifying veil stood on a column casting a gentle shadow on cabinet’s wall. There were lots of framed diplomas hanging on the walls; books and an old radio, which probably didn’t even work sat proudly on the shelves. There were also a coat stand, a desk, a round coffee table, a sofa and two armchairs in the room. And then there was me – strapped to a bed almost vertically set.

‘I have to go to the toilet.’ Although I said it calmly, I managed to annoy the doctor.

‘Pardon me?’ he replied in a very angry manner.

‘I have to go to the toilet’ I repeated.

‘You’ll report your need to the nurse after I’m done. And if you behave yourself, you’ll be able to go to the toilet escorted by our staff, of course. It’s all up to you and your behavior...’

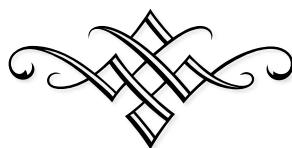
‘But I have to go now!’ I interrupted him again. He seemed very angry. It looked as though I destroyed his ideal plan for the day.

‘I’ve already told you – that’s the procedures!’ he ended the topic and was back to reading.

‘You prick!’ I thought. In this moment, my brain ordered my muscles to stop to tense. At first, I felt my urinary tract started to intensify its work. Then I felt an unspeakably pleasure of a warm moisture inside my pants. The sound of the fluid dripping on the floor was quiet at first, but then it got louder as I was in a vertical position. It didn’t seem to bother the doctor who continued to read his official papers. I smiled, because only I knew that wasn’t all. Few seconds later, my sphincters meekly carried out my brain’s order and a brown mass began to spill out of me. That was impossible to overlook – a new color in this white and sterile room. A big brown and stinky spot started to spread on the white, almost vertically set bed, to which I was strapped, dressed in a white shirt. The doctor only then saw and for sure smelled what had happened. He stopped reading and asked: ‘Do you realize what you have done?’

‘Yes, Doctor, I do,’ I replied. ‘I told you I had to go to toilet...’

When the screams stopped, I felt re-born. The strange sounds from the other rooms started to quiet. The day was coming to its end so I could go where I wanted to be. I closed my eyes.



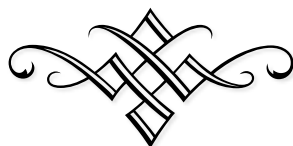
Chapter II ; Cave

I could do everything while dreaming! I traveled how and where I wanted. There were no limits. Basically as long as I could remember reality was always an unwanted intermission for sleep. I got up only to eat and go to the toilet. I also had had to work to get some sleep, but now I had everything provided, so I could sleep as long as I wanted.

A cave was my favorite place. I remembered a trip with my father when I was young. For four hours, we were struggling through heavy snow to get to the hillside. There was some treasure hidden under it! An entry to a small cave, in which apparently some prehistoric artifacts had once been discovered, was covered with a frozen waterfall. There were icy stalagmites and stalactites inside it. We flashed our flashlights and enjoyed the play of light. The colors were changing like in a three-dimensional kaleidoscope. I was there a lot of times and during every season of the year, and it was impossible for me to say which journey happened in a real life and which did not. To be honest, I wasn't sure if I had ever been inside this cave physically. I couldn't even tell with certainty that this cave really existed! Anyway, it was always my favorite hideaway, especially when I gave sleep to other people. No one could ever find me there!

I just lied there and listened to dripping water. It was warm and dry inside, even during winter. All you needed was a good sleeping bag, a fire ring near the entry and you could sit there forever. The beauty of the whole universe was captured in one drop. And another one, and another one... The cave was like home for me, more than my actual, real life home. One of cave's walls

was a solid rock. I recreated it in my bathroom with structural plaster. During sleepless nights, I would always go there, pour water on this wall and just look at drops falling down and reflecting lights...



Chapter III ; Escape

There is one thing that differed the cave's wall from my bathroom's one. If you looked closer, you'd see that someone carved words in the darkest corner of the cave. Those words went like this:

WHO SHOWED ME THE WAY
WHEN I WAS SLEEPING BY THE LIME?

WAS IT GOD?
OR RATHER
SOMEONE ELSE?

