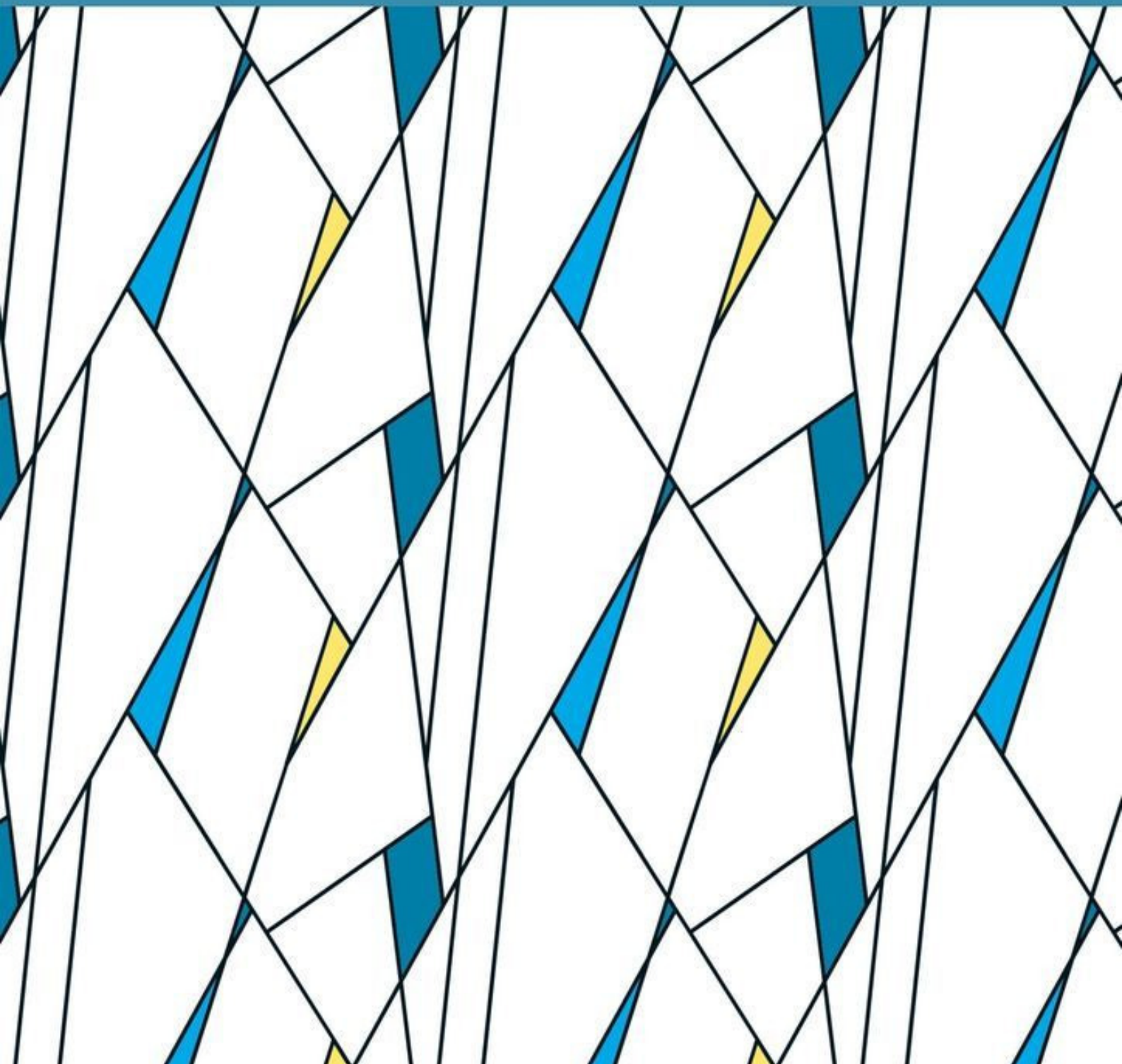


18+

SERGEY ZYBOLOV

*Deja vu. Love*



Sergey Zybolov

**Deja vu. Love**

«Издательские решения»

**Zybolov S.**

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Sergey Zybolov was born in 1970 in Chelyabinsk. He graduated from Chelyabinsk State University with a degree in Journalism. In the South Urals, many people know Sergey as a surrealist artist who actively participates in exhibitions. Today you have a unique opportunity to discover Sergey from a new perspective. Modern work “Deja vu. Love” is Sergey’s first novel, which took 20 years to write.

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# **Deja vu. Love**

## **Sergey Zyblov**

*DEDICATED TO MOTHER LUBOV, WIFE ELENA AND  
DAUGHTER POLINA*

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ISBN 978-5-4498-7896-0  
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**SERGEY ZYBOLOV**

**Dejavu. Love**

**Translation into English: Sergey Zyblov using translation programs**

## Foreword

Before setting off on a new book trip, take a small backpack from “Dejavu. Love”. Perhaps it will come in handy. So, let’s begin.

The first thing that you should pay attention to and adapt to is the few storylines in the novel, one of which is “green” – develops almost a year in advance. How and what happens is time. This is just a small copyright tip. I specifically say this in the preface, so that the reading is more calmly perceived.

The second, with unknown parts of insects or geographical names, if they suddenly come across, can be found in a special dictionary at the end of the book.

Third, this is a kind of well-known dejavu – a state in which a person feels that he had once been in a similar situation. There is an opinion, which is supported by scientists, that a possible reason for the occurrence of dejavu is a change in the way coding of time by the brain. Yes, and at the same time, the process is easiest to imagine as the simultaneous encoding of information as “two in one”: the past and the present, moreover, with the simultaneous experience of these processes. With all this, scientists say that the effect of this dejavu itself can be caused by preliminary unconscious (i.e. in a dream) processing of any information. In those cases when a person (I pay moderate attention to the word “person” rather than “person” or “individual”) in reality encounters a situation perceived at an unconscious level and successfully modeled by the brain, so to speak, close enough to real event, and there is an effect called dejavu. A similar explanation is perfectly confirmed by the appearance of dejavu in quite healthy personalities.

And the fourth is love, which still rules the world. Have you heard this somewhere? Then it remains to wish you an easy perception of the work.

## Chapter 1

### WHITE

Annoying drops monotonously knocked on the window, lulling the whole world with their symphony. The lullaby, performed by nature on this warm May evening, harmoniously floated in a huge, faceless, gloomy city. Heavy ghostly marble clouds slowly crept from south to north, hanging heavily over the metropolis, as if a sleepy, burly sow swollenly moved into its cozy flock for the night. And only a bright-carrot airship, which had entangled a messenger of some immensely past century, boldly added a light brushstroke of warm colors to the palette of rainy and gloomy sky. Despite the fact that this fat, helium-inflated sausage, hung soullessly in the sky, involuntarily personified a sort of “luminary”, the real energy of heat and light did not come from it, but only on the contrary, the orange object wandering, as it seemed, randomly in the celestial expanses, with an annoyingly stubborn weight, mercilessly pressed on the city, causing only unpleasant fear.

Somewhere on the outskirts of the industrial monster, a painful thunder rasped, here and there the nervous lightning zigzags sparkled. The viviparous sky, as if plucking out streams of water from itself drop by drop, martyredly squeezed out rolling natural roars. Only a muddy, vague pruning of the moon had nothing to do with the raging elements, the night light scornfully reigned over one of the tall panel buildings, on the edges of which, as if the armrests of a giant royal throne, towers towered, and calmly dozed. The bad weather was enjoying its fury, as if an awakened tiny child who woke up and falsely naughty in the middle of a night’s rest, but meanwhile, for three whole weeks or so, dusty and windless, almost sandy, land reigned in the region.

Along a brightly lit narrow street that sheltered in different colors – five-, ten – and forty-story panel cubes, slowly rolling a green passenger car of some mossy model. Suddenly he jerked sharply and stopped at the intersection at the moment when the sparkling lightning blinded the buildings, the next instant the vehicle briskly turned backwards, jerked once or twice, as if a puppet kitten choked and backs back, and gazed heavily again headed along Sixty-second street. Having completely dissolved in gray, dreary rain, the car no longer returned, turning into the next quarter.

Not a single passerby was on the evening street. Not a single one at all. In the tightly tinted windows of the first floors of buildings and in the mirror of wet warm asphalt, the useless pulsating light of the lanterns repeatedly, until a frantic phantom, was completely shamelessly reflected, and this glow increased even more, all playing with incessant drops of rain and preventing the city streets from falling into a dream. Night mood...

“Well, that’s who will say honestly and frankly – why the hell is it to shine so brightly on our deserted streets, since anyway no one should appear in the late evenings. No, really, why all this? Well, why-ee? Nobody goes anywhere, but where to go, if you can’t? It is impossible... yes, actually, and there is no need. At night, we need to rest for a new working day, which we are doing very well... and the light is on and on our health? Maybe they turn it off at night? We don’t even know if it burns at night. Maybe ask Ski or Rhonda? Although... in general, it’s a rather strange situation... strange, yeah... but, okay, you should not think about this topic. This is not our question, our business is simple, simple – work for yourself and work! Today the day is over, and tomorrow... Tomorrow will begin soon... after awakening! And again – in a circle!” – Thought Ave, trying to find a decent explanation of what is happening.

Imperceptibly approaching the end of the tenth hour of a rainy Saturday afternoon, the minute arrow mercilessly destroyed another day in fate. Before the evening verification was a quarter of an hour. In almost every window of house number twenty-four, a muffled light jealously froze, as if

the building itself was also preparing for a daily roll call in order to check the Available composition of residents, as it was established in this condominium.

On the twelfth floor in room A-745, the television flickered faintly. Absolutely indifferent for some time, Ave and Ski watched, like every weekend, the news program “Evening Pages” of Channel 19. But now, they immediately revived, their attention was drawn to the plot of a strange tragic event that took place in the capital of the neighboring state, the huge metropolis of Anmea\*. Today at exactly noon on the central square in front of the monument to the leader of the party that has been ruling in the republic for about fifty years, two dozen ants, twenty workers staged a self-immolation act. Brought to deepest despair, the insects locked themselves in an old modest minibus, and after the friendly chanting of political slogans, the crowd gathered around, a decent number of walking ants, suddenly heard how painfully, violently and vigorously breaking a glass of bottles and bubbling liquid spilled, they broke about ten vessels, what took a few minutes. Frighteningly, part of the onlookers began to retreat obliquely, to shun, foreboding with all my heart irreconcilably unkind, all the more so as a sharp bad aroma flashed through the air, blowing on the spot... Then, overnight, the little car flared up... The screams resumed, the suicide bombers flaming and rushing about in the walls of the vehicle screamed with all their might, proclaiming one slogan after another. The language of the neighboring country, of course, was different (that’s why it is “another country” – with its own language, culture, system, etc., etc.), but still the individual words were clear to viewers, although they were carefully muffled when creating a peppered news story. The most tragic and fatal was that this terrible death, this monstrous action, was carefully planned: writing and television journalists were invited in good faith, the city authorities were officially warned, and by a strange coincidence, no one prevented such a strange form of expression of will.

Absolutely nobody! There was not a bit of any police cordon, nor fire and rescue, nor medical services on duty somewhere in the neighboring courtyard. The official cause of the incident was not announced. Authorities commented rather dryly on what happened, citing the fact that “there is no reliable information about the purpose of this rally, as well as about the condition of the victims (this should have been burnt!).” It was also surprising that the reporters of the television channel that told A-745 about the tragedy argued that the chilling self-immolation could have been arranged by the members of the Raskine sect, which was banned in Linai, which had intensified on the eve of the tenth anniversary of the organization’s activities in the Linai People’s Republic. Television people emphasized that ardent supporters of the sect have repeatedly staged similar acts of self-immolation, in squares in minibuses, in protest against political activity and the arbitrariness of the authorities.

“Arbitrariness?! Any such arbitrariness?” – reporters asked from the screen. – “Everything is in order, everything is fine! Well, except perhaps sometimes... sometimes – yes-ah... so to speak, misunderstandings, such accidents happen... And, of course, such incidents frighten the public and bring, one might say, a real panic into the calm and wonderful life of ordinary, ordinary people citizens of our country! But they, that is, citizens, that is, they-do not deserve this! The citizens of the country must be calm, confident in the future, and must work for the good of their homeland!”

From time to time, the hackers of the anti-state organization even managed to go on television on the country themselves, brazenly breaking into the satellite network of the national Linai television. In addition, the New Year’s celebration was inexorably approaching according to the Linai calendar\*, with the advent of which in the regions of this huge, insanely insanely large country, the largest state on the continent, and in the nearest neighboring countries, an impulsive increase in tension was expected, the kettle of dissatisfied could boil in at any moment, therefore, the General Union of States\*, in order to prevent any manifestations of dissatisfaction with the regimes that nevertheless were real, extraordinary security measures were introduced, and today’s incident itself by burning, it once again showed the insecurity of civilians from any action of anti-government organizations.

“Today, these limp individuals decided to burn themselves, having independently taken a rash step into hopeless obscurity, choosing a terrible and painful, but quick death. Instead of working for

the good of our beloved state to the bottomless depths of the state, they chose to die, they went into the unknown, and tomorrow, what awaits us tomorrow? It's not an hour, their close brothers, their ideological friends, without any stops, will begin terrorist acts, explosions, and it is still unknown what!" – with a frightening conclusion, the heated journalist completed the report.

– A-a-a-ave, listen, but what do you think, in our country, well, right here in our city, on the square, could this happen? – Ski pulled away from the hypnotic TV screen and slid audibly toward the glossy window. – You understand, yes, understand? Maybe this? I mean, ah... I mean, could ants burn themselves in our place? – Ski yawned frantically and looked to the side where the central square of the city was to be hidden behind the hopeless rows of multi-storey cubic houses.

– You see, I think so, it all depends on what forces moved the brothers who decided to take such a step, – Ave also got up and approached Ski. – After all, it is quite possible that ours will be able to do this. Who knows them? Who knows all of us, what are we capable of? Sometimes the farthest away is perceived not quite real. The world is like an illusion in which we live... I mean... – here Ave suddenly coughed, but a minute later he was released and he continued. – After all, what do I mean? I'm saying that if an event occurs somewhere, it seems to us that it does not concern us, does not concern us at all, and is unlikely to affect. It is somewhere there, on the other side of the world, in a ghostly illusion, in an indefinite distant, and we are here... Do I say it right?

– I don't know if it's right... Simply, this is your opinion... – Ski muttered.

– Ahh, actually, – Ave went on, not paying attention to a friend's words, – we're already used to having this information, news or opinion there... yes, in general, at least we're used to almost everything was presented to us already ready... It's like a semi-finished dish in a store, you already bought it, brought it home and it lies quietly in the refrigerator, you just have to get it, defrost and warm it up. So in our case, worker ants go to desperate measures, to sacrifice themselves... Maybe some of our individuals are also mentally ready, there is literally one step left... or am I saying something wrong? Already, it seems to me that I sleep on the go...

– Yes, everything is fine, I'm already sleeping too. That's it, midnight, it's time to sleep. Do you think they're coming? Do you take these measures yourself? – Ski with an indefinite lethargy looked askance at Ave.

The conversation increasingly took on a political connotation, and on Saturday evening neither of them wanted to talk about serious topics, and, in general, politics is a forbidden topic... The question is, why did everything have to start? Dead end option.

– Ye-e-eah, how to say, how to say! Hmmm... maybe they themselves, from hopelessness, you see, Ski, from hopelessness, from a dead-end life situation, or maybe for the sake of other ants with a long sight, this is our way out, who will understand them? Look, here we are! We will be noticed and, possibly, the world will change, and it will become easier for other individuals to live! Maybe they think so?

– Listen, perhaps this way, but maybe everything is different. We don't know for sure, and we will never know, – Ski loudly clicked on the glass with his claw. – There is also a variant such that they are simply used for ordinary mercenary purposes, like weak-willed dolls, as empty puppets, hostages of the situation, so to speak, forcibly forcing such actions. Somewhere I already saw and heard this more than once, and not two, so these are not my thoughts.

– Yes, maybe that's so... Maybe you're saying the right thing... I already thought about it the same way. But I thought, thought for a minute or two and immediately forgot... We are loaded with work, distracted from different thoughts... sometimes there is no time to think about life, right, a-a-a?

– That's right, but we slowly crawled away from my main question.

– Crawled away, crawled away...

– You see, I mean – can this happen in the State? We are not some Linais there... we have a completely different State, we have a different form of government, different thinking of the population. After all, there, they have – otherwise the world is arranged!

– Maybe otherwise... We are shown one thing...

– Yes, he is completely different, this world! Or not? Although... I don't even know what to answer... Solid questions without answers... – Ski amusedly spread his upper legs and his antennae\* also moved to the beat of this movement.

– You know, Ski, to be completely frank, it sometimes seems to me that something similar happens with us, we just don't know about all this. The country is big, and... They just don't tell us everything. Why should we tell? – Cheered up, Ave turned his muzzle in half-turn and squinted his eyes maliciously to the side. – You understand a lot, you understand, as I do, but... to say out loud or to admit to yourself – there is no courage or simple time, always in work – there is no time for awareness, or something... Since we had such a conversation, here you are and said as I think. It's no secret to anyone that the media... these are all newspapers, television channels... They are always regulated by the State, even in private hands... Newspapers, radio and television – as levers of control over the entire mechanism of state power. Wow, as he said! – truly surprised himself to his frank discovery Ave.

– I agree with you, completely agree! Well, we can't do anything here, we have to swallow the "bait". Ah-ahmm, and you're done! We are this... We are ordinary consumers of the product, let's say so.

– That's right, they show and convey to us what our supreme government considers edible.

– Yeah, it is!

– The most important thing is that they support us as labor: they feed us well, give stable work, a roof over our heads, and everything else... everything else is, as it were, aside, it is secondary. Any state, our or neighboring, or even on another continent, needs simple workers who will plow and not think about anything other than work...

– Yeah, here we are.

– Yes, here we are working... It turns out that they keep us on a strict leash so that they could not jerk to the right or left to the side...

– That you hit the very point!

– There is such, I – such, I – well-aimed!

– Indeed it is. Any state needs labor, but here's the catch – not every system can competently manage its citizens. I think a lot depends on the identity of each individual... As the ancient saying goes correctly: "If there was a neck, there would be a collar!" – the amused Ski slammed on Av's paw and they fell silent for a while.

## Chapter 2

### WHITE

While Ave and Ski were talking peacefully about the physical capabilities of burning the bodies of ants – opponents of the system in various countries, Rond, diligently acting as a duty officer, turned around in the kitchen, like a crazy little squirrel in an endless spinning wheel. The young announcer in the “box” with insanely beautiful sky-turquoise eyes was completely monotonous, as if it were not a living individual, but a skillfully straightened doll model, voiced yet another decree of the country’s President Snai to tighten measures against “state criminals”. Each eleven on the streets of large cities after eleven o’clock in the evening went without any legal proceedings for hard work to the east of the country to the city of Dsiterrum-4\*, where for more than a dozen years the development and processing of uranium-phosphate ores has been carried out, which meant, in fact, the death penalty, sadly extended for several working years.

Indeed, in the conditions of this distant settlement, not one of the ants could live for more than five years, with the exception of volunteers who went to a uranium plant for at least some small piece of bread, because their working and living conditions were many times better than the forced captives, but at the same time, they were also, in fact, doomed – to the volunteers, at best, the Most High was measured out for ten years. Undoubtedly, one of the attractive privileges of volunteers-uranozavodchikov was freedom of movement: they could travel for free during the blissful annual two-week vacation by electric trains, airplanes or autobuses – anywhere in the continent. This “cosmic-universal privilege”, as Ave ironically called it, they completely used to, as they themselves said, “aerate their clothes from uranium dust, and at the same time completely dispel the monotony of gray everyday life accumulated for the tense working year. “Voluntary choice”, in fact, for many was the only solution to life’s problems, since the unemployed, driven into a corner, were forced to get a job after unsuccessful attempts to find a job.

In conclusion of the usual “Evening Pages”, the announcer, again as in a pattern, reported on the seasonal recruitment of lemongrasses, technical workers from the uranium plant, who received their nickname because of the color of the uniform: protective helmets and raincoats. But now the “talking head” disappeared without a trace in the ocean of rainbow colors and on a flat screen, after a short commercial break of a new honey drink, a field of hundreds of colorful squares grew, which winked and changed color, in addition to everything, the TV a couple of times squealed unpleasantly.

– Rond, listen, let’s go quickly, report! Tv is waiting for you! – Ski shouted, calling a comrade to action.

When Rond, on duty, galloped up from the kitchen, Ave and Ski sat tensely beside the TV, shimmering with all the colors of the rainbow.

They energetically extended their left forelegs on which personal tokens flaunted and looked at each other synchronously. “What? The most common nightly on-site cash verification process?” Rond carefully picked up the paws of his comrades and pulled out hard plastic tokens. “Pee-pee-pee”, the television set made matching sounds, it was a quick dial on the front panel of the attendant and winked mischievously at friends, and the cold flat white tokens drowned without a trace in the side wall of the flat monitor. Rond flicked a switch, pressed another three buttons, and the picture on the TV screen from a multi-color was transformed into a monophonic pale pink field – the test was successful.

– Well, that’s it for today! I wanted to tell you something else, literally just wanted to, but forgot... Okay, I remember – I will say then! – with enthusiastic color Rond said and traced with his right paw over his head some incredible greeting.

– Well! That’s it! That’s it! – Ave did not protest and with a smile heartily added. – As you say, my friend...

Named tokens dropped out of the television as further non-worthiness, and freed Ave and Sky rose from their seats.

– Yeah, programm-mmm, we’ll finish-sh-sh. And we have only one thing left – to drink tea. Tea, tea, tea! – said Rond.

– Tea is good! Tea is a healthy drink! – Ave supported him.

– It remains just a little bit, and in less than an hour you should lie in bed and dream! Well, or not to dream, but what to lie – that’s for sure! Although dreams are very important in our lives, so try to see them! – the tired Rond smiled wryly and scratched the mustache, where the tendril of the tendril protruded, and the phrases that had been used for days, weeks, months, years, burst out of his mouth with deserted air. The following words, however, like many others, like ancient pyramids, firmly and completely dusted their being. But it is precisely from scanty droplets that a whole ocean is accumulated, from small words, days, events, and all life consists of... – I hope... – Rond stumbled half a word, but then continued. – I hope that tomorrow morning will not overshadow our happy existence. In a couple of minutes I will set the table, and let’s come.

“Exactly, a ‘happy existence’? Is it really, this is our ‘happy existence’ that can initially be happy? Existence is living, not a full life!” – She whistled through Av’s mind and pierced with painful non-pleasantness into her heart.

– Good, good, – Ave suddenly felt dizzy, everything started to run wild in his head, he carefully adjusted the token on his wrist, twisting his eyes nervously, like a frisky oblique hare on a sunny May lawn, waiting for the mortal danger to arrive, and again approached the window pane, leaning his head against the subtle transparency that separated the world of apartments and the world beyond.

Home broadcaster – television – under a tiny, roasted claw Ski found a well-deserved reassurance and firmly-firmly fell asleep until morning.

A tired, tired, ant sadly approached the uterine bed, sullenly fitting in the right near corner of the room shelter, opposite the window, and quickly having thrown off his shirt, as if being freed from a depressing bridle, gloomy shackles holding the humiliated prisoner, lulled with a moderate pattern of a street hurricane, he fell wearily, flew into the universal world, tasting a sweet dream, the fading antennae swayed preemptively, and only a touching smile adorned the narrow-minded profile of the dying ant. A delightful delight... The weekend was squeezed and squeezed away... Packed to the eyeballs Saturday sat down precariously, slipped by an elusive snake into a bottomless time abyss. “Take it easy, get it already, without any utopias there, and stubbornly plow up to the flight of forces... without trendy cleverness, this is your destiny! Morning will take away the decadent mood, drown conventions already, drown them...” – Ski politely pinched himself and was ashamed of the drained despondency. – “No one will untie the narrow knots of fate!” The flow of thoughts, it seems, died down, but only it seemed, and he suddenly became ashamed of his helpless state: “Oooh... What can ants preempt in fate? What can do in time? What can I do?..”

Literally a minute later, exactly according to the established Charter, Rond rang out, calling for a light dinner:

– Everything is ready! Welcome! You have not forgotten about me?! You will find tea and small goodies! Let’s get smart!

– Come on, come on, um! – Ave and Ski buzzed in one voice, glanced at each other, giggled ironically between themselves and headed toward the kitchen.

In the center of the cozy kitchen there was a small artsy triangular table with neatly rounded corners – designed just for all the inhabitants of a one-room apartment – an object of Avent-garde furniture. The frosted glass surface of his countertop was slightly highlighted by built-in soft green neon lamps, creating a homely warm cozy mood. In the evening it was possible not to turn on the

overhead light, but to enjoy the illumination of the table, which made tea drinking a truly homely intimate tradition.

Tea was aromaticly smoking on the table, placidly filling the entire kitchen with sweet mint freshness. “In the same way, it was always pleasantly sung in our boarding school!” – said Ave to himself. Three bright green bells hung over a table with sulkons – a simple, uncomplicated lamp. One of the glass semiprecious flowers planted in a subdued light, dissolving evening gatherings. For what purpose Rond turned it on, although not at full capacity, but only by a third – it was unclear.

All three ants carefully, so as not to accidentally get burned, poured fragrant contents from one mug to another, in a “retirement method”, as Ski quipped. Silent silence. World silence. Perhaps a little sad... You can only hear the friendly murmur of chilled tea.

Not a single sound was heard from either the upper or the side apartments. In the neighboring apartments, in the entire huge building, these minutes also enjoyed traditional tea drinking. Yes, it is in the entire forty-story glass-concrete cube. In a multi-apartment building, which, however, belonged to dozens of others, of exactly the same buildings, was known not only in the city, but throughout the country to industrialist Theik Dee. To get a job at his radio parts factory, where Rond and Ave worked for life, and a little later, Ski appeared, or a well-known automobile giant, or one of the factories of the military-industrial complex, one was enough! Just one and only! You just had to be born lucky! His workers were provided with everything necessary for a comfortable existence: they were provided with paid living space and quite decent earnings! There was only one thing left – to work selflessly without stopping paws, without stopping for a minute. Work, work and work!

From early childhood, future workers of industrial giants of Theik Dee were conscientiously brought up in specialized boarding schools. For many years, yes, it can be said for sure that for many centuries of the development of ant society, a standard scheme of caring for those who have been raised, brought up, learned, “released into life” has itself built up – their complete and absolute dedication, their work, enduring conventions. They gave birth, raised, gave a little education, plus specialized for work on a farm or enterprise. None of the inmates of the institutions knew whether they had parents or not. It was in these widespread boarding schools that young ants were inculcated with work skills as a way of life-self-sacrifice, complete and unprincipled dedication: for several long hours (for a child’s fragile, sometimes sincerely-naive consciousness – just endless) hours a day, they tirelessly wielded harsh tools, at first with naive mistakes, then – gradually developing skills, and then – “on the machine”, quickly and with genuine enthusiasm spinning the little things incomprehensible to the childish mind; growing up a bit, ants spent almost all of their “free time” (the so-called “free from work”) on an assembly line in the shops of a factory that fulfills government orders for the defense industry, it was then that they first heard the incomprehensible word “weapons”, and began to be proud (after all, they were just told: “Be proud, you are working for a great cause!”) that they help their valiant work to their beloved Motherland in an endless and everlasting war with a hostile aggressor that was boundlessly far! Farther than it seemed to many adults, and closer than perceived by children.

## GREEN

Amina woke up and opened her eyes, deaf and hard sigh-null, absorbing imaginary freshness, and immediately, literally, in one marvelous moment, plunged headlong into the magical, enchanting fairy-tale-noisy world: here and there the sonorous pale lemon grasshoppers tirelessly, vying competed in the art of chirping, as if at an outlandish festival in the resort town; somewhere nearby, a restless river was pleasantly noisy, divinely playing with water musical busting on rocky rapids, like a harp, the warm south breeze was amusingly amusing itself with young foliage, stroking, tickling fragile twigs on only full-flowing fluffy leaves, steam very young dragonflies flew audibly in front of Amina's very nose, catching up with each other. The sun's rays, as if on a magic piano, wrote out a cheerful melody.

Above Amina's head, somewhere on a branch, a gray-green bird flashed something quickly in her tongue loudly in her tongue, calling on the whole world to enjoy natural beauty. Either the multilayered drowsy blanket hid Amina and didn't let go, or an impartial objective reality – everything spontaneously alternated in a restless and so seductive sea of consciousness: a titanic ball swept diagonally from the ants head and Amina from a frightening noise she closed her eyes, an imaginary ball desperately snapped "ooh", and obediently returned to its original place, froze... Living reality confessed and, it seems, returned to the ant. The past was revived, or the future was growing with new sticky notes, uniting, flowing colorless from one to another, and freely giving birth to a synthesized new, unknown...

Here she is serene with Ave in front of each other, and he gently and so cordially holds her claws in his paws, and something endlessly, captivatingly speaks, and speaks, and speaks without end and edge, and she, blinded by desires obsessively looks into his perky eyes and swallows in measured portions his soft story. And then there was the artistic sincere whistling of a thrush, and mixed into one outlandish dish – the aroma of blossoming apple trees, lilacs and linden honeycombs, and again this unbearable stuffiness, and sparkling sunshine, and general whistling itch, and the murmur of an unknown mountain stream, and the rustle of a live spring grassy carpet, and the light buzzing of the May beetle, followed by a pair of dragonflies chasing each other, and the fall of a strange object to the ground (a cobblestone came from somewhere, it seems), and the sparkle in the sun is amazing of silver-thread kzotic patterns that spiders had made into oblivion from early morning – all this in one, common picture, pops up in consciousness, as if an abandoned spinning skillfully hooks in a stormy river and pulls out a trusting trout with a lightning jerk – all this returns Amina to the forest clearing...

Still not completely moving away from the restless half-nap, constantly interrupted by awakenings, the ant tried to look far, far ahead and saw only bright light and unclear outlines of brown spotted trees, she struggled to concentrate on the birch, on the pebble, which began to grow with moss, on the barrel that I decided to rest on this cobblestone, but, unfortunately, it didn't really succeed – only phantom looms loomed nervously ahead, barely reduced to a single image, as they immediately mythically bifurcated, lined up and soullessly went into oblivion, into a translucent dusty heat. Amina continued to breathe deeply, reclining, near a sprawling birch, whose puffy buds were almost completely opened, and pleasantly scented with the freshness of the cleanest young leaves, but there was no possibility to move the fellow: vague internal forces harshly and uncompromisingly fettered her, as if hopeless paralysis, and never for a moment let go from the moment of awakening. Throughout the body – a lightning-fast growing, overwhelming feeling of anxiety and inexplicable panic, disarming fear. The blackening anxiety in the rattling air convulsively, with emphasized bitterness, plotted white gagged-wide strips of the crosshair, as if at a distance of several meters from Amina was an invisible ant and shamelessly with all his might painted lime on a transparent fence.

The naive ant from this unusual mirage vision threw into a light heat. The breeze suddenly changed and Amina smelled a sharp smell of a burnt tree directly in her nose, she instantly looked away, from where an unpleasant aroma had come, but she saw nothing and no one.

“Solid nasty things! We must survive this day, then it will be easier!”

The worried ant grunted a little in the womb once or twice, and it seemed to her that a bully bird, a mockingbird, mimicked her somewhere in the bushes, Amina made another effort and tried to say something, but an indistinct dry rattle scrambled out from a dry throat.. With a habitual movement, she carefully brought the foot up first to the petiol\*, then to the swollen tummy, as if checking if her treasure was in place. The round, elastic body kept a new, infinitely dear to her life.

Amina recalled snatches of anxious and nervous sleep, which she had just dreamed of. For the last couple of hours she was dozing uneasily, constantly waking up and again crying and drowning in the same dream that she had before, and this continued until she finally woke up.

“Oh, oh, what kind of strangeness of our body? The riddles are solid... the same dream, the same plot scrolls more than once? Are we doing something underreporting somewhere, or what? Or do you need to change the tactics of behavior? Something useful to learn from this dream? Several times – is it like a reminder or what? Mysteries of the mind... Maybe, a reminder that we went the wrong way, and we must return to the beginning of the labyrinth of our destiny. Well, what if it's too late and nothing can be changed? There are different situations in life... Sometimes it seems that each of us periodically returns to the beginning of this very labyrinth, which... No, perhaps you can't return to the beginning! Of course you can't! Each of us returns to a certain point where he already passed, where he was already... and, now, we stand and think: ‘Well, oh, after all, the last time I went this way, and came back here again, and where do i go now Where to? It's a vicious circle?’ There are two or three more turns... it happens that there is... and we set off again with the naive hope of overcoming this damn thing, and it tempts us to express ourselves curiously-abusively, but, okay, just – damn maze with the help of higher forces, go-go, but, in the end, we return for the third, and fourth, and twenty-fourth times to the same intersection. The question is, well, why? Yes-ah... it is asked, but no answers have been given... we need to get up and go, planting hope and relying only on our own strength... who else would answer our questions. And who will answer them, if not ourselves... means, the conclusion is that we get up, no matter how hard it is, and set off again on the road in search of truth, happiness, dreams and everything else!”

In a failed, crumpled dream, the ant sat quietly, lounging in a soft leather chair, near the tinted oval window in a new, sparkling every detail, car of a high-speed train, confidently flying through an endless wheat field. Somewhere in the distance, the gloomy outlines of the city were visible: black factory chimneys blew out puffs of smoke, it seemed, never fading, rare multi-storey buildings stuck out with bristling needles-giants against the background of other cubes-houses. With each second, the metropolis was moving more and more away from the train.

“We, like, should approach the city, go to it, and not go somewhere to distant lands, away from it...” – Amina tried to rationally think in a dream, but the composition, the gentleman swaying gently swaying, everything went away and left from an alien settlement with a pretty decent speed. – “How so?” Well, how so?” – with an upset spontaneous hopelessness sighed an ant.

The pale, soullessly sad sun disc barely peeped out from behind the swollen rain clouds, surprisingly reminiscent of a pockmarked udder cow, ready for milking, and which were so full that they conscientiously waited for only one thing – the slightest signal of divine thunder to liberally give birth to a merciless, tropical rain. Either from the fact that the glasses in the impeccably new-baked carriage were carefully covered with a reflective gray-blue film, which was applied so that the bright sunshine did not interfere with the soft-armored passengers, or from the impending hard marbling of the weather, or something else, the gloomy landscape, which was slipping measuredly beyond the borders of another world, seemed even more depressingly gloomy.

A puffy toy – a funny little elephant – a hero from a well-known old animated film – a whitish-pink color: a soft proboscis, uncompromisingly bent upward by an arc-shaped pipe, innocently called for a cheerful mood, bulging over a funny freckled blue-eyed blue in Amina's velvet doll legs. With a cap mounted on a puffy head, the blinded-oval, insanely huge ears seemed to serve the elephant so that he could easily overcome distances, flying from place to place. At first he sat quietly and with dignity, and was the size of a militus, tiny kitten, and after a minute or two indecently inflated into the pre-business of a giant pillow. The half-asleep ant, smiling a little noticeably at the very edges of the mouth, hugged the southern fat man tightly, like the most dear and beloved animal, and, sentimentally clinging to the plush, soft, angelic, almost half-dead creature, because it swayed measuredly in time with the train, flashing hilariously strange artificial buttons of his eyes, captivating with a sparkling light, and indistinctly ambiguously mumbled under his nose, – at least, it seemed to Amina, she felt much easier, trying not to think at all about the crazy speed the tee with which the train was whistling, neither about cloudy, prickly, depressing weather, nor about what is happening outside the bad window, nor about what is somewhere out there, its incomplete report about boarding schools and even not about what awaits her ahead.

The bright, spacious car was full of passengers, everyone was sitting in the same comfortable seats as she was. Someone was dozing uneasily, sniffing nervously and loudly, whistling through the sugar holes of the little mustaches, and at the same time, anxiously moving his upper pair of paws – it seems that in ephemeral oblivion, the helpless ant tried to crawl out, climb out of some incredible blockage, subtracting his path and getting out on a saving surface; someone calmly spoke in an undertone on philosophical topics with a neighbor on the road; a pretty well-dressed elderly ant, so crimson-gently sitting in the chair opposite Amina, having buried her face in the book with her muzzle, neatly mastered a thick historical novel; two mock soldier ants in full marching uniforms, somehow strangely falling into the “business class” completely unformatted for ordinary military men, settled down comfortably, turning almost close to each other, and talked about something, actively gesticulating paws. From the side, their lively dialogue seemed rather amusing, and Amina, looking at this scene, smiled broadly.

The car door rattled loudly and drowned without a trace somewhere in the wall, plastic profile slides indifferently captured her A comedic teen ant almost flew into the carriage, dressed in a fresh, clean, as if dry-cleaned, costume of a funny doggie: a cocker spaniel muzzle curiously rose on his head, shaggy velor ears drooped limply to the mesonotum (middle back) \*, upper and the lower legs reliably moved, repeating the movements of the pet. A well-dressed suit looked great on the newcomer, and if it had not been for the lie-codegter finishing element – the doll's face above the artist's head, then everything would have looked just fine, without any flaws. Perhaps it was necessary to think of it in some other way: to reflect and adapt so that the terry mask of the good-natured dog would be worn directly on the muzzle by the ant artist. Following the funny cocker, he literally crawled on all fours, a gingerbread man rolled in a little gingerbread man, dressed in a colorful, multi-colored suit, either a soldier or a fireman from the last century, with delicately embroidered round shoulder straps, hanging (obviously with overkill) from all sides with sparkling elaborate accelerant, like a serpentine Christmas tree, he instantly rose and straightened. The belligerent stamped sprout came out small, rather even small, it barely reached just the cocker's bushy ears. Energetic music sounded from the small sports backpack, deftly attached with bound ribbons to the back of the\* spaniel, two artists hovered in an icy pose, mimicking the famous mythical sculptural sculpture, and even having time to sing along some text unknown to the audience. Amina was so carried away by the unexpected concert spectacle that she felt with her whole gut, felt how good she was, how pleasant it was to enjoy a simple circus number performed by ordinary train artists. She wanted to get a coin and toss a bucket into a poisonously reptilian color, but, actively rummaging through her broad pockets, she found nothing at all and decided to continue to enjoy the performance further. Here the first coin tinkled silver, – Amina's neighbor deftly threw it in favor of the artists, he put aside his

historical Talmud for a moment and, smiling unusually wide, so sweet that even honey drooling ran from the left edge of the muscular lips\*, kindly carefully examined the wandering circus performers. Amina, again in earnest, was somehow uncomfortable, and she again nervously fidgeted, stirred, started to scour pockets for the umpteenth time, but they were all completely empty, but now – a real miracle – I stumbled upon saving silver shabby quarter, and immediately decided that he was much more needed by these amusing guys than she, she, embarrassed, quite awkwardly rose from her place, not letting go of her mother's elephant, she stepped once or twice and somehow awkwardly the movement of the paws endowed with its generosity in stepping. The amusing cocker caught the corner of her eye that Amina threw a voiced coin, fervently nodded her double head and continued to dance. The soldier was already in earnest: he was growing upward, more, more sophisticated and more furious, and his legs, as if wound up, easily and simply made incredible pretzels, which could only be envied, and voted, voted, holo-forces' throughout Ivanovo, 'which somehow... somehow began to annoy many passengers. The protesting procession began to move unconstrained further along the spacious carriage, successfully collecting food for itself. Someone readily parted with their people in blood, while others simply stared indifferently, yawning at the performance, and sat motionless, as if nothing special had happened, but there were those who, in time with the energetic melody, gave in amicably paws, than the duet was even more paused by the most. But, as the holiday arrived on Amina's car, he left, disappeared: unexpectedly, spontaneously, unpredictably. The sounds died down and abruptly broke, not reaching the end of the composition.

At that time, two double whistles hissed hoarsely, deafeningly, lingeringly outside the window, on that side of the windowless surreal world: "Lice-lice-and-and, lice-lice-and-and!" – as it used to be, on old, time-worn, loud-breathing train monsters, and, as if upset that he could not win the racing competitions, sullenly trudged along in a quiet, lazy move.

Resting Amina glanced anxiously at the illusory surface of a window glass gently browned by sunset, but was not tuned for a romantic contemplation of all the beauty of the natural picture, all the more so after a couple of seconds the conductor ant burst into the carriage, looked around nervously, took a step back, but immediately returned, grumbled displeasably to someone standing in a gray vestibule, sharply pushed the door open, and politely, with a powerful, rolling baritone, politely asked the passengers to present their travel documents.

Sometimes it happens that you swim indifferently on a pathetic boat on a drowsy and capricious river of your confused thoughts, either flying swiftly, sometimes phlegmatically falling flat, then inspired by beautiful, crazy exploits, or sometimes pessimistically resting on the coldest day, completely without strength and without the slightest a ghostly desire to rise, and, surprisingly, you do not notice the landscape surrounding you at all, reality skips a gray, monotonous, indifferent background, and neither color paints, nor images, nor sounds, nor smells, nothing... Solid gray.

Exhausted by the monotonous, debilitating, lulling road, the ant anemically noted to herself that the live picture outside the artificial carriage, tirelessly streaming with a continuous conveyor belt, radically changed to a more joyful life: threatening enemy clouds, something, apparently, having scared, they have already fan-scattered, but the mean, pale, waxy sun, almost completely colorless, so huge and oblique, still remained behind the pink feather, as if torn to shreds, by soft cotton wool of clouds, and not far, just a few hundred meters from the railway flaunted low emerald green undulating hills, sometimes in places with blossomed pearly tankers stars-flowers.