TWENTY HIDDEN BODIES
TWENTY HIDDEN BODIES
AND ONLY I KNOW
WHERE TIME IS DEVOURING THEM

WHEN A TIE WAS SLOWLY
SLIDING OF HIS NECK
HE LOOKED INTO MY EYES
FOR A SHORT MOMENT

LATER ONLY EMPTINESS
WAS LOOKING AT ME
IT WAS ALWAYS LIKE IT
WHEN SOMEONE FELL ASLEEP
IN MY ARMS

I DEAL SLEEP FOR FREE
I DEAL SLEEP FOR FREE
MY ONE GESTURE
CHANGES PEOPLE'S LIVES

EACH MORNING
GOD LOOKS AT ME
FROM MY MIRROR

I TRY TO TOUCH HIM
BUT ALL THAT'S THERE
IS GLASS EMPTINESS

These words are the biggest puzzle of my life. In my mind, I can recollect episodes of giving out dreams, as if it were some TV series. Of escaping many armed people. Of dogs hunting every trace I left. I see newspaper headlines, big articles saying that there is no progress in investigation. And still I'm not sure whether it happened in my real life or in my dreams. I struggle to differentiate one from another. The fact is I know where those bodies everyone is talking about are. No one knows but me! I've tried to show them, but then it has always happened in my dreams...

I've been living a double life for a while now. In dreams, police chase me, because they've seen me when I was showing the location of the bodies. While awake, I read about yet another victim taken by, as media call me, Mr. Lullaby. Apparently, I tend to leave some kind of a signature in a form of a poem. My mind is fucked up. In dreams, I know everything about the murders, even things never disclosed by media or police. When awake I collect scraps and record all the information concerning my doings and me. I describe them on my father's writing machine and catalogue in folders.



Chapter IV ; California

Street 6114

For almost two years, it seemed the lost people were connected to each other only by Mr. Lullaby's poem. It was a cold evening. While driving my car I listened to my radio. They talked about the kidnappings and new pieces of information released by the police. Apparently all those kidnapped people were members of satanic sects. What's more, all of them attended the secret funeral of Anton Szandor LaVey, which took place in October 1997 in Colma and before that, they all had taken part in rituals in Black House on 6114 California Street. Yet the most intriguing things were objects found at the crime scenes.

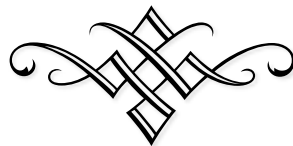
One of the victims had a beautiful necklace, which was ripped off her neck during her abduction. It was exactly when the victim's family found the pieces of the necklace neatly arranged on Mr. Lullaby's letter that the police started the investigation. The artist's incredible craft and his detail-orientation were seen only under a very strong magnifying glass. While from a distance it looked like an abstract piece of art, if you looked closer, you'd seen terrifying figures in some kind of convulsions. They were like movie frames. However, the necklace wasn't only about its artistic value. It had a subliminal message. After tests, it turned out the necklace was made of infants' bones. Police quickly figured it out. The victim's calendar, tickets, visas - it all seemed to confirm one terrible fact. The kidnapped girl had attended the infamous 'Demon's Feast'. Its aim was to sacrifice thirty three

infants to Satan during three months of rituals. Guess how many pieces had the necklace got?

Another victim's room was even more petrifying. It looked like a big altar, full of religious artifacts. Crosses, pictures of saints, candles... Only a religious fanatic would be able to live in such a place. Horrific dolls were found among some old stuff packed in boxes. One of them, surely the pearl of this sick collection, was dressed as a priest. But it wasn't all. There were also disturbingly specific tools. For example, there was a round object with spikes to be used when you felt sleepy while studying the Holy Bible. In such a case you just needed to clench your hand on the object and the spikes wouldn't let you de-concentrate. Some punishment tools showing traces of usage were lying on the prie-dieu. The investigators found a secret passage behind a bookcase. It was very narrow, so only almost an anorectic person would be able to get through it. A claustrophobic, dark room was on the other side. There were no lights there, but surprisingly a night-vision device was right at the entrance to this den. A big steel necropsy table was placed in the middle, surrounded with garage-like shelves full of jars with conserved parts of corpses, even the whole dead bodies in some of them. Humans of all ages, cats, dogs, chickens, all at once, arranged in a sick way. Behind that bizarre exhibition stood even bigger jars with eyes watching, fingers pointing at unwelcome visitors, jaws screaming in a silent shout. This macabre discovery resulted in the thorough searching of the rest of the apartment. When the investigators got to the Bible and opened it, they were stunned. Almost every page had traces of dried excreta, sperm and saliva. But among those hideous stains they saw beautiful and horrifying visions made of billions little strokes with annotations in unknown languages.