Slowly turning toward the passengers, Amina unexpectedly found that she no longer had a soft toy in her paws, she simply irretrievably and suddenly disappeared into the transcendent parallelism of being. It just was, and already it is – no...

"Well, well, no, no! And this happens, sometimes... An unpleasant, so to speak, surprise..." – with even calmness digested the disappearance of the ant. She lazily, drawn, slowly, like a winter sleepy fly, pulled out a slightly rumpled ticket from a simple lady's handbag, tried to straighten it, but she didn't succeed, and she hastily handed it to an approaching railway worker. He was in no hurry

to take the provided coupon. Then, with a prickly coolness, Amina raised her eyes to the conductor opposite, and what was her surprise when she saw Ave in front of her in the form of a railway inspector. He froze rosy and smiled the whole width of his face. Its icy state melted in one second, as if a drifting iceberg had been driven to the equator line, and in a matter of seconds it disappeared into the oceans, becoming a part of the world water kingdom.

– Ah-ha-ha! Happy birthday, my dear Amina! – Ave shone, sparkled, flickered with energy ephemeral stars of joy and love, which seemed to become visible around him. Amina could not believe if he was in front of her. – Happy birthday to you! Happy e-day of your great birth! How are you, at five, I hope? I certainly know that everything is fine with you! – He said it so juicy, so loudly that all the passengers in the carriage died down and looked in their direction.

– Yes-ah-ah, mood so-so-e-e-e... – the ant was drawn out protractedly. – Yesterday, it seemed, it was “five”, or even all “five plus”, and today – even... – Amina sighed, took a breath and continued, – I don’t even know what to say... Everything seems to be complete okay, all is well! And how are you? – dumbfounded by an unexpected meeting, Amina looked in love at the mysterious Ave, and still could not, well, could not understand where he had come from.

– Well, you’re the girl with us – wow-wow-smart enough, you know how to count perfectly! You know how, huh? I know for sure – you know how! Once, ye-e-es-s-sterday the mood was at “five”, which means that today – already at “six”, and tomorrow – will be at all “seven”! Aah? So, and only so be it! I’m telling you exactly, don’t even doubt for a minute! Everything is fine, count: from one to five! No, better – up to ten! And just business! Why are you frozen? Smile, come on! Well, smile, my sun! Listen to me and everything will be super!

– Mmm, interestingly you say, Ave! Is this possible? – Amina, often-often blinking from a fallen surprise, finally began to come to life and regain consciousness, and slyly squinted her eyes, mercilessly staring through the stunned Ave with a look.

– Still asking? Of course, pos-s-s-s-sible. Everything is pos-s-s-s-sible! – Ave exclaimed solemnly, clapping his hands energetically, playfully turned around him, standing on one foot. “There is nothing impossible in our world, as you already know!” Generally no im-pos-si-bi-li-ti-es!

– Exactly, nothing is impossible!

– Yes, you and I somehow spoke on this topic. Moreover, it was not long ago...

– Yes, yes, it was... – Amina said, agreeing. – I remember well, then you still... You said that... what...

“The most important thing in any business,” Ave grabbed stalled Amina and confidently pulled forward, “in any desire – really, really want to, well, and then... then again – choose the right direction and move towards achievement this very goal, precisely setting priorities. Chips move forward and go!

– Yeah, yeah! – managed only to insert into the monologue of the dispersed Ave.

– You have to really, really want! And then – all the best, so after all! All – on the thumb! Well, of course, to try your best, to work and work on the solution of the question – without this, nothing! Without hard work – impossible! Yes, and, of course, still count. You need to count in order from one to ten! That’s, actually, that’s all! Yes, that’s all... – the ant spread his legs wide apart and slightly shook them, showing what it was – “that’s all”...

– Yes, yes, yes, I remember, of course, I remember, yes! This is the only way to live! You’re right! Any ant can do a lot. I don’t remember, I completely forgot who said it, but some of these... of the great ones. He said this: “The ant can do anything, but only laziness, fear and low self-esteem usually interfere with him!”

– Laziness is definitely not about us. But now, for some reason... eh... for some reason it doesn’t work out like this with me, we... a lot of people don’t get it... – the ant on emotions finally got up and wanted to hug Av, but he mercilessly shot a patter:

“Tsss, and this is a nice little birthday present for you!” Congratulations from all-all-all of my lovers-beloved souls-and-and I wish... hmmm... – here he a little puffed up, but after a second or two

he again chantedly continued – and I wish, very much in scale to you, so that all your dreams come true – small, medium, huge and even enormous! Let everything come true! Everything, whatever you wish! Ahhh, if possible, I will help in their implementation! And, of course, let the sun shine in your world and let everything be “perfectly” with you!

And ending the last sentence with an emphasis on the last word, Ave pointed his paws at the ant carving, as if in zero gravity, into the carriage of an ant, which triumphantly held that very soft pink elephant, peacefully sitting a few minutes ago in her paws.

“Oh, well, business!” The day turned out today! Enormously – some solid-stone riddles and puzzles!” – Amina sincerely was delighted and surprised at the same time, she accepted with outstretched legs, noting to herself the envious glances of the carriage travelers, a touching gift and gently plunged into the safety chair. Dumbfounded by a blast wave of continuous surprises, the ant wanted only for a moment to look at the gray-olive hills endlessly flickered by a sinusoid behind a slippery window: now growing into huge, peaked, humped, drowsy mountains, then almost straightened to a shagreen, half-naked, barely gloomy, gloomy melting in the fluffy ultramarine of the horizon, but its fleeting glance was firmly magnetized, stuck and could no longer tear itself away from the enchanting, passing landscape. Only the weather, tuned to a more or less positive melody, again sharply changed for the worse. The tragic, gloomy clouds unceremoniously and roughly shoved the colored fluffy pillows of the clouds, and ruthlessly surrounded the sun from all sides, forcing him to unconditional surrender.

“It seems, after all, one cannot do without go-o-od rain! Wow, what the hell are coming!” The ant thought with annoyance, and said aloud, continuing to look out the window, as if spellbound:

– What day is it, Ave, tell me, please, otherwise I’m already confused! What day of the week?

Strange, but there was no answer, and the continuously-galloping hills had already ended, they gradually grew into majestic, impregnable mountains, around which a railway streamed with a silver ribbon. At the very foot of one of the sloping, wrinkled mountains, a modest village dozed off carelessly: dozens of three log-shaped old, but sturdy houses worthily revived the brown embankment. From the window of a flying train, one could see how several restless peasant ants lively drive a large herd of aphids into a new pasture, constantly shouting at them and whipping them up with whips. Through a dense wagon window, strangely leaked, a fragrant bouquet of blooming lavender and honey flew in.

– I ask what day of the week is today, Ave? What are you saying, huh? Silent... why?.. – Amina was finally able to break away from the kingdom in the law and looked towards a friend. – Ave, Ave, where are you?

But that was no longer in the same place. The baby elephant, a divine cub, was sleeping peacefully in the good legs of an ant. The painfully bright lighting in the car disappeared for a couple of seconds and then immediately returned. Amina, with some caution, got up from her seat, looked around with anxiety, feverishly searching the entire space of the car with her eyes, but, having not found Ave, she flopped hard back into the chair, sneezed, and hugged the priceless toy with extremely strong tenderness, closing its eyes. Dense silence came.

“I really hope... I really hope that everything will be settled down, and I will soon come to my goal! Without any unpleasant adventures. Just come and that’s it! Hurry to meet Ave already... still to determine exactly what my goal is now! Is this question looming ahead again, probably the most difficult question – to determine the goal to which you want to move?” – with a sigh, Amina thought in a dream and woke up.

“So, now and now, we conclude from... oh, oh, from sleep – we have to try hard, we really have to try to understand ourselves and determine the goal for this segment of life! And then everything will be much easier... it will be – just great!”

Gingerly rubbing her eyes, Amina was finally able to focus her vision on a nearby, just a few paces ten, huge, branchy, ash-coal tree with hanging thunderclaps of incredible claws. Then the ant

clearly saw how it separated from the mighty fairy giant whistling, a lively black silhouette spun off, although... although, after some minutes, she swore to herself, that the scene that had happened subsequently still seemed to her. At first, Amina was taken aback by a calm, phlegmatic walk, approached, sailed on light green, emerald, pistachio gentle waves along a grassy meadow, a rather strange ant, and dressed exactly like Amina herself, right to the smallest details, as if a mirror reflection: and a shabby light blue denim overalls with a number of narrow pockets on the right trouser leg for working tools, with exaltedly embroidered white and blue stripes, and a light shirt in a multi-color cage, and a summer windbreaker on top poisonous green in color with double, narrow, pointed arrows catching one another, and light white sports-type ankle boots, and another amazing coincidence – she was also pregnant, on such a tidy date... yes, and most importantly, the most striking thing, after which Amina the first was hard to think soberly – “Amina came up,” “Amina number two,” was exactly like her.

– Well, how are you doing and how are you doing? – with a confident velvet voice, the ant’s double asked in a chant, although her mouth did not come off. – I am very glad to meet you here, I have been waiting for a long time...

– Yeah, things are going well, everything is exactly so... everything is fine! I’m ok! – Amina, the first, slowly repelled a test blow, and a little surprised looked around, expecting with a slight hope that maybe someone would appear and save her, would help her in an absurd situation, but, as and it happens in terrible stories, not a single living soul was in the clearing.

– Are you sure about that, umm? You are kind of confused...

– Yes, everything is in order!

– Are you sure you are saying, umm? – stubbornly and melodiously insisted on a pessimistic answer approached. – I... you know, for some reason it seems to me that not everything is so perfect and beautiful? So many things have piled in your life, and you have piled all at once... It happens... Isn’t it hard for you? And if something seems to me... in general, my feeling rarely fails...

– Listen, thanks for the trouble, but I...

– Yes always please! – interrupted the ant.

– Thank you, thank you, I am absolutely sure that everything is fine with me! Great with me! – Amina parried clearly instantly and her uncertain look fixed on the approaching one. Then Amina noted to herself that she had already met this young ant somewhere before, but the playful mind could not agree that she herself was, this was Amina-second.

– Oh well! Alright, alright, let it be as you say? Excellent, but!.. I was just wondering, I...

– Really! – Amina glanced quickly somewhere behind the back of the unknown and noted that in the same clearing, in their common clearing, only on the opposite side, the same, exactly the same scene takes place: one Amina (now Amina the third) – pregnant, haggard, tired, and half asleep sitting and talking with Amina-fourth, which they talked about – did not reach the ant.

– For some reason, my heart skipped a beat and... so I decided to ask you about life... – Amina-second continued with a splinter in her voice.

– I understand, I understand. But I... everything is fine with me, really! – answered Amina, and she looked further behind the sketch on the opposite side of the meadow, which stalled and did not develop in any way: both ants were talking peacefully.

– Let it be “excellent” if you think so, – Amina-the second wedged into consciousness again.

– Yes, thank you, so be it! And only so!

– Immediately how... At a conditional level, everything is interconnected: everything that we invest in the world invariably returns to us! Everything flies to us in a boomerang. You say “excellent”, which means that the highest mark will return to you.

– Exactly, that’s how it goes!

– Of course, for sure!

– Does anyone deny this? I always adhere to the same opinion... give the world good – will return a hundredfold... so...

– That’s very good! I am extremely happy! I’m extremely glad that everything is fine with you! Let it continue to be easy and smooth! – unexpectedly, a stranger cut off Amin’s stranger, turned sharply and walked away. Amina just managed to send her a short one: “Happy to you!” – as she disappeared without a trace behind the nearest trees. Perplexed Amina did not have time to see when the detached “mirror” couple on the far side of the meadow parted – now there was nobody. “Brains have been completely awkward lately!” – Amina thought to herself distantly.

The sunny pancake, pulsating with endless positiveness, had not yet managed to rise high enough, but its burning, ruthless, all-penetrating tentacles already mercilessly burned the earth. A single, golden, lacy, cloudy, puffer coat resembling a cosmogonic sleepy fish swam across a demon-blue sky.

Morning heat foreshadowed a painful, excruciating and unpleasant day... Tiny annoying flies, one after another, stuck to open parts of the body – to the muzzle and upper legs, did not lag behind and irreconcilably tyrannized. Amina endlessly brushed the nervous frustration of small fry away.

“They got it, got it, got it! And what do they want from me?” – The black-eyed beauty could not understand in any way.

A small slippery snotty green lace rustled near the hind legs of an ant and disappeared into the thick grass.

“Well, where am I? Where am I now? What will be next? Who can help me?” – One after another, restless thoughts instantly grew to the most sky-high heavens and became a powerful, insurmountable stone wall. “And after all, in fact, not everything is so excellent if you frankly admit to yourself!” – Amina sighed heavily and remembered a recent guest.

– What are you doing here? – unexpectedly in front of a dreamy Amina an unfamiliar ant grew up. Where did he come from – Amina could not explain herself even after his departure. It just suddenly appeared molecularly, apparently by removing the invisible magic hat from the heated forest air – like a fairy genie. – Hi-hello, wandering bun! Come on, tell me how you got here!

For the first time in her life, she saw such an unusual dark-brown giant, as it seemed to her, with an impressive multi-ton truck. Expressive, almost rectangular gray-green eyes gazed steadily at her, carefully studying the ant, droplets of sweat lazily slipped through the temples of the traveler. The stranger’s infinitely long, grayish tendrils moved slightly, it seemed he was not going to go anywhere without receiving an answer. A snow-white plastic helmet was sitting on his dimensionless stump, like a glove, the same color – a jumpsuit from an air material adorned with chocolate color with a simple double emblem pyramid. Because of the widespread propodeum\*, an even more powerful backpack was sticking out, on which God knew what was worn on all sides: some worn by time, distant dirty blue colors polyurethane rugs, rectangular bundles neatly wrapped in foil, over which the blinded, centuries-old, faded labels with once printed rainbow barcodes, a couple of lanterns: one in a rather strange, rounded case, most likely – waterproof, solid-looking, about the size of a soccer ball, the other – just min it was a fake one, as if toy, with an elongated ribbed handle and a flattened lamp, and a spare helmet, exactly the shape and color of an apricot. In his right foot, he confidently held a small hatchet with a sheathed blade. The coloration of this very propodeum – the ant back – shows a high degree of kinship between some of the species of ants. It was on this good-natured topic of “kinship of individuals” that the further development of any other thoughts of the pregnant individual was stalled. She perfectly understood that the ant who appeared before her was a slightly different, alien species, and how he would behave in the situation that had arisen was the main question. But she did not feel the incense of fatal danger, which usually “looms” from afar, so everything should be in perfect order. Involuntarily puzzled by the appearance of the guest, the ant blinked awkwardly, her eyes ran restlessly, like crazy squirrels in a wheel vicious circle, but she herself was in the pose of a stiff polar bear.

– Hey, hey? Do you hear me? I ask, how are you doing here? – the stranger tried to stop the racing car racing thoughts of ant on the freeway of life, but all attempts seemed naive and unsuccessful.

He smiled broadly and softly to the seated one, who seemed helplessly icy, and at the same time his Arctic helmet squinted, rode off and nearly fell off the back of his head. The carefree trick of the “merry white helmet” amused Amina and her matte mandibles lifted slightly.

– Yes I...

– Yes!

– Did I drive past here? – with a hoarse throat in the throat Amina began to come true. – Passing, and now it turned out... it turned out...

– In what sense did it “drive through”, may I ask you? How to get through here? Here from all sides – do not drive, do not go! – the brown giant looked at her in bewilderment and tried to understand what she was talking about, while still continuing to hold a wide, good-natured smile. – You’re not alone here, or what?

– Why? I’m alone here... It seems to be alone!

– One or not one, I don’t understand? Have you been thrown away? What happened? – endless questions poured with thorny arrows from a curious passerby, and the answers? The answers were in no hurry to be born in the light milky fog in which the forest traveler was.

– In terms of? Ah yes! It so happened that they brought me to the city... Wow, they brought me to the city...

– Well, well, well!

– Yes, yes, they drove to the city... And then, it seems, something happened... Something happened, something happened! And I don’t remember at all... I don’t remember what happened – she calmly folded her legs on a neatly protruding petiol – a stalk connecting the abdomen with the breast, which until recently was very narrow, and now has become unusually round. – What else to tell? When we hit the road, was it evening? Evening?

– Are you asking me this? – the ant inclined its muzzle.

– No, I think... it seems like it was evening... I think it was evening...

– Ahh, well, then what? Yet when you, I turn to you personally, and not to the whole company, with whom you went, so, did you personally go to the town or where did you go there? Where did you originally go? Was there any purpose? – The ant gazes steadily at Aminu. – In each individual case, we can say that practically – in each, any ant, regardless of status, mood and much more, each ant, when it goes somewhere, has a specific purpose, final or intermediate destination, so to speak. Was there a destination in your personal case?

– Yes, yes, you say correctly, there was a point... you all say correctly, only now...

– Of course, I’m right. Wrong – completely impossible. If it were “wrong,” I would be silent. And-and-so, your point is destination...

– Point – this is all true, but something does not converge! Morning now, now, ooo-morning, and I don’t understand anything! Everything somehow twisted, got confused, turned around... we went in the evening, left in the evening, but how did it turn out, in the sense of – I ended up, I don’t remember... and where then is it? Strange... I can’t understand anything that happened! What... – the lost ant quickly blurted out everything previous with such an aim that they say: “I told you how to eat, and there you’ll figure out what to do with it and how to live with it,” and it would seem to continue to continue endlessly chatter like that.

– Well, well, and I won’t understand it at all, – her stranger retorted slowly with the arrangement, concluding that nothing sensible could be achieved from the stranger. – And there are no more or less traces on the grass or around the clearing! There are no traces of crime, so to speak! And this is not good! – He gave an all-penetrating look to the surrounding area and scratched the hump on his frontal lobe\*. – There is simply nothing at all, amazing! It seems nothing and nobody! The main thing is

to decide what all the same to do to you, that is, now not only to you, but to us, and how then, where to move! – a stranger barely audibly rumbled monotonously, and slightly adding volume, he said: – In any case, you need to get to the city! You won't leave you here! Now we'll come up with something. Since I met you, then you need help, how can you be alone without help? Now come up, come up!

– Thank you for... – Amin began to wheeze again, but the ant was already hurrying away from her somewhere.

## Chapter 3

### WHITE

This is how folded, as if plain, non-woven, bustling patterns of the blind maze of Fatum appear and multiply, as if fragile, delicate multi-storey houses of lightweight matches grow, simplest like clear mountain river water without poisonous twisted impurities, or patterned intricate, filled and diluted with all kinds of chemical bromines and magnesium (it's not up to us to decide), the fate of the great blessing of the stars: the life paths of Ave and Rond constantly crossed, and to be more precise, they just always ran alongside, and Siamese twins poke parallel to manual trolley on the rail track. We can say, practically, one common destiny (simple-straightforwardly ordered) for two with barely noticeable differences, spotty blotches, but, if you deal with meticulous scrupulousness, then for many working individuals the life paths are parallel with respect to each other, like properly stacked railroad tracks. So they go, run, flow, sad and rejoice, harmoniously and stubbornly, monotonously and endlessly – one next to the other (the right stretches near the left, and the left is the neighbor of the right), sometimes disappearing after a slight, sometimes unexpected, turn of events, and again, manifesting itself somewhere in the distance, growing and dying, but not changing to the very ghostly horizon...

Ave spent about fifteen years with Rond in one beautiful boarding school, one of the twenty best educational institutions in the country, from birth to graduation into “Big Life”, such a standard, such a labor and such a rootless. Together with him, he successfully completed specialized technical practice for one year at the largest urban training combination, at the end of which, with star ratings, they were freely admitted to the factory, which had become a loved one over the years, along with him and two dozen of the same poor fellow comrades, they hunched for three months, endlessly long ninety days, in the godforsaken uranium plant, where they managed to get punished due to the absurd oversight of the senior foreman during the night shift, along with to them he devotes the sixth year of the factory radio-technical details and I am sure that will work with it to the end of life.

“Ahh, it cannot be otherwise! This is so obvious! Together we will work and work!” – constantly categorically exclaimed Ave on this occasion. He recklessly believed that work and stability are the most important thing in his life, as in the fates of millions and millions, and millions of hymenoptera, like him.

“We were all born to work! We are all the beloved children of our vast country, and we love it recklessly! We love her!” – directly and irrevocably stated the Charter of the Society in its first all-encompassing article, making it clear that high-ranking state men sincerely, that is, with all their great hearts, cherish the rights of all citizens, and, first of all, “universal right to work.” To know and implement all the Statutes and Codes, and about twenty of them were recruited, was considered the duty of every full-fledged citizen of an independent State.

“You know, my friends, I'll say this... Maybe a little grandiloquent, but absolutely affordable, absolutely simple, absolutely... The whole spirit of the universal labor service penetrates our whole life, we plow from morning to night, and are ready to continue to work hard and work hard, and all this is for the good of the beloved Motherland!” – once in the dark purple evening hour, when the working day murmuringly brought up another exhausted digital icon, so, between things, easily and philosophically showed a weary Rond, who didn't want to say anything like that, but it was born of its own accord, out of breath him, along with fatigue, this rather simple, but deep expression once and for all with a small splinter sunk into Ave's mind.

Sad, gloomy, and at times indecently tedious, Ski appeared in A-745 two and a half years ago, after an unfair dismissal (as some individuals believed), or, as is commonly called, after the

“removal” of the previous third resident of the apartment -Lertz. The full name is Lertz A-79AK, although no one remembered exactly what his name was all. He conscientiously rattled at the largest radio engineering concern for more than three decades. A law-abiding worker, a production foreman, caught an unforgivable cold one October morning even after a traditional labor ritual, that is, after an ordinary eleven-hour working day, he went to bed dead. The next day, a joyful sunny bunny loomed a ghostly happiness – according to the internal house schedule, it was his home duty that was the reason, and therefore it was not necessary to go to his native plant and give his precious health for the benefit of a mechanical heartless fellow. After some work on the small farm here, hopelessly feral Lertz, gathering himself with all the unearthly forces, went for fresh nectar to his life key, which at that time was almost an hour’s walk from his home. Quite predictable and inevitable events developed further in a terribly active arithmetic progression. Forced autumn walk in the wild fresh air under a drizzling cold, stinking rain did not help, but only hurt the sick ant. Returning home with two ten-liter cans of nectar, he was completely exhausted, hopelessly collapsed at the very threshold of the apartment, losing consciousness.

When Rond and Ave arrived from work, they found the poor fellow in a helpless state: the painful heat didn’t let the ant go away for a minute, it seemed that under the thin skin of the patient, an insanely fiery fire was burning, ready to break out. Three short days allotted by the district doctor to recover a sick individual did not change anything significant. The next day, Rond, on duty, diligently looked after a fellow, spread out on the bed, as on a deathbed, indecently high degrees saving drop by an hour, but when they reached normal, the temperature rose again, and inevitably only one way was seen: the hardworking Lertz worked perfectly, and it will be eliminated only. That is exactly what happened. After three fleeting days, the doctor faithfully recorded “non-recovery of the patient and the impossibility of going to work.” The ill-fated metapleural gland\*, responsible for the production of antibiotics, which protects ants from all kinds of bacteria, was damaged. Under the Code of Privileges, Lertz lost any right to a workplace – who needs a sick ant?

Ave and Rond tried to intercede for a comrade by writing a fraternal petition for a deferment for the time of restoring health, an additional explanatory and positive characterization, drawing the attention of the leadership to the significant experience and merits of an excellent employee in the past, but nothing, alas, did not help. The sentence was ruthless, severe, and irrevocable, without any appeal consideration. The small monthly allowance, which was supposed to be paid upon elimination from the place of work for the first six months to support life, was insignificantly miserable, completely insignificant and completely miserable, in fact it was only enough for a week. . .

“Can you imagine, Rond, a monthly allowance – for a week!” – Ave spoke vehemently to his friend. – “How to live in such a situation?” Can you answer the question? The direct question is the direct answer! But, after all, there is no answer! There are much more days in a month than one short week for which this allowance is enough for you! Or is it just that way? Here it is – real life. . . Those at the very top do not understand how we live here. . .”

In a word, in such a situation, ants living on auspiciousness had to starve. And for a sick Lertz, a lack of food was the worst medicine. Within a two-week period, Lertz was evicted from the A-745 room, the property of the enterprise, because he was no longer an employee of the radio factory. His comrades supported him as best they could, but they could radically change something; they were not able to.

There was still a worthy option to solve a vital issue – getting a job, but finding a permanent place, and even with housing, or with decent wages so that there was enough to pay for housing, was unrealistic. Lertz could not change his profession and try to earn his daily bread in some other way because of his age and character traits. He devoted his whole life to the service of one single enterprise, and now, like waste slag, he was thrown into the trash.

Neither Ave nor Rond knew how Lertz’s further fate came about, and after a month or two they didn’t remember “fellow soldiers” at all: working days take away all mental strength and make

you think only about the present. Neither about the distant past, nor about the near future – there is practically no thought to think, neither strength, nor time, nor desire.

– There is no Lertz with us, and perhaps there isn't anywhere else... though... – somehow, a week after the elimination of Lertz, Ave told Ronda, “our Lertz seemed to have sunk into the distant and irrevocable past, having given his debt to... – and then Ave fell silent, not knowing who to pay the debt to, and, after a minute, he decided to finish the tirade. – He gave a debt, probably to the State... here I don't know.

– Yes, you're saying everything right, old man! Correctly! – Rond decided to support a friend, seeing that he doubts. – It's a pity that Lertz is not with us, we are very used to him.

– Sorry, exactly...

– But life is such that yesterday – he, and tomorrow – maybe we... no one knows what will be behind the twist of fate... there are all kinds of turns – both smooth and sharp...

– That's for sure, life is such... though, we always blindly believe in tomorrow's stability – isn't it? We have a job and we don't even think that we can be in the place of Lertz...

– Do not think, because there is no time. We just plow endlessly in our production and that's all...

The memory (which is still an infection) which is typical to be selective, imperceptibly for friends, was carefully taken by an eraser and, closing her eyes and heart, mercilessly erased almost all the pages about Lertz in the Life Book of A-745 apartment. Out of a thousand applicants, they were lucky enough to be selected by an ant named Ski for a vacant workplace. Before Skye found himself on Sixty-second Street, he humbly pulled the strap on the industrialist Pax, his younger brother Theik Dee, a senior assembly fitter on the conveyor of a car factory, day and night, and fell under a massive, by the standards of the time, reduction in the number of good four hundred ants that flooded with a cold storm wave with the introduction of modern, fashionable robotics. Then, more than five years ago, a similar step by Pax to re-equip his enterprise evoked the ironic smiles of most tycoons, because the maintenance of the “live” labor force was much cheaper than the purchase of expensive equipment, and additional financial injections were required for constant maintenance of the equipment. Only two short years passed, and Pax admitted his obvious tragic mistake, but, of course, the money spent idly could not be returned.

– Only the one who does nothing does not make mistakes! – Pax stated with philosophical calm. – And yet I am sure that the near future is in progress! The time has come for an all-common robot life! Robots will flood our factories and our homes, they will not only come to our aid, but will crowd us out from everywhere. Just kick us out! We will be forced to yield to them in many vital sectors! You'll see, I'm saying for sure! It sounds scary, but it will. I believe that our real world is now almost ready to surrender to the mercy of robotics, and what can we say about what will happen in ten to twenty to thirty years. Of course, this is not good, no, not good, but this is simply nowhere to go, it is simply impossible to get away. Soon you will see for yourself that I am telling you the truth. Life itself will put everything in its place!

In fact, few ants believed the words of Pax, nodding indulgently towards his expensive mistake, but the handsome progress, in fact, tirelessly paces-runs-hurries with quick steps, and here the whole clue is not so much in words there was something overshot in the calculations of the industrial tycoon, how many in the actual, in practical application of new inventions. Unsophisticated world-renowned scientists and brainy eccentric inventors from time to time present, naturally or unexpectedly, any surprises and discoveries: not only pleasant and useful in everyday life, but also completely useless and, sometimes, even dangerous. After all, how can you create, for example, a flawless robot driver? Now, just drones are being tested. Yes, it's possible to teach a motor vehicle to move according to a given route, but all life collisions cannot be taken into account, there can be hundreds of options, even thousands, of emergency situations on the road.

A computer program ideally reads changes and errors on the road, comprehensively scans many objects during movement, evaluates the sudden appearance of pedestrians, developing and correcting the traffic algorithm. But after all, it is impossible to foresee. So, the most ordinary example, when an ordinary robot transporter moves at an average speed at “rush hour” along the intended route along an congested highway, and suddenly for no reason, it stops in a dug, and the reason is quite simple – A simple accident happened ahead. One imprudent driver could not navigate in time in a busy traffic stream, and his favorite car suddenly ran into another car (and where he got out of, damn him!) When changing lane to a neighboring lane. Everything! Dead end! These “dead” cars, which are scolded from all sides, are standing, cars that tightly sealed not only one and a half or two lanes, but also all the traffic with the most difficult traffic jams, and which you have to go around, cars are waiting for the transport police... But the stream of people passing by vehicles endlessly and the robot will wait for the right moment to travel, but this very moment can only come in an hour, which is likely at this time.

In everyday life, in the place of the “auto-drone”, nine out of ten drivers will slowly begin to move, emotionally asking their traffic colleagues to let the car go, and they will certainly miss out of solidarity: not the second or third, but the fifth motorist. And such uncomplicated situations on city roads – an infinite number. So, the conclusion follows only one thing – robots can not always save the world! In one thing, Pax was right when he said that “life will put everything in its place.”

All technical equipment, “modern and reliable,” as unconditionally stated in the annotation, purchased by Pax, and failing with its enviable stability, was dismantled overnight and immediately sent to the metallurgical plant in Vourdeks-9, where it found a new life. Over the next two days, new staff was accepted, and the auto-factory conveyor was bored, breathing again, booming, and noisy with resurgent force. Of the four hundred ants that were eliminated from the Pax factory, about fifty remained alive (a tough, harsh life without a permanent job, unfortunately, did not spare anyone!): They were lucky – they found and took the ants to your previous job. Ski and twenty other highly qualified specialists were offered jobs in the new workshop at the radio factory upon dismissal. These paths led Sky’s fate to the dwelling of A-745. To say that “the ant was very pleased that he has a new job and housing” is not to express all that universal happiness, the boundless happiness of salvation and gaining a new life.

“Without labor, there is no point in our existence!” – with such an unpretentious stereotypical phrase, good-natured Ski met the new comrades-in-arms, good-naturedly unconsciously checking his response. He did not deny, fully accepting the philosophy of labor and productive pastime. In the future, it was not noticed by the ant that he was lousy, lazy, and losing his job, was ill or chooses a easier labor operation. Ski always tried to fulfill the production tasks assigned to him by the “excellent”. Maybe something didn’t work out completely, but he devoted himself to the work process one hundred percent. Ski became friends with Ave and Rond – of course, not immediately, but step by step, gradually, since a common household is a very difficult matter, and it takes quite a long time to find individual approaches to solving many issues. For all those two little-tail years that Ski lived with Ave and Rond, he still once thought about leaving. He was attracted by the profession of a military officer for a long time, but inexorable time passed, it flew rapidly, and the ant kept putting off the solution to this vital issue, and when it was too late to enter a military higher institution, there was only one thing – to enlist for contract service in the army. For health and physical fitness, Ski would probably have gone through the appropriate medical commission and been accepted into the troops: people like him are always welcome there. The solid stone Ski had more than enough energy, in all his life he had never turned to doctors, except for vaccinations, and apart from a broken upper paw in early childhood, when he awkwardly fell from a tall tree and could break everything, but escaped with only a simple fracture. Strong, well-knit, muscular Ski did morning exercises every day, as did most ant individuals, but in the evenings, it turned out only once or twice a week, stubbornly “pulled pieces of iron”, pumped muscles with dumbbells at home, plus almost every Thursday – volleyball training with friends.

Everything seemed to push the ant to pursue a military career, but each time an impossible-strange, inexplicable force stopped the development of Ski's thoughts about changing his life path, something did not add up, and he always saw a certain mystical side in this.

But a couple of weeks ago, the ant again thought about military service, he faced his neighbor Torill, an ant soldier, who once again offered his help in registering for contract service, face to face. Ski solemnly promised to think carefully and give an answer.

## Chapter 4

### GREEN

Endless dozens, hundreds, thousands of cars, similar to each other, like dirty brown bumblebees, muttering morning prayer confidently and heavily under their breath, skipped at a frantic speed over a wide and deliberately fanciful bridge that loomed starlessly in two corners from the maternity hospital. Divided, sawn like a birthday cake, into several equal parts, the flip-up architectural structure, rather, resembled the fortress defensive towers of the Middle Ages, connected by a continuous, irreconcilable, impassable wall. Menacingly buzzing metal ropes, mercilessly piercing right through the bridge from the beginning of the ascending cross-over structure to its foggy-dense end, completed the gloomy picture of the mega-caterpillar monster. Thick stranded black threads twisted by powerful snails seemed huge sharp spikes, needles of a bristled hedgehog or an angry porcupine, ready to do anything to repulse the attack.

Under its heavy, heavy armor, in a bluish haze, a calm river flowed, humbly carrying its waters of time to an unbounded blue ocean: here, in a bustling city, the river drowsily spilled over the great expanse, endowing the inhabitants of the beloved town with its priceless beauty. The weather did not favor. A shy little ball rode gloomily across the sky back and forth behind gloomy heavy clouds and was in no hurry to appear at all, and a nondescript, incomplete sketch pressed, seeming half-dead, onto the city with its heavy pessimistic load. Somewhere nearby, every minute above the high-rise office buildings, a military helicopter grunted alarmingly and risky: it either completely disappeared into the thick draconian ultramarine sky, then it suddenly popped up in an unexpected place, and, hanging for a couple of seconds, as if scanning a picture of what was happening, drowned again in the unconditional splendor of moist clouds. Amina distinctly saw how far away, on the outskirts of the city, a stockade of factory pipes was bursting incessantly bursting with unpleasantly dark thick puffs of smoke.

“Where is our world heading for? Where it goes... it’s a real kata stanza... what is the ecology and ephemeral care for our mother nature? These are the most naive environmental issues for a long time do not bother anyone! Well, it seems to me that they don’t bother... naive... did they come up with beautiful terms sparkling in the summer sun, take at least the recent one... They called last year the pathos ‘Year of Ecology’, but what did he give us? He gave us an empty ‘shhhh’. A couple of voiced problems were also voiced by business... But real vital questions remained unanswered. We build – we work – we produce – we throw away... and all this – for what? Is there an answer? If dividends shine fantastically in some small matter, then, despite the unresolved environmental issue, the proposed project will be agreed, in any case, sooner or later, but it will be agreed anyway, and only so... The hypersensitive marker engraved with the name ‘Profit’ clearly highlights the main line ‘Total’ and that’s it. It’s all in the hat: the state is supposedly happy that the number of jobs is growing from the launch of the new project, and there will be new tax deductions to the state treasury, new employees are happy get a job with stable earnings, and the boss with a team of investors are happy from dripping into the account in countries free of taxes, percentages of invested capital! Profit is all! And more absolutely nothing is needed. And we will deal with ecology... then... maybe we will deal... if we have time...”

Deadly, overwhelming technical emissions mercilessly rose endlessly winding paths to the gray, tired of the heaviness of breath, the sky, firmly connecting and attracting to each other two worlds, two universes: the heavenly world and the earthly world. Poisonous technogenic umbilical cord tightly bound and did not let go, giving rise to genuine fear. The harsh, merciless wind hysterically, incredibly straining his muscles, squalled with all his might, eagerly trying to take the poisoned clubs away

from the hard-working city. And among this lead industrial world, on an open platform, on the roof of a neighboring high-rise, surrealist-artist-ant. Neither inclement weather nor the dirty darkness covering the city did not bother him. Cleverly hiding behind a double brick ledge, under a strange, improvised small canopy, it seemed that the ant completely did not pay attention to the strong wind and drizzling rain, he, as if in an illusory oblivion, hurriedly drove his brush on the canvas fixed on a ventilation ledge, enjoying the process of drawing, the creator was dissolved in his work, leaving for posterity a dog-sympathetic gray landscape on the canvas. What for? For what?

On a small windowsill, near which Amina stood, there were blooming violets. Here is the true beauty.

The noise of the restless, buzzing metropolis barely came through the dense double-pane window. In some slipping moment, Amina quite realistically thought that on the site of high-rise buildings she sees a terrible apocalyptic picture: rare dilapidated houses, stinky, fetid, dilapidated shed shacks, laminated-shingled plywood pieces and wooden bricks, shabby tent wigwams, cardboard resemblances of houses built from faded advertising posters, amateur rolling dugouts.

Around the bright bonfires that restlessly play between themselves here and there amid the surviving houses and abandoned cars, wilted ants doze off on tattered boxes, shamelessly wrapped in torn clothes, which are strange to call clothes, everywhere to the dark blue the sticky streams of smoke of the abandoned country conflagration stretch to the black sky, and the mercantile-harsh, completely lifeless sun, akin to a fiery indefatigable bird with an amber-agate reigning plumage, calmly flies itself from place to place, but a life-giving, saving light that from her, from the solar star, alas, does not come. The depressed Amina sighed heavily and slammed her eyes, trying to turn off the pessimistic and gloomy picture in the mourning imagination.

Time flowed sluggishly through the sad irregular oval of the window, round, tired of expectations, Amina comfortably housed herself in a cloudy, wide, freely fit two medium-fed ants – almost a double, double-breasted armchair made of pleasantly soft skin of young dandelion rams, from which – there was an amazing aroma of a blooming lotus from a distant delta of the southern river, saturated with the inherent notes of working days of hymenoptera. The ant twitched slightly, as it happens in the first milliseconds of slipping into the slippery transcendental parallelism of sleep, but Amina did not sleep, and did not even doze, she looked into the distance, through a ghostly transparent, huge double-glazed window. Her lucid, velvety kind eyes sparkled unusually brightly – either from the joy overwhelming her, or from endless fatigue. Go, take them, these ant women, why do their eyes shine?

Every minute someone passed by her in a humbling manner: either jaunty, restless young medical sisters, now pregnant ants dazed by thoughts, immersed in the som-nambulistic world of the future, then restless doctors, sometimes laborers, business-like and important, like peacekeeping guards, and it happened, and small, still very small pearl ants ran through, noisily sorting out some of their intricate mischief.

“Where did they come from here?” – Amina was perplexed and smiled idly. – “Shouldn’t a special building have to be assigned to such a trifle For some reason, I always thought that baby-ants are placed separately? It is strange how such small ones were released into the general adult corps? And when will the weather improve and the world will become colored?”

Suddenly, a completely relaxed ant heard a couple of ghostly sonorous clicks, and an unfamiliar voice right behind me whispered faintly: “So, we work, we work, we work, friends, we start the process, we start shooting! Motor-motor-motor!” In dismay she looked around nervously, desperately got up from a friendly chair and confidently took several steps towards the elevator, but suddenly changed her mind and immediately returned to her former place. An accidentally flustered uneasiness melted in an instant, leaving no trace.

Here, in the city maternity hospital in just two days of stay, she felt so comfortable and calm for the first time in the last two months that she would love to stay here for a couple more months, she still has nowhere to hurry. Nowhere and no one to go to...

– Sorry, sorry, can I help you with something? – the nurse on duty kindly turned to Amina.

But Amina “lost consciousness” and did not hear anything at all, the medic touched her paw to the pregnant woman and repeated the question.

– No, no, everything is in order. No, thanks, everything is in order, – Amin hurried to answer. – I have everything... I will ask if something suddenly... Thank you!

“Caring paws! Caring, caring, caring! That’s why I didn’t have enough all the time. Here they take care of me and my future baby...”

Outside the window, through the hazy hopeless cap of clouds that covered the city, and indeed the whole world, the burning, living rays of the sun erupted, as if a mysterious surgeon had carefully made an incision with a mysteriously bright scalpel, and in an instant the gray and earthy houses and streets came to life, breathing, turning the gloomy area beyond the area into colorful and truly vibrant habitats. The gray-dirty industrial monster in an instant unrecognizably transformed into a polyphonic-colored town.

“How little, it turns out, is necessary for true happiness – for someone a tiny drop of warmth and care, for another – a few rays of the sun? Life-giving sun. Although, maybe it’s the same thing?”

– Admire our beauty? – with a proud smile, the approaching roommate of Amina, the ant Piyo, nodded at the marble-blue snake. “But today she’s hardly impressive!” Today it is cloudy, and not at all... She is very beautiful here! You just need another time...

– Yeah, I look at everything. To the city, to the river! I like everything very much, – Amina answered with a little confusion in her voice, and she was surprised at her shaky uncertainty.

– Yeah, our Miisa\* is perhaps one of the most picturesque rivers in the whole continent. And for me – she is the most beautiful and is. The most-most-most! In the summer, especially on hot days, Miisa is generally irresistible! You look at her in the summer! What places will you be from?