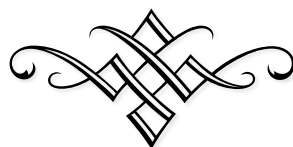
Yet the most twisted puzzle was connected with an online server called durda.com. All victims had their e-mail accounts there. The server and the

domain were pre-paid until December 2097. Accounts themselves had no limits, neither in data transfer, nor in capacity. The site itself showed nothing, not even a logo. No menu, no links, no content – just plain emptiness. The server was established on 1992's Boxing Day from somewhere in California. The webmaster was anonymous; the whole thing was pre-paid so no information was required. No one stood in charge of the server therefore potential users were able to create their e-mail accounts without any assistance. And durda.com offered nothing but electronic mail. It seemed to be an ideal way to communicate without any outer control. But when the investigators knew where to look, the answers came straight at them. As it turned out, Durda was the name of a Mars-crossing asteroid, which was discovered on the same Boxing Day the server was established. But what's strangest of all, it was labeled under number 6141! The investigators instantly connected it with the Black House's address. Only the two last digits were in different order. Was it a coincidence? An investigating squad was sent to 6114 California Street, but nothing was found there.



Chapter V ; House of Pleasure

My cave is my home, but don't cheat yourself, you can't live away from civilisation. Sometimes you must go back to it! I like my apartment. It is shabby and in a skimpy neighbourhood, but nevertheless I like it. Being awake tires me horribly. Actually, I can't remember a time in my life when I haven't been tired. Not physically, but mentally! Thinking hurts me and I can't stop thinking. I've tried everything, but nothing's worked. That's why at some point I decided to sleep more – I hoped I would rest from thinking while asleep. And in a way I was right, since it turned out thinking didn't tire me in sleep. But now there are two side effects of it: first, I can hardly distinguish between reality and sleep, and second, while I'm awake my brain is so loaded with information from my dreams that in result I think more and tire even quicker. So I've decided to accept this state of affairs and attempt to function within its borders. I have to control chaos ruling my life. Something must happen, that's for sure! In evenings, when I come home I put a couple of ice cubes into a glass, squeeze a half of a lemon into it and pour some mineral water. I carefully choose a record, sit comfortably in an armchair, study the cover and listen. Music flows and I absorb it with every particle of my body. All those cracklings and imperfections allow me to go back to the days when thinking wasn't so exhausting. It's probably the only true pleasure I still experience.



Chapter VI ; 3:33 AM

Most often on the record's second side I turn off the light and fall asleep almost immediately. Usually a moment later I'm in my cave, but sometimes the dream begins differently. I walk a street wet from the rainpour which ended some time before. Sun emerges shyly from behind the clouds and an enormous rainbow spreads above the town. It's quiet, so quiet I hear a clock ticking in my apartment. I approach a park and hear voices of playing children. I am to meet somebody though I don't know who it is. In a distance I see a woman holding his little boy's hand. I wave to her although I don't know her. Suddenly a car comes from the left. Obviously a driver has a great trouble with controlling the car but he's speeding up. A moment later a great noise is heard. I calmly approach. Two victims lie on the street: my mother and me in the age of four. There is a van with big letters saying MEAT AND SAUSAGES on its side nearby. Its wheels are in blood pools, its radiator is steaming. When I am to see the driver's face, the car is aflame and my dream return to the beginning, I walk a wet street and everything repeats all over again. I awake at 3:33 sharp and a moment later a clock set at six starts ringing....



Chapter VII ; Butcher

I looked at old family albums. My mother gave me also reels of films made by my father when I was very little. There were astronomical numbers of those albums and reels, as if somebody did nothing but run around with a camera. Apparently, when I was very young I often took my dad's camera and filmed everything. My parents thought I would work in television.

I bought a projector at a flea market. I knew nothing about it and probably a shop assistant sensed it. I showed him one of the reels and he chose a right projector. Then I found some white wall and started to watch my reels one after another. The projector overheated from time to time so I had to make breaks. I fell asleep quite often and on one occasion a fire nearly broke out. The reels were labeled with the date and place only. My films were on them since the year I was four. Mostly they were about nothing but I found something which could be useful. Suddenly there were images of butchers slaughtering pigs both on the photos and the reels. It was strange – what kind of a four-year old boy so passionately watched and documented pig-slaughters? The shots were terrible, but what horrified me more was a thought how that kind of a hobby could affect my psyche.