– Have I seen few rivers? More precisely, this river – the first one I met, – Amin said a little embarrassed. And then blurted out joyfully: – But I really liked her! True, really liked it. We also have a river in the city, but somehow we couldn’t get to it. Do not believe it, I have never seen her. All work and work, but endless vanity, but there is no time for the beautiful... there is no time to think about the beautiful. It seems that work eats up all my life... And from the city I am from San-Prittu\*.

– Well, about work – that’s what you are saying! So many folded. We have to plow from morning to night without a break and a weekend.

– Yes... Work is our everything... without it – nowhere...

– There certainly isn’t anything beautiful. All for the common cause...

– Yes, yes, everything is so!

– And sometimes it seems better not to stop and not think what we are for and why we all work... the main thing is the process itself...

– You are directly speaking in my words. Well, talk about work! – Amina said in surprise.

– So this, I think, not only you and I... but about the river... if you talk about the river, then in general, any river calms and gives an inexplicable force of life, – Piyo became sad for a second, thought for a moment, and began to think aloud. – I don’t know how to explain it, but the course of the river... It fascinates and captivates with its calmness, with such good calmness, it draws you in, attracts you to you. Chess-word, it fascinates and calmly so, calmly... you look at the current like that, you stand and look, and you think... you think... uh, now you would immerse yourself in warm water and completely relax! – dreamed Piyo immediately closed her eyes, and a slight smile froze on her face.

– Ahhh, and the truth, probably the truth, is so cool! Amin caught her thought, delighted in a completely childish way.

– Yes, this is not the right word, not the right word! It is cosmically great! Fine! Phenomenally! Be sure to swim sometime. Take your time and drive to the river... In the summer you need... – happy Piyo shone with emotion and added. – Highly recommend!

They stood still for several minutes in complete silence, enjoying the panorama of the city, which eagerly absorbed solar energy, and the picturesque river, until they were called into the dining room for a mid-afternoon snack.

Two loud gulls flew one by one outside the window, they made a small bend over the radiant smooth surface and disappeared without a trace behind a spiny bridge.

## WHITE

Thin, cold trickles of the soul fell on the narrow shoulders\* of the ant. Hissing water gaily ran through the hardened body from head to toe and disappeared into a small black hole in the floor. Warm rainbow light played overflows and invigorated Rhonda. The bathroom, for the convenience of using two ants at once, was divided into two parts by a low matte partition, which, like a mirror sheet, reflected the contents of one compartment in the other: snow-white washbasins for washing and pseudo-angular corner cubicles for taking a shower repeated to the utmost insanity glossy taps with cross-shaped “lamb”, numerous shelves for any important bathroom trifles, hooked plastic hangers, reminiscent of the teeth of a mythical dragon, transparent, cunning, in the shape of an unusual the marine animal, ladle, merry plastic stand for the toothbrush (with only one hole), showing a one-eyed pirate crazy

There was a soft knock on the pale blue plastic door, which was most likely used for the border between the bathroom and the corridor rather than for locking by random guests, then a beeped light a couple of times, and, finally, Ski’s cocked voice sounded.

- Rond, in a minute your time is running out! Hurry up!
- Now, now I’m going out! – skillfully repulsed a blow Rond.
- Come on, come on!

The red ant cocked his head: an electronic clock, neatly placed between the tiles, suggested that his legitimate five minutes for the soul had expired.

“Ehh, that’s a swim in the real sea!” Or you can in the warm and clean ocean... Sail away far, far from the coast, stretch out and lie down, relax on the calm, barely swaying waves, feel the whole expanse and depth of water, fully enjoy the expanses of the water element. Sail away so far where there is no one, so that the silence is quiet, gentle, light, whispering waves and the even, smooth surface of the ocean!”

He calmly turned the pretzel of the valve a couple of revolutions, and the brisk stream of water, gradually decreasing, completely disappeared, ant briskly shook the last drops from his head, extended his upper right foot to a striped towel and felt a gentle touch of light material.

“The most important thing is to thoroughly wipe the antennae so that you always have it dry and shiny!” Remember, a dry mustache will someday save your life!” – unexpectedly Rond showed another memorable photograph from a deep, deep childhood, – the words of the kindergarten nanny.

Drying himself with a pleasant towel, he threw open the bathroom door, and the mint breeze of the room air conditioner swept through the redder body. A disheveled ant pulled on his underpants in an instant and quickly ran out of the bathroom compartment. A few minutes were left before the general release. For some reason, Rond crouched for a second and abruptly jumped, fatally waving his right foot with all his strength in the air, depicting a volleyball player who soars above the volleyball net and punches the opponent’s block with an elastic ball.

“So as not to forget about the most important thing! As always – at the last moment!”

Rond paced broadly on the threshold of the room, Ski and Ave were already in their places – each in his own bed.

- We’re ready, – said Ave.
- Yeah, – Rond said in the affirmative.
- Yes, we are ready! – confirmed Ski.
- Well! I hear, hear! – Rond raised his voice.

The on-duty ant put his right red-haired paw to the electronic clock and lowered the registration token: the clock indicated the time with a bright green light – “Twenty-three, fifteen.”

“Everything went perfectly, another working week was tattered... another one, like hundreds of other weeks... how wonderful, how good that tomorrow, almost today is a day off! Finally, you

can take a little breath after the marathon of a difficult work week and switch from all this perishable fuss, running around, husk, confetti...”

Rond, full of thoughts about the upcoming day by the usual movement, set the gentle Sunday alarm code on his watch, and, having pressed the automatic shutdown of the lampshade, flopped into his own, so welcoming bed.

“In a real calm sea-ocean, you would have a swim!” – with a new tidal, shaggy-foamy wave, his “hardly-selling” dreams of endless expanses of water returned.

An endless stream of pink fantasies annoyingly swirled in a fascinating icy whirlpool and did not let go into free swimming, boiling with boiling foam, and reverently charming, and lulling. Rond, who fell asleep, suddenly remembered his old friend Kint, who selflessly kept watch on a fishing trawler: “He surely admires all the beauties of the vast ocean, and, maybe, sometimes dissolves in it, swims, bathes... Work is work, but you can enjoy moments that are favorably given to us by fate.”

The muffled soft orange light of the lampshade, gradually fading away, finally fell asleep soundly in a gray-haired nightly note. Outside the twilight window, noisy rain still lashed uneasily. The murderous elements played the devilish tragedy in the theater more and more actively. The changeable gusty wind either flew with furious fury on the incalculable trophic drops falling from the sky, then silently faded away, as if a fearless jaguar, waiting in ambush for a young antelope, then again pounced with even more frantic force, and this desperate game continued without end and edge. Terrible thunderclouds pushed anxiously across the gloomy sky from one corner to another, and back again, as if finding no way out of a confined space. And yet, the only way out of the shaky shameless clouds was to completely pour out all their sadness accumulated over the day, two-week-month over the sleeping city, and only then calmly sail home...

Ski and Rond were already snoring soundlessly – apparently, they had revealed some secrets of enchanting night tales. Ave, lying on his right side, unsuccessfully tried to fall asleep and peered at the old Alt chair with curved carved legs, his eyes moved a little to the left of the furniture antiquary, and before his eyes appeared a picture of a lighted-black square window: external light fell on a huge rectangle from above, creating an illusion of infinite space.

If you look into the gloomy depth of the night, without being distracted by the same forty-story hulk, you can see so thin and fragile lines of sad loneliness! But, alas, the ghostly tears of nature, sullenly flowing down the transparent surface of glass, returned to the real world. A world of endless laws and regulations, where every working ant was a tiny detail of the universal mega-mechanical apparatus.

Suddenly, Ave caught himself with the careless thought that observing the rain chilly at night, at the very moment when everyone and everyone had already left the real world and were soundly sleeping, brought in his tiny heart an unclear confusion, and now for a whole month or not, more than a month, he lives somehow differently. Not so, that absolutely something radically changed in his life, but he began to inexplicably be excited and fascinated by the flickering night world, attracting to his mystery, like a magnetic plate. It seemed to him sincerely that every particle of his tiny organism deliberately tries to increase to infinite sizes, then to decrease to a point mark, and that his whole body is continuously breathing, and already lives some kind of indefinite, unnatural for a “vicious circle of working ant”, your life. Sometimes strange minutes came, and maybe seconds, when his “right” consciousness turned off, and he uncontrollably drowned in an infinite, mysterious Universe. A whistling wind gripped him gently and firmly and carried it into distant unknown expanses. After such alarming fleeting attacks, it seemed to Ave that he was losing control of himself, could not do anything and say where he was. His mystical soaring did not cause much concern, and he decided that since the state of these same “unreal flights” didn’t harm anyone around him, then everything was in perfect order, everything was on schedule, unchanged... For himself, he he couldn’t exactly determine whether it was good or bad, he simply felt an irresistible desire to get up and go to the window, to be a little closer to the priceless transparent pearls pouring from the infinitely hazy sky.

It happened that sometimes, nevertheless, some inexplicable fear pulled out all his muscles, suddenly paralyzed his limp body, gripped him tightly by all legs, like a Procrustean bed, and did not let him out of his arms.

## Chapter 5

### WHITE

Morning sunshine easily seeped through the dense glass barrier. The smallest specks of dust, as if performing a mysterious rite of worship to the natural gods, leisurely amused themselves in a funny rhythmic whirl. They measuredly waltzed according to the laws of old traditions: “O-o-one, two, three! One, two, three!” Their carefree bewitching and captivating dance enlivened the room a bit, where literally everything was still there: every object was in a state of deep sleep. Energetic zinger in a frozen world. Microscopic dust particles are the most tender creatures of the divine nature, and, perhaps, of the technogenic world, one after the other, the other after the third, and so on – to infinity, they selflessly fought for existence in the surrounding microcosm: then growing into a bottomless The flow of the sun to visible particles, then dissolving without the slightest residue in the shadowed world and becoming incredible invisible. The mystical square of the window, attracting bright life-giving rays, served as a place of uncompromising execution of the dreams of billions of cru-kicks. In order for them to become colossal and significant, they only had to get into the sunlight... it turns out how simple it is! Just a combination of natural circumstances, and you are already completely different.

When the numbers six to thirty crept out on the light panel, the sleepy alarm clock woke up nervously, restraining itself, yawned and monotonous, and, until it was deceived, a calm melody with unknown force lifted Ave from the soft bed. The day came of his domestic duty. “O-o-one, and two!” – The internal counter of the half-sleeping ant clearly turned on, and the schedule for Sunday chores appeared on a black glossy screen. In a quick way, Ave threw a fresh shirt over his shoulders and, making a couple of winged steps, decorously appeared in front of the monitor, shamanically performed passes with his hands and revived the dead machine. “Three, four!” – and a personal electronic chip token, which was worn on the upper paw of each goose and intended for total tracking of the location of each working individual, passed the test. The half-asleep goose returned to his bed, in the room the already awakened but still languid Ski and Rond were finishing their bedding. “Fi-i-ive-six-seven!” – here the new day has begun!

– Guys, guys, – Ave began modestly, but did not recognize his hoarse voice, his throat was filled with dry thorns. – Hmmm? He growled sharply and loudly. – Guys, today you have outlined painting at the factory, so dress in the “fourteen” shape, truncated?

– Yeah, what’s the difference, what to do? I want to say that anyway! Even if it is painting, we agree on everything! You stole us! – Ski went to wash. – The main thing is to go to work anyway!

– That’s for sure! Work on Sunday is the holiest! – Rond supported him, either with a malicious smile, or with unfading optimism. – Today we work only half a day, and this is encouraging.

– Yes, by the way, you have not forgotten that next Sunday a carnival is planned! And we still have a problem with costumes. It will be necessary to come up with something, are we? In general, we will do everything as expected! Carnival!

– Ave, you seem to be working, friend! – Rond squeezed toothpaste onto the brush and looked out from the bathroom to look at Ave with great surprise and winked at him. “Or am I confusing something?” We have a carnival in two weeks, not one. Am I saying something wrong?

– Listen, for sure. You’re right, in two! I completely got used to this job! – Ave smiled shyly, shaking his head slightly, saying that “that’s what I’ve come to – I’m already confused in a few days,” and added a hardly sensible reason. – Although, if you say by all the rules, the carnival will begin a little more than in a week. We are speaking out – in two... Not really us, but only Rond, we don’t have time for anything. Rond appears in two weeks, and the carnival begins in one. He shouted the last sentence to his friends, worried that they would not hear him.

Rond and Ski looked out together from the bathroom, they were already brushing their teeth with might and main, and, muttering and muttering something slurred, they glanced at once. Today, Rond was counting on returning home at around two o'clock, he was going to call Ski to shoot a talk show, but he somehow put it off to tell him about it.

– Ski, will we go to the 19th channel tonight? – Rond has pawed on him and on himself. – Are we two going together? At eighteen zero-zero talk show filming. Since I've been called, then I have to go.

– Together? – Ski asked.

– Yes, there are only two invitations, Ave is on duty, he will not be able to completely, so we are going.

– I don't even know... Something is not in the right mood! – nosed Ski.

– Listen, well, no options here. In the evening – talk shows, they called us, so let's go. You have to, friend, you understand! That's all!

– Good! You really persuaded. More precisely, I confronted the fact, – said Ski with a slight causticity in his voice. – It's good that I didn't say it yet, not at seventeen fifty!

– Nah, it would be too late in the evening. Now is the time! In the morning – the very thing – to plan the day correctly! – Rond laughed at his joke, Ski did not take offense at all. – You yourself know very well: I've completely started working, I'm thinking everything – it's necessary, it's necessary to say, today, tomorrow I'll say it, and all this' today-tomorrow 'is transferred and transferred... And here they are, and – said!

– OK! Received information! I'll go to the show! Once – it is necessary, then – it is necessary! But, only for your sake! – minted Ski.

– No, you don't have to! Seriously speaking! For my sake, you will have to take the lead in the show!

– Ha-ha-ha, you simply amused me, – Ski smiled muffledly. “Thanks for the morning positiff.”

In the kitchen, still not awakening, Ave filigree sliced bread for his comrades. The boiling of boiling water in the kettle reached the consciousness of Ave only when the water was turned off in the bathroom.

“Eight-eight and a half-nine!”, And ant removed the kettle from the hot stove onto the malachite stand at the moment when Rond and Ski, rumbling against each other, rushed out of the bathroom into the room to start the sports warm-up.

– Ave, we freed, you can go wash yourself. Come on...

“Here are ten! Ten is just great!”

Ski's loud arrow hit directly into Ave's mind, and made her flinch slightly, which instantly rushed into the bathroom to freshen up and no longer doze off.

“It's time to turn on the day!” Away, away all sorrows and laziness! It's time to take care of everyone! And waiting for us ahead – success!” – Ave remembered the words from some time-worn song.

Having polished his teeth with magic toothpaste, Ave smiled broadly in a pretty mirror and winked at his reflection cheerfully. Quickly shaving with a brand-new blade (“What a blessing it is to shave completely” zero “for” one, two and you're done!), The ant drowned unconsciously in a wide terry towel, trying to somehow stop the morning race, and, waking up, with pleasure went to the kitchen. It smelled soft and cozy of mint freshness.

– O-o-o, damn it! – He cursed loudly, hitting his hip painfully on the jamb of the bathroom. – Well so-and-so! I'll gather all the corners today, for the umpteenth time... – and the ant scratched the bruised place. And then a snippet from today's short dream surfaced, like an Ave athlete, Ave, who had never once got up on skis, flies recklessly, rushes from a huge pink-sunset snow mountain on magical skiing, and like a real slalom player deftly dodges obstacles: right-left, right-left. Bright

rainbow golden frosty evening adds a gambling mood. Diamond spiky snow flies with tiny pollen into a happy bespectacled muzzle, and the man is infinitely happy from winter walking entertainment. Solemn music sounds... it looks like our anthem...

In my beloved kitchen, the alarm clock hinted twice, notifying me of the minute readiness for the start of Sunday breakfast.

“Everything passes, as always – clearly on schedule! But keeping to the schedule is a direct guarantee of success! We are just well done! One must always reassure oneself, and if one does not cheer oneself up, what will happen? There will be nothing special, just hardly anyone will do it for you. So, we are the real youths! We work and smile! Without the right attitude there are no labor successes!”

Cheerful Ave turned on the TV for a minute or two to watch the weather forecast for the day on the AA-News channel.

– Guys, hear? The weather positively pleases us with its sixteen, and the sky promised a clear, without rain, no wind, well, or almost none! Real summer is on the street! – Ave commented on the forecast so that Ski and Rond could hear it. – So, we can safely say the words from the famous song: “The sun shines in the morning – that means the day will succeed!”

Two peppy comrades, having finished the morning warm-up, threw weighty dumbbells under the sofas, and one after another they jumped again into the bathroom for literally five seconds – pouring ice-cold water on their belts. At that time, Ave meekly sat at the kitchen table and dreamily filled the mugs with tea, a well-cooked hypericum, and the guys, already dressed in dark blue shirts and trousers, appeared together on the threshold of the kitchen.

## Chapter 6

### WHITE

The service factory bus departed from the house where the ants lived on a Sunday schedule, at seven-fifteen, punctually according to a strictly time-honored schedule, since along the way it was necessary to go around several more points in order to “load” all the working people. Our comrades just had enough time to spare, a toe to toe to get into funny striped black and white overalls from comfortable and very thin, but durable raincoats, designed for painting work, in which they looked like hilarious exotic zebras, and go down to high-speed elevator to the first floor.

Ski, already dressed in colorful attire, humorously portrayed an impatient horse waiting, – mischievously and sweepingly hit the imagined hoof on the floor. He opened the door wide open, and, with a friendly wave of his left foot on Ave’s goodbye, the other pressed the red button for calling the elevator several times. The doors of the lifting device swung open silently, and at the same second Rond jumped out of the apartment, fastening the last button on the move. It was obscured in the half-darkness of the elevator, where there were already a dozen of the same striped ants like them.

– Have a good leap for you today, zebras! Victory at the races! – Cheerfully chased after Av, but it was too late, the elevator doors closed. He decided then to cheer himself up and sang aloud. – Go-o-o to work! Go-go-o-o! There are forces, and we will overcome everything without problems!

He bounced high on one leg, then on the other, shaking zero the last, stuck in a passing consciousness, invisible drops of sleep and, turning around, continued his housework. The duties of the duty officer on Wednesday and Sunday included: a trip for life-giving nectar, the release of accumulated garbage, a shopping tour to the supermarket for groceries and a number of household chores.

Ave never wondered what he liked more: housekeeping or working in a factory. The most important thing is the work that is beneficial. For Ski and Ronda, there was no difference either, the cult of working with the Damocles sword hung over all ants, imperceptibly, subconsciously. They could not help but work, and plowed tirelessly almost around the clock, on a small condition: if only they were given time for short lunch breaks. And no matter what they do: they worked on the assembly line or washed clothes, raised domestic animals or harvested, cleaned the house or cooked food, any useful activity nurtured an ever new and indefatigable desire for work in them. It was a kind of sophisticated drug, more and more dragging red-haired creatures into its nets. Why and for whom did they work?

Such a difficult question fell apart into tiny particles at lightning speed. Each working individual had to work according to the law of the Charter, rather dryly and bluntly. That’s the whole explanation! For the sake of the common good! Once, trying to break away from the general labor service of ants and openly taking an interest in the one about the purpose, actually, and for whose good he should bend his back, four other ants unanimously picked up and carried him to Legal inspection. The next sunny day, the questioning ant did not appear at his workplace, which, apparently, he was tired of. “You do not want to work conscientiously, do not work, but do not bother others, do not lead them astray!” Some individuals tried to understand what strange thoughts they visited the new rebel, but did not come to any logical conclusions and decided that perhaps he was crazy at the age of forty, nobody remembered his name, and so he remained in his memory all “lazy ant.”

Joyful Ave slammed the front door and returned back to the kitchen. First, he had a simple job – to wash the dishes, and then wash the overalls. The main burden on the kitchen battlefield was on the shoulders of the electronics: the dishwasher, which Ave loved more than other devices, suddenly “conceived” and broke down last night, and the service mechanic called by Rond was due

to arrive at nine. There was more than an hour before the repairman arrived, but Ave could not sit idle and decided to wash the dishes with his paws. This has already happened sometimes, in the memory of Ave, three or four times, when the automatic friends were lazy and refused to help, simulating a breakdown. Three years ago, after frequent technical failures of the notorious “dishwashers” in many condominium apartments, it was decided to replace all models with completely new modernized cars. The warranty period of the new project was at least five years, but still the equipment could not withstand the hard work and sometimes “fell asleep on the go.”

Hastily finished washing the dishes, the ant planned to take up the washing of work clothes, which remained after a hard week, but, before it even started, the washing process was interrupted by two short doorbells.

“Maybe it’s already a mechanic?” Ave thought, and quickly headed for the door.

Out of the corridor, out of habit, he glanced at his watch; it politely shone half past eight.

“It’s strange... for the mechanic it’s a bit early! Although, anything happens!”

The front door swung open wide, with a squeal of whistling, and on the threshold an ant materialized in a brand new, still plainly ironed and slightly giving off irritating mothballs red-green uniform. His wide trousers-trousers reminded Ave of some kind of rascal joke heard recently on TV, and he involuntarily swam in a smile, but immediately stopped, and froze on a half-screwed ironic note. Through a light leather cap with a voluminous and indecently bulging plastic cockade, on which flaunted an openwork letter “P”, neatly mounted on his head, peered long tarry antennae with a light fluff. Without saying anything, the calling postman energetically handed the landlord a tiny little cylinder.

– What is it? What is it? – Ave burst out twice, and the half-smile completely disappeared. – Who is it?

– It is for you! – there was an answer (courtesy itself). – Please sign a receipt, please.

– Me?.. Well, ooh, good! Thank you! Of course...

The landlord quickly scribbled the scribbles in an outstretched postman’s notebook, a thick journal-style album, and the ant instantly evaporated.

Ave and Rond constantly received electronic picturesque messages from an old friend of Kint: the regularity with which a former classmate wrote to them could only be envied.

The life paths of a too self-confident Quint with ants of a more domestic type, Ave and Rond, radically diverged immediately after leaving the boarding school. Few individuals decide, like Kint: to take, pack up and leave to go to study at distant lands in a nautical school, in a frightening distant distance, into the unknown. An enthusiastic sea romance, firmly settled in the heart of an ant about two years before the end of the boarding school, was born after swallowing one after another of art books about the fascinating travels that he took to read in the boarding library. Behind the brilliantly picturesque pictures of the majestic sea-ocean and composed by the victories of brave travelers, one could not see the hard and exhausting work of the real workers of the sea, no matter how pathetic it sounded. Plus, the most powerful impetus for choosing a life path was an excursion to the naval museum, organized for pupils in the year of graduation. At that time, ants carried out unusually many various trips and excursions in terms of professional self-determination, the ants fell into a “wave” when it was possible to choose a profession: the government of the country recommended that all educational institutions pay increased attention to the future of simple working ants. It seems that the excursions really worked on some individuals... For a year and a half, Kint graduated with honors and excellent performance from a specialized seaworthy school and from there went straight to work on a hefty fishing liner somewhere in the northern seas with a great, but still somewhat hazy, hope for universal romance. And, as it turned out in reality, enchanting and neatly combed enthusiastic tales of captivating travels around the world and the harsh, difficult realistic everyday life of “serfdom of the sea” – two opposite poles. Kint went into a harsh, inhospitable sea on a dull gray working shift for several killer exhausting weeks, and upon returning home he carefully described his sea voyages

to old friends, not at all embarrassed, relying on the artistic experience of romantic writers. Three to four days of home rest, and then again on an exhausting, labor trip. But, despite all the endless difficulties, the unbending romantic ant never regretted his life choice.

Ave didn't always succeed in answering Kint's letter at once, often he put off the answer "to tomorrow", which grew day after day into "the day after tomorrow," and, at best, into a week-long delay. Ant did not really like to talk about his life. Yes, and what to write? Everything to perfect smoothness is monotonous and trivial, sloppy and monotonous, and it looks like this will be until the end of days. The life schedule of the movement is the only one: home-work, work-home. For everything else – there is simply no free time and energy. Sometimes time appears, but there really is already no strength... no strength and that's it! There are none! Rare rainbow-colored magical days fall when it happens to color everyday life with the brightest colors, but this is very, very rare. Take, for example, the spring carnival, which has been held according to one scenario for years, decades, centuries...

The last electronic news from Kint arrived with the postman not a month ago, as usual, but much later – it took as long as three or four months. But Ave and Rond did not even notice the long silence of the old friend, and only now Ave remembered the navigator.

## Chapter 7

### WHITE

“New brand postman again? Silent of some kind. Earlier with Jerome it was possible to exchange news, chat for five minutes! And this one – immediately ran away, did not even meet. Unusually somehow. And the letter – I wonder from whom, from Kint? It seems like red capsules came from him, but here...”

Torill, an ant soldier from a neighboring apartment, appeared on the floor. In poisonous yellow running sneakers, in funny camouflage tight-fitting tights and a pale green T-shirt with a white star and engraved “AFS” inscription, he now more resembles a mischievous tall grasshopper than a sergeant of the active army. Torilla’s diligently inflated muscles bumped out from under his sports uniforms – real Hercules, and nothing more! In his right cast-iron foot, he strangled a seedy backpack, clumsily sewn on his own, into the narrow striped triangular karma-neck on the side of the backpack Torill tried to push the badge-key from the apartment, but it seemed that something was hooked somewhere, and he muttered nervously. At first, the ant headed toward the elevator, but, noticing Ave at the open door, headed toward it.

– Good morning, Ave!” I see you in good health, so to speak?! – Torill resolutely extended a foot for a welcome shake. – Is everything in your life good?

– Good, good morning, Torill! Yes, everything is fine, everything...

– Excellent, excellent!

– Yes! Everything seems to be fine, everything is in perfect order! – Ave also gladly extended his paw, and the neighbors greeted each other. Ave was glad to see his neighbor in great shape. – Health – in full order, thanks! Work – as always, we work continuously, so – everything is fine, nothing is changing in our world!

– That’s for sure! Right, yes! Work necessary, necessary! But, nevertheless, sometimes something changes in the world, and here I don’t quite agree with you...

– I’m not talking about that... We are the most ordinary working ants! Very, very glad that I met you! Something long ago you have not been seen? A long time ago... where have you been? Did you go somewhere again?

– It’s you who are in the top ten – for sure, you left, yes!

– That’s right, I look... and I tell the guys...

– I noticed, I noticed that there is no me, you are observant, as always! Well done! – The ant unexpectedly crouched to lace up the sneaker. – Yes, what are we, what are we? We, as always, are orders to us, and we went...

– I see. And I look – there is no and no you... I ask the guys, they say – they also have not seen for a long time...

– We constantly travel around the region. Yes, in principle, and not only in the region. We have such a job, you know yourself! Yes...

– Yes, everyone has his own job. And each profession has its pros and cons, so to speak...

From the rainbow-full of life, Torill was mortally smashed vertically with a specific mixture of cucumber cologne, midnight campfire and morning and evening physical activities, just mercilessly killing all living things in the immediate vicinity, and non-living – instantly turning into icy stone statues, as if after the lead piercing gaze of the Gorgon Medusa. Ave sensed this gorgeous amber, as soon as the infantryman appeared on the site, as if he had specially sprayed his unique vigorous army aroma before “going out into the people”.

“Is it so difficult to follow a few rules of life: take a shower more often and at least occasionally wash your clothes, don’t go in after morning jogging or after something else...” – Ave kept in mind the simmering emotions, because he always respected his neighbor.

Torill lived in the neighborhood for more than five years, and Av, meeting the soldier every time, noted to himself that he was in a new robe. Then he put on a chic military uniform resembling a full dress uniform: a frisky green cap with an openwork cockade on his huge head looked very solid, and the tendrils protruding along the edges of the headgear harmoniously complemented the image of a real army pro. Properly tailored to its size, a tunic with silver epaulettes and a dazzlingly white dandy accelerant, strict ironed trousers and polished classic shoes completed the image of a super warrior. Either he wore an Aventure sports sweater, originally painted in black and white squares, clearly gathering for the upcoming World Chess Championship, then elegant sand breeches and a delicate lilac silk short-sleeved T-shirt with the Didi sports society logo badge classic azure jeans with a motley trendy amber-brown jacket with a tucked-in handkerchief in a breast pocket, it was in perfectly black from head to lower legs and in a forage cap, and every time, despite being rather strange and sometimes a ridiculous combination of colors, the outfits on Torill looked great, emphasizing his slim athletic figure. This spectacular, irresistible, muscular ant was simply ideally created to work as a model, but did not serve in the regular army division, where for ten years it was famous for professional successes in the field of an ordinary signalman and, of course, was the first in all kinds of sports categories.

Ave already wanted to go further on his business, but then a small event occurred, which subsequently had a continuation...

– Ave, do you happen to know why a cat is dreaming? Is the white cat so big? – Torill asked suddenly and carefully looked at his neighbor, waiting for him to answer. – It’s just interesting to me...

– A cat?

– Yes, so big!

– Is that white?

– Well, yes, a big white cat! Today she has been dreaming all night. And now I want to understand – what would it be?

– Good! You dreamed of a white cat, and what do I have to do with it? I don’t remember my dreams well... – Ave stood and smiled.

– I’m asking you – do you know what big white cats dream of? Maybe there is some sign or...

– So I don’t do dream-solving... and something tells me, I already heard from you this question about a white cat... Have you ever asked?

– There wasn’t such a thing... the first time I ask... I wanted to find out...

– Ahh, in general, besides, it’s not enough to remember who you dreamed about, you need to know what you did yourself, what you did around you, in what atmosphere, what smells there were – you weren’t, you need to know something else... Ahhh! Feelings, which I felt in a dream – are you good, was it bad... how was it for you – light, warm, comfortable?..

– Something you are loading me... already too much, probably... I asked about the cat, but here you already really need subtleties... You complicate it, it seems to me. I asked you directly – about the white cat and that’s it. Here you are right now and answer just about cat-sh-shku! Come on, just about the cat! – Torill spoke quite seriously.

– Are you serious? Torill, it’s like you wanted to hear something about a feline, right? – Ave could not stand it and laughed.

– Of course, to me, who else? Since I asked you, then answer me...

– Oh, in general, seriously, then a lot of factors are necessary... That’s what you most remembered in your dream? This is also important! And now on the basis of all uh-this – you can say something specific in your sleep... that is, you need to tell as much as possible, then it will be more or less clear...

– Who can say? – grinned Torill.

– I think those who have dreams...

– Aah, you?

– Do you remember what else was? Or just a cat? Yes, good morning! – Ave greeted a neighbor from another apartment, who gently and almost silently sailed behind Torill to the elevator.

– Ave, you obviously can help me, tell me what this dream is for, since you know so much! You wait, do not rush me! Come on so... – the soldier looked hopefully at his neighbor and continued. – The cat is white – one unit, the sun is bright – also one unit, although there seems to be no options here, a large clearing and a forest – just one at a time...

– Wow, wildlife is a plus for you! After all, I remembered something! You see how... – Ave squinted in a smile.

– Yeah? Well, there was still a sea somewhere very far, far away, but I heard it. I heard how hissing, that is, the sea is rustling, like the surf of something there... how the waves are playing, right there are splashing like that... though, the sea was somewhere on the edge of the earth. But still it was heard, really! And the cat, this white cat, was walking around the meadow, all purring something under her breath...

– It's funny! Okay, so she wasn't just a cat either? – Ave kept trying to stir Torill in his memories and ironically succumbed to him.

– Yes, she was so... such a cat was... strange, or something like that, so to speak?" She danced a little in the clearing, swirled, gathered and gathered grass, and then she approached me, turned like that... – and he depicted a rather elegant 360-degree turn, – and extended a full armful of Ivan tea. Such beautiful delicate flowers, pinkish-lilac or something... here they are what I remember most of all, well, and the cat, as the main character, remained in my memory... by the way, you said that I remembered – the flowers of Ivan-tea. They wedged into my memory, so to speak!

– Clearly, Torill, but you can be mistaken about the one and only sun, – Ave liked the role of the interpreter of dreams more and more, and he got used to it more and more actively. – Things are clear with the cat, but about the bouquet of Ivan-tea, Torill, did you accept it as a present? I understood correctly – the cat handed it to you – to give ho-bodies? So? Correctly?

– You see, calmly step by step, now we'll solve my whole dream!

– We'll guess, for sure! Do not go to the grandmother!

– What kind of grandmother did not go? Yes, she wanted to give! But I didn't give it, or rather, I didn't take the bouquet. – Torill thought, vigorously scratched the propodeum with his paw, as if his brain was at the level of the abdomen. – No, listen, listen, she gave me all the same, yes, she gave a bouquet and said something like that... such... aah, well, she said with a smile and said: "This is for you, Torill!" Exactly, she said and presented a bouquet. And I took it, but I don't remember exactly any further...

– That's it, you just remember nothing?

– I don't remember how I remember, I'll say so.

– Yeah... – Ave sighed in relief.

– For now, all that is, all the information. Enough for analysis, so to speak? Or else it's necessary – you said "details", but you've remembered something, that's it... Tell me, Ave, by what has already been gathered for solving my dream...

– In general, listen, dear Torill, – Ave began with a dark and mysterious look, who was not at all joking at the moment, although he was a foot in the mouth by the decision of mystical dream puzzles. – Your white cat is most likely one of your new little-known comrades. Do you have any?

– Yeah, who knows? Maybe there are some. One must think, remember...

– Well, here and remember!

– I do not remember...

– Well, it most likely should be a girl. Some ant. Everything should be transparent here...

- And why is that?
- Listen, Torill, here you need to make a strict distinction: who has a dream and who is involved in the interpretation of sleep?
- Come on. As you say – we will do it!
- So you have more questions than I have answers. I haven't started telling anything yet, but you're raining questions and raining questions... it won't work, you listen calmly and listen!
- Yes, I... – the military began to make excuses.
- The turn will come – I'll tell you everything! Well, I do not refuse to unravel, right? You asked me, and I, as a comrade, decided to help a comrade...
- Well, come on, come on, I calmly listen further. – Torill for a minute artistically stretched out, as if on command “quietly” and gave military honor. – Do not interrupt more!.. Everything, silence, silence!
- I continue... – said serious Ave with arrangement.
- I'm silent! – Repeated Torill.
- I continue... so, oh, this someone, that dancing white cat, wants to capture, so to speak, conquer your inner world, understand you, probably so... yes, and I'll say right away: it's not bad, and it's not good, it's just a statement of fact. Take it as it is and that's it!
- What a horror! Horror-horror-horror! Horror, you tell me... – said Torill cheerfully...
- Indeed, and so thoroughly outlined on you! You see, no? Conquer the inner world, know you! And maybe even fall in love, what the hell is not joking! You have an ant – even where!
- Fun you scratch! Interesting to listen!
- Yes, as I can...
- All is well, come on. I like it so far...
- Comedian you! You say, too, where do you like it or not? Well this is not grandma's tales to please, but a whole science!
- Ahhh...
- Here is the eee and “aaaa!” Do you understand? Even in our clinics there are doctors who deal with dreams! – It was already impossible to stop Ave, the course of wild fantasy and transformation turned his courageous boat into the open, boiling sea. With the air of an all-knowing Doctor of Science, he continued his neighbor's sleep analysis.
- So, I want to focus on what you actively heard in your dream and what you received as a gift! Accent... understand? So, this is the sound of the sea, which is incomprehensible how far, and bright flowers. And these, by the way, are the two most active romantic principles, that is, what?..
- What? What is “that is what”? – Torill listened to Ave's story as the most diligent first-grader in elementary school in the lesson concentratedly listens to the teacher and learns world truths. – “Romantic principles” – I think it's excellent, it's almost understandable to me, and then what?
- Old man, I ask you – what is it?
- What? I do not understand you!
- Ooh! And what's next – it all depends on you yourself... here you yourself have to make a choice in the near future – accept a “bouquet”, that is, a gift of fate, or not accept it. Torill, just what will be behind this surprise is not entirely clear... not quite...
- Why is it unclear?
- Well, ooh, so... so, look, before you make any choice – think carefully and act, soldier! This is what I am telling you in a friendly way now!
- Thank you, Ave!
- And do not be offended if you said something wrong. The time will come – and everything will be clear.
- This is always so, it seems to me...

Life, of course, will tell you, but you, Torill, do not shit yourself!” You are smart and strong, strong, of course, more, but still... You certainly can overcome all the difficulties and obstacles that life will put in your way! And-and-and, true, forgive me for not saying so.

– Well, Ave, well, Ave! Thank you so much! – emotions overwhelmed Torill, at first he hugged brotherly ant tightly, then he took his tiny paw into his two huge paws and shook it with sincere gratitude. – Thank you, friend! He instilled a great joy in me, charged me with optimism! Thank! You’re very good at me with your... this... your dismantling of sleep. I promise, I promise you that I will be more attentive to life, and I will try, as you said here now – “think and act, soldier! That’s for sure about me! Thank!

The neighbors exchanged a couple of sensual phrases about life, passing and coming, and scattered about their important matters: sports Torill hurried to a morning run, although he trained in time much earlier in the week, but on this Sunday he could not find in himself strength to rise – tonight he returned from another business trip, and Ave, as always, plunged into household chores.

The ant slammed the door and hurried into the bathroom to start the washing machine. He put the cylinder received from the postman on a mirror bedside table in the hallway, hoping then to familiarize himself with the contents in a calm atmosphere. “A dying profession is a postman! Everyone is switching over to electronic messages, and soon the postal officers will not be needed at all! Here it is life – it moves on, here it is – progress, electronic substitutes are replacing living ants, what will happen next?”

At exactly nine o’clock, and not a minute later, the service technician arrived and immediately started repairing the dishwasher, “there are a lot of calls, and there isn’t quite any time,” he only answered in answer to his naive question: “What something serious?” Less than an hour later, the device rumbled regularly. Ave on duty, too, finished the manual laundry with work clothes, all that was left was to hang her to dry. A youthful fitter, casually rattling a tool in the kitchen, grumbled something and grumbled under his nose, and when Ave came up to him, burst out on him as if he were guilty of all mortal sins, but still pleased with the end result of his Before leaving, he stated that the landlord should not be offended by him.

## Chapter 8

### WHITE

After grumbling at all and all the mechanics left, Ave hastily hung up the washed laundry to dry in the bathroom: the ants did not have a balcony for such purposes, as in some others high-rise apartments, and in the room they did not like a chaotic mess, even if it was a “working mess”. Next important an active line in the schedule of the duty officer was a strict point – “a trip for juice”. After the divine nectar, I had to run for my two to a distant area of the city with ten liter cans, since the decent ration of each ant includes a decent the consumption of life-giving juice.

Hardworking ants were on duty in their apartment daily, in turn. Three times a week: on Tuesday, Friday and Sunday – there were complex, elongated shifts, from early morning until very late evening. The person responsible for all household chores was automatically released that day from work in the main place and worked only on the housework: he tried his best – cooked, washed, cleaned, ironed, went for groceries and juice for fontanel... On the other days of the week – there was also enough daily work, the goose bumps never sat idle, they didn’t even have a head came to take off from fulfilling labor obligations in front of your comrades. Ave somehow on the day of the next on duty, I caught myself thinking that “you spin all day, you have time to do a hundred different things from morning till night, but it’s as if they aren’t decreasing, the next day, new hundred are already planned projects, and when to keep up? At least work around the clock...”

In the room, the ant quickly changed clothes: he deftly picked up the common ones on the wide leather belt of jeans trousers instead of a “home” shirt, he pulled on a flannel electronic mini-watch, for a minute he lingered in the hallway, recalling – had he forgotten something. “Everything seems to be normal!” Ave threw a light black jacket-windbreaker, – and then, what good, it still rains, looked around and went out onto the landing, slamming the door shut with a sweep, and touched the elevator button, she winked with a green eye. The speed case, as if waiting for the owner, opened his arms with lightning speed, and when he entered the brightly-lit cabin, he cut off the outside world from him. And with a dull click the elevator doors Ave I suddenly remembered that I did not take the most important thing – cans for juice.

“Stunned! How did this please me?!” – ant grinned to himself, and immediately poked at “Stop!” and then – on the button of the home floor, jumped out of the opening doors.

“It’s funny!.. I forgot!.. Well, do I have to make that happen?”

In an instant, the front door opened, the benefit of the canister always stood in a hidden dresser in the hallway... Once again in the closed silence of the elevator, Ave is alive resurrected in memory an early meeting with a postman.

“The letter should be seen today!” What is there? Surely, there is a message from our Kint... Interesting, interesting read his romantic tales of the magical sea... And, in general, he hadn’t written something to us for a long time, no matter what happened to someone else...”

Suddenly, something clicked from below in the floor, unpleasantly with a heavy it stretched along the entire body of the elevator car with a drawn screech, the light blinked intensely, blinked again, it smelled of fetid dampness (or just so it seemed), and the rumbling elevator gave a startling murmur, suddenly there was a ringing to pain, the dead machine painfully “hung” for half a minute, which for a frightened Ave, it seemed like a centuries-old gray-haired eclipse, then a dangerous one the cabin slightly butted from one side to the other, as if seeking balance, sharply twice shook the whitened passenger and continued downward.

“What is it? What is going on here this morning?! Are the stars lined up?” – worried Ave.

Very soon, the aggressive cabin smoothly stopped on the first floor, the doors opened silently, and the ant, endlessly happy that the short was unpleasantly extreme the elevator journey ended without any consequences, scaredly jumped out onto the glossy floor, sparkling sparkingly multi-colored rainbow laminate, and joyfully greeting the friendly concierge as if he had not seen him for a couple of hundred years:

– Oooh, Diti, good morning, Diti! Very glad to see you, Diti! You are well done, you are a real miracle!