It wasn't difficult to find the butchery although now it functioned in a different circumstances. Handheld slaughter, often carried out in a customer's house, changed into automated killing, but the boss was the same. I recognised him from the photos. He grew old and grey, put on

weight, but his face didn't change. He didn't recognize me at first, but when I told him about a four-year old boy with a camera he got agitated and willing to talk. However his stories surprised me.

'Alfie, how you've grown,' the butcher chuckled. 'I didn't think I'd see you again, but now we have no job for you. As you see nothing's as it used to be.'

At first I didn't understand him. I was convinced I only had photographed and watched them. But I was wrong.

'I must admit you impressed me,' the butcher went on. 'You were four, those pigs were like bison for a grown-up man. Don't cheat ourselves, Alfie, they knew very well what would happen, when they stood and waited for death. Like humans, they felt their world would end soon. You have it on your shots. You see how they try to escape, you notice fear in their eyes. But with you it was different...

When for the first time you told me you would lull a pig to sleep I was stunned. We were bloody afraid the pig would harm you, but you approached to it, stroked its head, spoke to it and after a while the pig lied and calmly waited for death. Never before nor after killing took place so quietly. With you all animals died without fear and calmly. You may not remember it, you were only four and there is nothing on your reels and shots, because you were either shooting or putting the pigs to sleep. You can't do two things at once,' the butcher laughed. 'Anyway, you used to come and proudly announced you were going to distribute sleep. You were so serious, as if it you were on some quest, and nobody dared to smile though you were so funny. Once we had a terribly aggressive sow, all my men were scared of her. The biggest butcher asked me when Alfie would come... Man, what laugh I had. A four-year old dealt with the most dangerous animals

and old farts were scared stiff. You used to come for a year and then you got lost. I remember you wanted to slaughter, but we didn't agree. We thought it wasn't a job for a kid like you. You got offended and that was it. I never saw you again.'

His story seemed completely unbelievable to me, since I didn't remember anything from that time. On the other hand the butcher didn't have any reason to lie to me, besides I found him through my photos. On my way out I passed an old barn. Through a little chink I saw a white van standing on dowels. The barn's door creaked and the butcher looked out from his cubbyhole. I came in. The van had a sign MEAT AND SAUSAGES on its side. I glanced at its plate and memorized the number 6 YKW 141. The butcher put a hand on my shoulder.

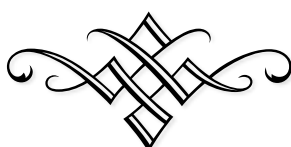
'What's up, Alfie? Now you are interested in old boneshakers?' He smiled.

'Who drives it?' I asked.

'Nobody, it's a junk. Nobody was ever able to drive this freakish son of a bitch, because it was always breaking down! Everybody was afraid they would have to return on foot. Only old Max could do it. The junk didn't balk when he drove it. And even if it broke down, Max could fix it off-hand in a middle of nowhere.'

'No one else drove it? Are you sure?' I asked.

'What's your problem, Alfie?' The butcher was getting annoyed. 'I know what I'm saying. Nobody drove it.'



Chapter VIII ; Lunch Break

A month or so later I found some information about Max. I had to be careful, because it would be suspicious if I openly asked people about him. I learned his routes, habits, rituals. Thanks to the biggest data base – community portals – I even learned his mobile's number. I didn't only know what he looked like. Strangely I didn't find any Max's photos. There was no his pictures on his profiles, as if he was faceless.

At first I had a different plan. I was going to talk to him, to ask about the morning when he had driven his van and deliberately crashed into my mother and me. The dream haunted me more often now and I was afraid that some day I wouldn't wake up. I desperately wanted to save myself, to prevent the dream becoming reality. When for so many years you've got problems with separating reality from dreams you've got a different attitude to time. Its passing is more symbolic then real. Almost every day I was afraid I'd again find myself on that wet street, Max would approach and I'd die, but what scared me most was the possibility that I'd hurt and see everything from a different perspective. As long as I was only an observer in the dream I could do something. I made a decision.

Each Friday at noon Max was supposed to go to a small bar in downtown. I found the bar's website. It was said there the part of the bar's design was a payphone. The owner was very proud of it and paid a lot of money to adapt an old phone to tone dialing without any harm to its functioning. So in a way it was possible to go back in time. Apparently the phone attracted many tourists and often was the true reason they came there. I went there twice

to see it. For the first time I drunk a cup of a very bad coffee, for the second time I had something which was supposed to be a steak. For each occasion I chose a rush hour and dressed differently than usual. And then Friday came.

The door opened rather noisily. Almost all tables were occupied. I went to the payphone and dialled Max's number. His mobile rang near the window. He was irritated somebody interrupted his lunch break, but he took it. I went to him purposefully and put three bullets in his head. People froze and watched as Max's body was sliding on the floor. Then silence was broken by a woman's scream.



Chapter IX ; Payback

‘Doctor, let’s be serious, this Alfie of yours confesses to murder a man at Phone Bar and everything fits perfectly. Witnesses’ statements, the bar’s layout, and what’s more, even this story about a car! Some years ago the victim indeed drove a white van with a sign MEAT AND SAUSAGE on its side and 6 YKW 141 registration number. May you tell me, Doctor, how he knows about it?’ Inspector was annoyed.

‘Dear Inspector,’ the doctor said patronizingly, ‘I have called to you myself when I put two and two together, but I can’t explain how my patient has learned about the yesterday murder. However I must remind you we are at the psychiatric ward and not everything is easy to understand. I’m convinced the CCTV will confirm Alfie was in his room all day yesterday as he has been there for the last seven years, completely isolated from the world outside. How could he be fifteen kilometers away if he was in the next room? With all due respect, Inspector, you are telling such fantastic tales and it makes me wonder whether I shouldn’t examine you!

‘Alfie’ the psychiatrist went on, revelling in his own voice and an impeccable accent, ‘was sent here seven years ago at the court ruling. I was to assess his sanity in a different case. After two weeks or so a true culprit was caught and Alfie was cleared of charges. Unfortunately, we found during the tests the patient had difficulties with separating dreams from reality and Alfie stayed here. I don’t know if he would ever be able to leave the ward, because he confabulate and sleep more and more.”

‘Could I see his file?’the inspector asked peacably. ‘I’ve got the court.’

‘No problem since you’ve got the required documents.’ The doctor stood up and took four fat files from the top shelf. ‘You can use our social room. Feel at home.’ He smiled viciously.

The inspector left the social room the next day. He was pale and he had a page with two columns, one with a head WE and second with a head ALFIE. Both contained identical entries.

‘Doctor, Alfie had come to you a year before the investigation in the well-known case of Mr. Lullaby. Of course it could be a coincidence if not for this.’ Inspector gave the psychiatrist the notes. ‘Look, most of this data hasn’t been in media, but Alfie knows it although he’s been here for seven years. He has no access to a radio, newspapers or a car, but knows about victims’ relations with satanistics sects which haven’t been disclosed by us. Do you understand, Doctor? No radio station aired the program, which according to your notes Alfie was listening to in his car, but its contents is hundred percent consistent with our findings.’

Inspector lighted a cigarette. At first Doctor wanted to protest, but then he opened a window and without asking for permission helped himself.

‘Doctor’ the inspector went on ‘nobody has investigated this durda.com thing yet, but everything is explained in Alfie’s file. By the way, an hour ago I got a text saying that Max, the victim from Phone Bar, had also an account on durda.com and the sect people had known him for a long time. Apparently Max supplied animals to those freaks. It was the reason they sacked him from the butchery. And the poem – we haven’t published it anywhere”.

‘Fuck, I’m not blind’ the doctor forgot himself ‘but please understand, it’s impossible! You’re implying Alfie is Mr. Lullaby and Max from Phone Bar is his last victim. I can understand the files contain his confession, that in your eyes they are an undisputable proof of his guilt and explain matters which even you haven’t managed to solve. But even if bodies are found in places indicated by Alfie, he has a cast-iron alibi! For seven years he hasn’t left this building!”

‘He’s a murderer and I tell you more – he’s only a cog in the great killing machine!’ the inspector said firmly, took his cigarettes and notes and left.”

The psychiatrist waited for ten minutes, then pushed the intercom button.

‘Yes, Doctor’, a male nurse said.

‘Bring Mr. Lullaby to my office...’