– G-g-good, g-g-good, Ave! And I'm g-g-glad to see you! – the old man smiled good-naturedly. A couple of years ago, he began to stutter a little, getting stuck on some words, – it seems that age affected.

– How is your health? Everything is fine? How does it work? What is your mood for Sunday?

– Yes, thanks, h-h-health, as always, in p-p-perfect order! All excellent, of c-c-course! The weather, it s-s-seems to me, is g-g-getting b-b-better, and this is the m-m-most imp-p-portant thing for a p-p-positive attitude, isn't it?!

– Is it, is it! The weather is good, that is customizable! The weather is weather, but do we always need to work so that it rains there or some other rubbish? – Ave looked back at the doors of the elevator car.

– Are you g-g-going to the fontanel?

– Exactly! And how did you guess? That's right in the very, very "bullseye" hit! Surprisingly – I was able to guess! – Ave countered with a smile, he wanted to say about the accident in the elevator, but did not know if it was worth it: – Here... we have some problem in the elevator...

– Mmm, and what? S-s-something happened?

– Yes, I'm stuck for a few minutes now, and the lights went out...

– Here you g-g-go! So, what is next? You p-p-pressed the call b-b-button d-dispatcher? I p-p-pressed the b-buttons, any b-buttons?

– No, I didn't have time... somehow everything quickly happened, and itself decided...

– Ave, you g-g-got scared, so what?

– Well, how scared? Not much, just all unexpectedly happened – that scared, but then the elevator went anyway.

– Well, now I will c-c-call the rep-p-pairman, he will d-d-definitely look! The main thing is that there is n-n-nothing s-s-serious.

– Well, thanks, I'll run on.

– Well, always, p-p-please, it's our job to k-k-keep track of order and s-s-safety! Have a n-n-nice day!

– Thanks! And to you, Diti, have an easy day and good luck! Let everything be in the highest class!

The hardly glass massive entrance doors behind Ave with a dull whistle connected with each other, when he felt the whole breath of spring with the whole body, for the first time the frosted March sun molded bright and welcoming pies in the spring, and gave everyone around, and immediately in the inter-air space the lightest ghosts of fragrances fluttered blooming handsome trees, when you still don't quite feel the dreamy breath, but you already know that they are definitely somewhere near. After a prolonged thunderstorm night rain, huge islands of puddles were illusory everywhere, and the crowned sun, which had awakened much earlier than working ants and had already risen very high, merrily had fun, accepting ephemeral water baths, inviting everyone with their all-pervading rays to join in active participation in his unpretentious round dance, teasing and enticing on Sunday's walk.

## GREEN

Amina threw back a strand of dark curly hair with a flick of her foot. With her thin fingertips, she tapped nervously on an obscure melody. The bright light filling the whole room gave Amina an incomprehensible joy, so pleasant, gentle, affectionate.

“And then I’ll go... I’ll go...”, – but somehow I didn’t get any further, the stubborn thought stopped, and I didn’t want to develop and look for such a simple, seemingly simple answer.

Where she goes – absolutely no clarity! What awaits her in the coming days – a continuous, whitish, impenetrable fog, as they say, is a “foggy fog” that fell so wrong at the time, however, does it happen that it falls on time. It just happens, and then we already think: “Ye-e-es, this story fell upon us at the wrong ti-i-ime!”

Yes and where in general Amina will be able to go when she has in her hands a difficult, completely unresolved question. Here, even at the right time, at least as planned – there are enough difficulties with the head... Perhaps this is the most important, basic question of her life... now the most important thing is that the birth should go as it should, and then it will be solved by itself, then the answer will be found.

“The main thing is what? The main thing, as always, is to arrange everything in a strict order! I’ll see my little one, and then I’ll deal with the question of how and where I’ll live... I’m not lost, all my legs are healthy, I have strength – I’ll solve any question!”

Amina calmly got up, went up to the large, exactly two ants high, oval mirror and admired her reflection. Like most pregnant ants, she was charmingly attractive. The roundness gave her a special charm and charm. The abdomen, or rather its upper part, was smoothly protruding, unusually towering, such a captivating petiol (the connecting part between the abdomen and chest), just recently, it seemed yesterday, so feminine and so fabulously soft, it was now elegantly fitted, like a huge pimpled basketball. It seemed that the whole lively little body of the ant had spread at the seams at once, it was stretched out, and it was completely unrecognizable: the eyes (those that had complex eyes\* of the ants) desperately spread from the gentle trotters into two blue shapeless ponds, whose gentle wild shores were torn off by torn pink clay; the neatly burgundy tendrils stuck out somehow not at all in a strict, not in an optimistic mood, one might even say, giving the image of hymenoptera an insignificant, but still sloppy sloppiness; antennal fossa\*, a reliable refuge for the antennae, from where they sprouted, turned red and significantly swollen, and therefore the scapus\* did not keep so even; mandibles\*, on the contrary, have dried up and, at first glance, seemed almost half as much as usual. But, despite all the miraculous transformations, Amina felt unusually good and comfortable in the new body.

Sometimes the ant seemed illusory that she hears, and even feels, within herself vague, dull sounds, and then also soft pink, soft scrapes, and did not quite understand: this should be so in her position or all this is unnatural. The zealous doctors, who zealously surrounded the pregnant ants on all sides, sweetly explained, telling one thing or the other, and each time adding new lengthy arguments, and every time she quickly calmed down, hoping only for a good outcome.

In the polished surface of the mirror, the reflection of an ant in a white coat was rapidly approaching.

“Let’s go to the ward, in any case, you’d better lie down,” the doctor advised with a cold hoarse voice in his voice.

– Of cours-s-se, of cours-s-se, already coming, already coming. S-s-so I decided to take a little walk, but s-s-somehow, you know, s-s-she is sadly s-s-sitting in one place. It’s a little boring... – recently, Amina’s childish long-drawn-out “s-s-s-s” has somehow become funny, and she kindly squinted every time she caught herself thinking that “s-s-s-s” amuses others.

– Why did you run away? – a smile appeared on the ant’s face, and he carefully grabbed Amina under the elbow and led her into a long corridor.

– Yes, it’s boring, I’m s-s-saying... Well, really... I would take a little walk... – the prayer of the pregnant woman gradually sank among the plain light blue walls.

– Are you alright? Nothing is required, but tell me, will we do everything? If something is wrong – you can always safely say to the sisters, they will help you!

## Chapter 9

### WHITE

The road to the fontanel, no longer, no less than three quarters of an hour, today clearly reduced due to high spring mood.

“Our old Diti, a fairy-tale old man, nevertheless survived his released term. He’s so old! How old is he, interesting to know? When we settled here with Rond, there were rumors that he had conscientiously worked more than fifty dollars! More than fifty! The same... yes, this figure does not even fit into the head... so it was back then, almost back in the past life. And how much is he now? To think – horror is simple! And they don’t eliminate him, although who wants to fire a working hardworking worker? Eliminate only for objective reasons and lazy ants! You have to go too low to get fired. And this one is a real pro in his field, and, it seems, in his favorite field. He thoroughly knows everything that is necessary and what is not necessary, and he has learned all the ants very well – he must have found his own personal secrets to each tenant, and a significant plus to everything is that he is not at all lazy! He is not lazy, just – well done! I wonder if lazy individuals are in nature, in general, in principle, is this possible? Yes, a total of sixty years or more he worked? How much is it? And he doesn’t want to leave... and where, and why should he leave, if there is work here and he feels that we need, we need society, and somewhere there, somewhere outside our house – he will become, and that’s for sure, ‘Waste slag’ thrown by everyone and left to survive...”

The path to the life-giving fontanel, which served for many centuries as a true “dear life” for the hymenoptera of the city of Kekhidupan\*, ran through the entire endless, long Sixty-second street, along a glossy, dry, lifeless wall of monotonous flat, inexpressive multi-storey monsters, occasionally interspersing, variegated motley glass cubes of supermarkets.

The only notable building on the above Sixty-second was the Congress Hall, which amicably combines together with a couple of dozen private minor television studios and press centers, and one state mega-TV channel. Frankly, honestly, the Congress Hall with its ambitious architectural forms was the only building that fully (from an artistic and aesthetic point of view) compensated the entire adjacent gray area of the same type. As if frozen in an unknown architectural ecstasy, in the geometrically regular form of the mystical octahedron, an amazingly beautiful high-rise building could rightly be considered a real work of modern architectural art. And the lower fatal-strange inverted pyramid, as if squeezed from all four sides, and the upper one – are amazingly regular in shape, both were undividedly decorated with multi-colored glass windows, pierced with a mysterious rainbow, more precisely from the ground floor, from the ground, asphalt pavement, to the sharp-pointed peak of twenty eighth, – all the millionth ghostly colors of the rainbow rocker flowed polyphonically from one to another. The sun’s rays of cheerful reflection from the surface of almost ideally mirrored triangles and rhombuses from afar attracted everyone’s attention, captivating the eyes of the townspeople and surprising tourists, sometimes turning into the carapace of a terrible huge ancient amphibian, which in every way murmured with patchwork and scaly modulations in every way.

The sixty-second street, spontaneously breaking off, quite easily turned into a sad wide tunnel, which you had to walk along for another ten minutes to find yourself on Hundred and Forty Street, and from there to the Third Quarter, where the fontanel was located, just a stone’s throw away.

Jumping around his native Sixty-second, Ave with a touch of genuine sadness said to himself that on this clear colorful Sunday there were an unusual number of ants in the streets of a cloudless city: everyone ran in a never-ending string, hurried, rode, was late, stumbled, stopped, colliding, exchanging glances, again continued the way.

A brand new clean bus of an unusually delicate peach color with a wide white stripe and the inscription “SP-Express Special Lines” silently braked quite a bit before reaching the intersection, at the stop of the routes, and two ants smartly jumped out of it, and a two-story liner, releasing a few pops another batch of deadly earthen smoke, as if a caterpillar had curved and turned onto Fifty-sixth Street. In a hurry, Ave almost ran past an ant that got off the bus, but something unusual happened. The jumped-up goose abruptly handed Ave the red paw, blocking, like a barrier, the road to an ant on duty, hastening for business affairs.

– Stop, stop, sto-o-op! On this side of Sixty-second str-r-reet it is strictly for-r-ridden to walk with empty canister-r-rs!!! Have you not hear-r-rd of the last amendment in Ar-r-rticle 129th?! This is a r-r-real disor-r-rder! Disturbance of or-r-rder! How do you, so easily, ignor-r-e the laws! This is ver-r-ry bad!

Stunned for a minute, Ave looked up at a passerby and, completely unaware of anything, opened his mouth wide to at least something intelligible to answer such an extravegant statement, but, as luck would have it, nothing came to mind. His mandibles began to twitch nervously one after another.

“What terrible rubbish is this? What nonsense! What is going on, green duck? Who is that? Who invented something? What nonsense?!” – Immediately flashed in the head of Ave.

Doing nothing, the opposite ant stood waiting expectantly and stared unpleasantly at Ave, who stopped. But here the ant on duty hooked up familiar lines – either eyes, or scapus, or..., caught it with the very tip of the claw, the slight movement of the clypeus that is above the mandibles, the half-look, he thought that something was wrong here. The awakened memory lifted him by the shoulders for a hundredth of a second and lifted it up well, returning him to the distant past, and he remembered this bird’s eye section, this cheerful gaze, but could not tell for sure where he had met this ant before.

– You... You... Are you confusing something? Is it really... where did you get this from?.. – with an incomprehensible intonation, – either asking or answering, the taken aback Ave squeezed out the words from the crumbs. – Amendments... no amendments have been accepted for half a year already, isn’t that so? Are you kidding me?..

– Old man, Ave, you didn’t recognize me?! I bet twenty units that you did not recognize me! I am A-a-aft! Remember, we plowed together at the radio plant for three years? Well, well, did you forget? Remembered? Come on, come on, remember! Aft! I’m right here, I recognized you right away!

– Ghhh! – just jumped out of Ave in surprise.

– Aft! Remember me? Well, come on already, remember! – the angry ant began to show texture in front and in profile, a little grimacing, and all this was accompanied by his infectious laugh.

– No, of course, I remember, of course, I remember!

– Well!

– I remember... and I look – some familiar ant is standing, but who – I just can’t understand right away?

– Class! Now I’ve found out right away – wonderful!

– And I look... Well, at least you beat me – I can’t do it! Well, you scared me, damn it! Really scared with his cans, hell! What kind of jokes do you have?

– Naturally, you can’t understand, although only seven years have passed! Like seven?

– Seven already?..

– Well, yes, seven are! But what years have passed! What years! Have I changed? And not only I have changed! – blurted out Aft. And only here old friends pounced on each other and hugged tightly. – Forgive me, I didn’t want to scare you, not from evil I... I just wanted to make a joke...

– Yeah, you have changed! Not seven, probably, but six years have passed... – Ave began, but Aft interrupted him.

– Yes, a lot has changed since then, a lot. They then quietly eliminated us and everything started to spin... spun...

– After the then dismissal, rumors circulated that...

– Why, there were” rumors,” – Ave Aft cut off again sharply, emphasizing” what’s there.” –

Rumors always go, they are rumors! Aft laughed out loud, then coughed half-vividly and continued again. – About the strike, then? I know that they talked dimly about the rally and something like that... interpreted... well... how can I tell you... eliminated, and that’s all...

– Yes, ah... “eliminated, that’s all”...

– Well yes! Life itself, you know, is not easy... Life is a very difficult puzzle, sometimes there are continuous riddles after riddles!

– So it was all, really was? – Ave asked very hesitantly, pronouncing each word slowly in syllables, and while he spoke he carefully looked around. – Is it true that it was?

– Well, you give, old man! No, of course! – Aft nervously moved his mustache and continued. “They composed everything then!” It was easier to make up than to tell the truth and explain everything...

– For some reason, I thought so... I felt that all this was untrue...

– Of course! There was no strike, and it could not be! So, in fact, there wasn’t any removal... for the sake of appearances, they did everything, although it could have been done differently, according to the normal, without any left-right affairs... everything is done, as always, through one place... I don’t know... I don’t understand why they are so with us...

– In general, it’s strange... why – no one understands at all!

– Well, that was, it was, and now – life goes on! You, I see, as always, you are not lazy, you run away on business matters, are you going to the fontanel? Aft asked, nodding at the cans. “Let’s go, go for a walk, I’ll take a little walk with you at least to the tunnel.”

– Of course, let’s go, we’ll chat a bit though. So many have not seen you... tell me about life!

– Exactly! I’m listening to you about life!

– When we’ll meet again... Come on, let’s go! I haven’t seen each other for six years... this is necessary! Tell me, how are you, what’s going on in your life.

– Yes, as always, according to the template project, we have a house, a job, a house again... Nothing new and interesting... What can happen to a simple working ant in life?

– Mmm, well, a lot of things can be done if you want to!

– Here I’ll think a little! Good idea!

– Do you work now?... Where do you work? It is necessary to work, it is impossible to be lazy in any way, “only labor helps us to move in life and develop fully”! You remember how we were taught. Come on, let’s go!

It happens in life like this: you accidentally meet an old comrade and, it seems, have not seen each other for a long time, and, like, they are terribly bored of communicating with each other, and, of course, are glad to have an unexpected meeting, but here are a couple of words they said, exchanged superficial, lightweight information about themselves – “what, where, yes, how, yes, what plans”, and all, you can put a “checkmark” in a marker and indifferently say with almost imperceptible bitterness: “ate to the dump”, fed up with fluent communication, and there is no particular desire to continue to listen to his detailed stories about not egkoy fate, and shell, to share their life’s scrapes, too, somehow not really hunting. Moreover, very often it happens, in almost nine out of ten cases. But there are exceptions, however. I came across an ancient acquaintance, it seems I didn’t say that I’ve been a bosom friend, but they began to share their experiences over all the years that they had not seen, and there was no strength to stop, I didn’t want to leave at all, at least kill me. What does it all depend on? Either from a momentary mood, or from an internal magnet to a given individual, or from something else... and, after all, I’m ready to stand and talk endlessly with him about all kinds of nonsense, although you perfectly understand that there isn’t much time for empty talk but you can’t tear yourself away from him or her in any way, even though you crack...



## Chapter 10

### WHITE

Two ants, walking amicably in one paw, headed along the street, their unpretentious conversation became more and more lively, and when they crossed the wide avenue – Fifty-sixth, cheerful and cheerful Aft suddenly changed his face and looked around sharply, as if checking that no one was following them, and making sure that there was no ghostly surveillance, with great pleasure that he had a worthy listener, he continued his colorful story.

– After all, then all two hundred ants sent us to Streerets\*? – And back came back less than forty.

– How so?

– Yes, like that! I tell you: forty out of two hundred! Can you imagine? Feel the difference: two hundred and forty! Two-o-o hundred and fo-o-orty, two hundred and forty! – Aft singled out both numbers, allowing you to feel the whole salt of the difference between how much was and how much was left.

– It's... it's just... it's a fantastic difference...

– Yes, the wrong word... anyway... well, all the same, these figures are not felt in our simple words... So, what I'll say: for those endlessly long five years spent, well, that is, in the sense of tattered, worked out in this, unnecessary, in this, abandoned to all distant, distant devils, Streets, we were all given a decent monthly allowance. This feed... so what? Do you hear Monthly allowance! We plowed to death there, worked and worked!.. Someone... Someone died there, someone was taken to a hospital in the capital, but already irrevocably, and we continued to plow. Whoever was taken away didn't return... We did the allowance, but who needs it? That is the question...

– Mmm, to whom? Probably someone needs it? Aah, no? – The phrase fell out of Ave in a clot of misunderstanding.

– Who needs their allowance now? To whom? No, well, oh... on the other hand, do you think I could drive these... these... international buses for a regular salary? And... I would hardly have been able to... and in general, I've come here on business... – Aft said and suddenly felt a nauseating, lumpy lump roll up to his dry throat, he choked, but was still able to squeeze a few words out of himself. – Now I say, wait a minute!..

– Can you help?

Suddenly, the face of Aft turned red, he shook his head negatively, the small, shabby mustache trembled convulsively, and he, with an unsightly bent almost in half, choked in a strong prolonged cough. The ant felt an unpleasant burning pain, felt like a fiery-prickly wave ran through the body, suddenly gray-colored, with a flash-like build-up: from the heart to the very tips of the paws, and mercilessly knocked out the very brain.

– Bjzhzhus-bzhzhzhus! Well, there's some kind of horror, bjzhzhus, today with me, well, what's going on! Horror, he is! – as if nothing had happened, continued the interrupted monologue Aft. – No, no, now they pay well at my work, I am not complaining. The manual – of course, it's all great! That's just health... health is not that... and not return health, for any money and rewards. Yes, and on such bus liners I do not travel often. It just happened so today... Today, at the Eighteen Seas Artificial Television Studio, veterans of the Streets accident were being collected... health could not be restored – at least someone would say... they were collecting us... – suddenly a new wave of terrifying attack came over Aft, he again painfully shortened, curled up in half, like a crumpled piece of paper, and grunted hoarsely for a long time, coughed.

– Aft, listen, well, maybe something to help you? Run for water? To run off? To help? What to do – say it! – to the embarrassed Ave it was scary to look at the bending Aft, and even more so, to remain indifferent in the trouble of the old comrade.

– Yes, no, no, everything is fine, everything is fine... wait, now... – the ant shook his head strongly, completely denying help, from somewhere in his pocket he quickly scratched a mouse-colored handkerchief, and a piece of fabric disappeared into the depths of the mandibles.

A black oval metal medallion with six or seven embossed numbers and letters crawled out from behind the collar of the shirt, as if a awakened sacred scarab beetle crawled out of hot sand in a dry desert, at the moment when the ant was bent in a painful cough. Ave noticed an unusual distinctive sign unusual for working individuals, and only wanted to ask Aft about him, as he decided to tell himself ahead of all the questions.

– I’m now considered a labor veteran... can you imagine, dear Ave, where am I and where is a labor veteran? Two categories – completely incompatible...

– Well, you give! – only breathed out Ave.

– I’m still so young, my whole life is ahead... And already – a real veteran! Aft anxiously took the dark roundish into a small paw, twisted it nervously, looked philosophically at the inscriptions and showed it to his comrade. – You see, it was handed to us. Do we need this? Yeah, it’s necessary, especially... Some have already been handed over posthumously. Yes, and we are also almost posthumously... There is no health at all, no, and almost no one is alive, but we, what you say, but we are veterans... That’s it! I don’t know what to tell you even this... It’s hard to realize some things, it’s very hard and still I can’t reconcile... Hand-handed, and rejoice, guys – veterans... But how do we continue to live – it is not clear...

– What are you saying? Why posthumously – to you? Live, live! Let’s all live!

– Yes, we are, really, against? We are not...

– Health... Well, health is yes, everything is complicated here... Hopefully, it will recover a little... You are already here, and not there...

– Yes, almost, – Aft interrupted Ave with calm confidence on a rising note of indignation. – We are all already – almost there...

And Ave really introduced this ant, his former spine, a sincere companion, one year younger than him, a labor veteran. Veteran of labor, who became due to a small pinch of past years for the merciless work in Streets. If you look from the sidelines – because of some few years that cost many individuals of life... There are optimistic charged natures in the world who are completely satisfied with everything and quickly get used to everything, that was exactly Aft himself. At one time, it was hard to imagine an ant more compliant and agreeing to everything, but now it was strikingly different from that old self. Such a strong change of character that happened with the decrepit Aft during the time before the comrades saw each other, struck Ave brightly. Life circumstances made him many years older: his appearance changed a lot, almost beyond recognition – wrinkles were significantly added and the body coating, as if all vital juices had been pumped out of his body and left one shell, seemed artificial and pale grayish. Ave remarked to himself that during communication Aft was somehow unusually talking, uncontrollably pushing with his power, not letting him in even a word that there was no such thing before. But Ave knew Aft very well once, but it seems that this “once” irrevocably passed and remained far, far behind, in a completely different, transcendental archaic reality. The unfamiliar voice of the dying Aft, which used to ring like an expertly tuned instrument, today was rather a creak of an unoiled door, now and then interrupted by a wailing cough. Perhaps the only thing left of the former Aft, which Ave knew many years ago, was a wonderful sense of humor. Rarely did Ave meet on his journey with a refined ability to subtly ironize and sharply joke; almost always a cheerful and cheerful Aft, like a fireproof bright light, as he laughed at the whole world a few years ago, he continued to joke about everyday problems and sophisticatedly make fun of issues of national scale. He recalled with noticeable pleasure amusing episodes from a recent extreme life,

a truly primitive communal, rooted, canine, and terrible painful life in a gloomy, dilapidated alien city, he narrated in a light, semi-aerial, and peculiar to him manner, as if the grueling, sometimes overwhelming and dangerous work at the emergency nuclear station became for him a festive Sunday walk to the city leisure park.

Ave knew about all the pressures that the workers on Streets had “combed” by the journalists from the weekly news reports, and at that very moment, in the minutes of communication with Aft, he tried to unite in one harmonious picture: the large-scale recovery of the consequences of the accident and his old friend, a participant in these heroic events. In total, more than three thousand specialists from different cities worked at the station at that time, and two hundred professionals came even from the arrogant Moot\*, a snob city, which seemed to have fought the whole history of the ant family with the whole world. Only a common misfortune, threatening terrible unimaginable consequences, violated the millennial confrontation of peoples. But, as happens in history, everything is back to square one, and after a two-year lull associated with the sending of worker ants to Streets, the military conflicts provoked by the motivated government of Moot, one after the other, somehow inadvertently resumed. The destructive, bloody war that has become the norm for residents of such a metropolis as Moot, like this arrogant and arrogant Moot, continued to breathe in the cadaverous smell of death. In Streets, by the combined efforts of an army of thousands of specialists, a completely different battle was going on: the life of generations fought fiercely with death, and this hand-to-hand fight could be seen on all TV channels.

## Chapter 11

### WHITE

At the very end of the Sixty-second, on an immense dry, colorless, half-living wasteland, sheltered by a parking lot filled with huge and tiny, but mostly very old cars to the eyeballs, and surrounded by a low, only one meter with a tail, a colored needle fence, menacingly and rumbled troublesomely, sniffing once and noisily shooting portions of blue rings from the muffler, a truck.

Once, about fifteen years ago, this place and wasteland itself was not there, but a real handsome forest stood out, with impassable thickets, unflappable charismatic oaks and captivating shaggy hickory. And when did you just manage to cut down such a picturesque and such useful walnut oak forest? Nobody even managed to notice, it completely disappeared without a trace with the approach of the city borders, with one sweep of an omnipotent magic wand.

A young, completely still beardless car mechanic in a dirty sand shirt, rubbed in places to obscene holes, nervously delved into the mechanical insides of a bubbling beast, the other – swearing and grumbling roughly and audibly, and fidgeting in place, sitting with a prickly uneasiness at the wheel, every minute he strove to look out the window at half-mast, then with one or two legs he adjusted the fastening of the rear-view mirror, and peered intently at him, evaluating the situation around the hissing car. The grimy ant sitting in the spacious cab shouted crisply at the first, obviously choking on the first syllable, which he only muttered and sharply waved off twice.

From a two-story brick house with a golden gable roof, with one wall, most likely a northern, hopelessly mossy fluffy brown-hazy moss, in which there was a simple auto repair shop, as evidenced by a wide, colorful, bright blue banner with clumsy golden letters, popped up another mechanic and steadily approached the rumbling truck. The ant gently opened the swing-open door, polished to a gloss, and vividly handed the mini-cylinder flashing red and yellow lights to the one sitting there. The astonished driver looked at the smiling comrade, carefully picked up the urgent letter and calmly, without confusion, went, without saying anything, to the workshop to get acquainted with the message. The vacant place in the car was taken by a new ant. Directly across the parking lot, a red-green postman hurried along a rammed gray-reddish crushed stone embankment.

As soon as he approached his native special vehicle, a semicircular “station wagon”, impatiently waiting for him at the entrance to the parking lot, with a gurgling engine, the door opened and he flopped into the front seat. Answering the question of the assistant driver, he gestured, apparently indicating further movement, and after a second the postal service car started. Slowly, leaving the parking lot, the car missed two cheerful pedestrians – Ave and Aft, who were walking and talking animatedly.

A red-green spot – the mailer’s uniform, flickered with a speck somewhere on the side, again resurrected the morning meeting in Av’s memory. The brief flow of his thoughts was interrupted by the exclamation of Aft:

– Ave, everything is very cool, so great that we met! Listen, I’m very-very happy! And-and-and... well, you don’t be offended, you know, to me further – nothing! Well, no way... We have to run, we have to go back. Don’t frown, okay? Well, a lot of time already...

– Yes, what are you doing? Like this? Yes, everything is fine, everything is fine! I understand. I am also very glad that we crossed paths! A miracle happened!

– If you want, if possible, or rather, watch today at half past seven on Channel Nineteen. Like yes, at half past seven, if I’m not mistaken... we will all be shown. Now you have to run! Huh? Come on...

– I’ll see. I’ll definitely look, I promise.

– Look, of course, come on. Be sure to look, yes, and tell Ronda too, let him look too. – Aft held out a hot and slightly damp foot goodbye. – Well, be healthy! Take care of yourself and... and always believe in a bright future, no matter how hard, no matter how completely shit there is in life! See you again, I hope. And about the route “work-home-work” – also, by the way, think about it!

– I will try!

– Think, think, there are some options that you just need to look for, maybe... maybe you’ll change it! – and Aft winked mischievously.

– Of course, see you! Life is unpredictable! – neither Ave nor Aft wanted to interrupt an unexpected pleasant meeting. – You know, I really want to chat with you as a thread for life. Meet me sometime?

– Yes, chat. Just choose the time. Write to me.

– I will write. But where to write something?

Their last phrases flew out like rocket-propelled shots – emotionally, resonantly, quickly, whipping. The endless minute of parting indecently dragged on, and everyone had to run and hurry about their work affairs.

– Listen, find me through the net. I live on 44th Street. Block number four and the apartment are also four.

– A solid quarter-quarter?

– Well, it turns out that yes. It is easy to remember... So remember so then, and be sure to write, do not get lost! I beg you!

– Yes, I will remember, run now. – Ave put canisters on the ground and turned Aft with his paws and, patting his shoulder, added. – All, happily, my friend, otherwise we will not part with you like that! Enormous luck in all matters! And health to you – a full bowl!

– Thank you, happily, Ave!

The ants dispersed in different directions: Ave was in a hurry, he had already lost a bucket of precious minutes, the honored veteran Aft also hurried home, after a few lonely steps, he turned around and began to wave his paws hotly after Ave, melting in the hopeless gray tunnel, but right there I realized that his farewell signs would be ignored, he dashingly turned and waved his paws carelessly.

– Oh-oh-oh, excuse me! I did not want, did not want! – Aft accidentally touched the legs of a passerby. – Excuse me!

– Yeah, what are you! It’s me myself who has flown! You ask me! The passerby muttered embarrassedly, raising his fallen hat.

– Oh, it didn’t work out well! Excuse me! – Only then a deadly scent of a stranger reached Aft, and he involuntarily narrowed his eyes.

At the same time, the veteran suddenly combed his crib and vomited his mandibles, he felt sharply, painfully, to the most incredible obscenity, as an unpleasant odor penetrated into his labyrinth passages with a small poisonous gimlet. “Horrible!” The ant raised its paws to a bubbling nose and prepared to sneeze with all its strength, but such a pale sneezed out that he only smiled to himself. The ant nervously pulled out his favorite handkerchief, with quick, almost feverish movements, wiped his mouse muzzle and took a step away from the strange passerby.

The stranger, frozen for a minute or two after the collision, shuddered feverishly, pulled his hat deep on his head, somehow hiccuped strenuously, unsuccessfully trying to restrain himself, and continued on his way. The chubby old man, relaxing serenely on the lonely bench Aft walked by, apparently dozed off a bit, and the veteran of Streerets woke the half-sitting, reclining one with his blue sneeze, he started slightly and, driven by the instinct of intelligent politeness, immediately blurted out:

– Be healthy, son, be healthy!

For a moment, the astonished Aft thanked the old man, looked at the mechanical watch, which dangled homelessly on a thin paw, and started off running. And somehow, unexpectedly, it turned

out briskly for Aft to start, and not to stop. Far behind him already stood a friend Av, and a “hat” passerby, and an old man, and someone else, and another, and behind him another... Aft fled, as if flying above the ground, and behind his back, a shirt, which had no time to unbutton, caught up in a street spring breeze, flipped frivolously. He fled, and in the sky-high eyes he whistled, one after another, freshly printed huge posters all over the walls of houses depicting the president of the country Snai. He escaped, and the monumental phrase under indestructible portraits “Your LIGHT future is in your paws!” constantly catching up with him and with unpleasant meticulousness, annoyingly and clingily, as if striking the back of her head, she asked again and again: “After all, exactly? Is your future in your paws? Or, can you say that I’m wrong? Am I mistaken? Am I mistaken?..”

He, who completely gave his health, his life, all of himself to the altar of service, the idea of universal prosperity, universal life... and... the idea of salvation of the entire ant family.

“Helping others is the highest degree... degree... degree... and what, in fact, is the degree? And why – it’s the highest...” – It seems that they taught us in a boarding school, but I don’t remember everything already...

– But... what do these words mean now? – Aft on the run recalled today’s conversation with reporters of the Nineteenth Channel. “What do they mean now?” Specifically for you, here is for you, they determine something?

– For me, as for all of us, right for everyone, for us, these words helped us to simply survive on Streets, helped to cope with all the small and big difficulties, yeah, big and endless that were born and were born one after another. It’s hard for you to imagine it all... It’s not even very difficult, it’s impossible for you to imagine it. These... these words were sacred to us... This... well, it is impossible to describe in words... Here – as if another world...

– What about now? Do not regret that you made such a choice?

– Do you ask strange questions? Very strange, I would even say... And you yourself would not dare to volunteer when millions of individuals are in danger? Well, or let’s say so – the danger threatens only hundreds of ants... Would you go?

– Uhhh, – the moderator grumbled.

– Well, well, they persuaded, not even hundreds, but let them be ten, or just one ant... Have you really sacrificed yours for someone’s life? – raised to the highest degree of patriotism, Aft looked into the slippery eyes of the journalists present in the studio, ants-viewers, and confusedly, timidly and without initiative, he searched for elementary answers to his questions, which seemed to be the most complicated equations for the listeners. – Listen, we were all taught from early childhood... Yes, and what have they been taught? We have... – here he hesitated a little. – Am I saying something wrong? Not that?.. If I say wrong or illiterate, you correct me. In some things I’m completely uneducated, but somewhere it’s interesting that... somewhere, I understand something, ay-ay. Aft smiled mysteriously, emphasizing the last word, and completed his tirade. – Right or wrong, you have to disassemble the whole team, and I really think so, that is, as I feel with my heart, I say so. I speak from my heart. Thank you for letting me speak. Thank you very much! Thanks to all!

– Yes, you are just a miracle! You are a real miracle!

– Yes, save-and-for, thanks! – Apt shone embarrassedly.

– You say the right words, Aft! Everything is correct and exactly so, smoothly! – the host of the TV show suddenly woke up from such an enthusiastic speech, as if he had just been safely in another parallel world.

He manfully extended his paw towards the veterans sitting in a small handful, bowed to them and applauded wholeheartedly, after him the whole audience was hypnotized by the applause of the honored workers. Aft calmly raised his right paw, asking for general silence, and the audience instantly died down, the ant continued with a completely different mood.

– Only, here... Only who will remember tomorrow about our guys? About my comrades – about Dotra, about Nita, about Skill, about hundreds, thousands of simple working ants? About those who stayed in Streets forever and will not return... About those who will not come back anyway...

– How is it, how is it? We will remember... We... – it began hotly, it was a television journalist, but Aft already closed his eyes and shook his head from side to side, shaking his mustache with noticeable nervousness.

– Not sure, remember. Not at all sure! Is such an accident for the first time? Well, I ask – was such an accident for the first time? Well, no, not the first time! No no! And many have already completely forgotten what happened. So you remember about us, while this pathetic handful of ants is still alive. Well, I'm definitely telling you, in your-our-common vocabulary there is no such phrase, there is no slogan "We will remember!" This is pathos! It's simply not there. Now there are forty of us left. Now – only forty, but three months a month ago it was twice as much! Mmm, do you understand this simple arithmetic? Twice as much, so what? How many of us will remain in a month? We just came and did our thing. I believe that we have fulfilled our duty to the Fatherland and these are not just beautiful words, but these are... These are we... – here he stammered, and fell silent, he did not want to continue the life-giving speech... The desire evaporated... For whom did he speak? For yourself?

Aft's sincere monologue quenched all the fiery exclamations of the journalists and continued to keep the audience trembling with excitement that chewed on what the veteran had said. It was unexpected and bold enough, although no one could say anything against it: after all, everything was so, in reality, it was, and will continue to be...

It was decided to take a half-hour technical break. Filming, which went a little beyond the scope of the television show, was resumed only after the slightly petrified journalists proactively talked with other veterans of the accident.

"How many of us will remain in a month?" And will it remain at all? Will it stay? "We have fulfilled our duty to other ants and that's all... and that's all, and nothing more special..."

Aft continued to rush through the streets, almost fly, and already rolled up a hot and prickly ball inside, and he felt that there were no forces, no forces and that's all, and he would have to go for a walk. "Ohhh, okay, I'll be too late, but I really don't have the strength to run and run!.. All our lives we all endlessly run somewhere, like mad squirrels in a closed endless wheel, trying to catch up to the ghostly... ghostly happiness... or what? Are we really going to always run after this alluring foggy happiness?"

A veteran award chain with a matte medallion frantically jumped over a tattered shirt. Plik-skokk, plik-skokk. Another painful lump with alarming perseverance rolled up to the flaming throat, along the aching neck plane and pronotom\* on which the shirt still held, streams of sweat ran away, the aching body was ablaze with fire, the temples were unstopably pulsing: tick-by-tick, tick-by-tick... In a muddy head, images and events suddenly seemed to dissolve, as if in a desert a dying mirage. Aft did not hear absolutely anything around, except for the black rhythms and hearts that were beating feverishly on the tom-toms, and his watery eyes distinguished only the narrow path of the tarry sidewalk. Most of all, the ant was afraid to think of an impending disease, which, shifting from one foot to another, in modest anticipation already stood at the threshold of his inner world and strove to cross it. He fought with all kinds of internal means in order not to let her in, not to let her in under any circumstances, but it seems that everything is useless, it was impossible to hold her by any means... maybe he imagined that he was giving up all his life forces, struggling with the inevitable death, trying to escape from his recent past. But how can you leave him or run away?

"Well, that's almost home!" Almost... There is nothing worse than this "almost", there is simply either "yes" or "no", or zero, or ten out of ten, and this unsaid "almost" flies out, and circles a ghostly yellow-bellied tit, and intends to sit right in you legs, but does not sit down, and suddenly it turns out to be not at all a tiny titmouse, but a big-legged stork. Almost at home... almost..."

Choking Aft, with an arrow, jumped out to the intersection of Sixty-second and Fifty-fifth, not noticing the racing pickup of the landscaping service. The crazy driver, trying to avoid a collision with a pedestrian who suddenly appeared, sharply pressed the brake and turned the steering wheel to the left, turned the car around, and with her treacherous right side she threw the veteran to the side with mighty force, as if an elastic tennis ball was bouncing off a racket. He flew soundlessly a few meters and rigidly flattened near the corner of a gray house; the car from such a sharp turn fell awkwardly on its side, young seedlings intended for planting somewhere in the public garden in the neighborhood, and which were still in a covered body a minute ago, spilled out on the road with friendly company.

At first one foot appeared timidly from the broken window of the overturned car, then, more confidently, the other, creaking from what had happened, the driver vigorously squeezed through a narrow glass rectangle – the door jammed from falling. A young ant passing by with a paper bag hurriedly rushed to the nearest phone – to call the medical care service. Passers-by hurried to the lying ant. Aft, spreading all six legs wide, helplessly sprawled on a punched propodeum, from under which a thin stream of transparent liquid – ant blood – slowly flowed out.

The wide-open torn shirt was decisively transformed from pale turquoise to gloomy ultramarine. The torn antennae spontaneously asymmetrically balanced in the air tense from the episode that had occurred – they were both completely broken and barely moving. The two upper legs also hung limply, as if in zero gravity, clearly not wanting to calm down and freeze. In Aft's open eyes, life was not going to give up; he looked forward, not seeing anything in front of him.

– How many of us, eh?.. – Aft whispered faintly, but hardly anyone heard him. – How much?.. Who can say?..

They encircled the downed Aft from all sides, – well, what interest is there – the most interesting event, and even on the day off – at least some little entertainment for all the loiterers – the ants were stiffened in unnatural poses, and with guarded excitement they looked at their relative, and none of them bent down and touched the downed one, fearing to do something wrong. From the overturned car to the mottled ring of witnesses of the accident, the driver limped limply forcibly limping on his right paw – it seems that the damage to the paw was serious enough, since he could not calmly step on it. The crowd synchronously parted, and when the driver approached Aft, he closed the vibrant, glowing excitement ring again, he sank down to the ant he had knocked down and carefully took his paw in his.

The veteran's icy sad glass beads seemed completely lifeless, but a tiny stream of hope with a sun-bouncing bunny ran down his gray-red rough wrist, there was no need to worry – everything was probably formed, and the driver was seated on a post here, on mouse pavement-petiol\*, slightly bending tergites\*, and began to carefully examine its wounded leg: hemolymph\*, “ant blood”, there were not so many, but nevertheless, acute pain pierced to the very tips of the claws. Finally, a medical aid driver strained to siren arrived at the emergency intersection. Two ants in bathrobes jumped out of a fiery red-white door together and ran to the victims. A sullen ant doctor squeezed his way through the crowd, side by side, who really did not like to go to the scene of incidents, the number of which in the town had recently increased sharply.

No less nimbly jumped out of the car two more ants from the back door. They had to make the chief physicians, so they did. Dead silence reigned, wired life whistled in all the carriageways, where vehicles of all kinds and breeds were squeezed between a random crowd, an unusually deserted sidewalk and a half-dead “shifter”, slowing down, and some what happened here?“, Frightened drivers and passengers looked. Once in a flash, a sneeze and a wounded Aft were carefully loaded onto a stretcher and thrown into an ambulance.

– At the end of the month... – the veteran continued to whisper.

– What?.. Why are you there? – the doctor did not understand him. – Shut up, come on! Take care of your strength, you need them!

– What to do with the second? – sharply asked one of the white coats. – Take it or what, huh?

– Throw him too. Come on, take him too! He’s not so serious, but for the full set we will arrange it too! – briskly ordered the doctor.

From behind a mournful brick corner, the silent traffic police patrol car appeared, and she calmly drove to an upturned pickup truck. The business-like policemen took up their duties: they quickly sorted out the littered young seedlings, some trees were badly damaged, but they were still thrown uphill along with everyone, then nimble cops surrounded the overturned car from all sides and “o-o-one-two three-got it!” easily, naturally, without further fuss, put it on wheels. Witnesses of the incident began to silently slowly disperse, one by one they reached further on their small and big deeds, which they had followed before. Some fifteen to twenty minutes after the unfortunate disaster, except for the lazy yawning patrol, there was nobody on the roadway of the intersection, and after another quarter of an hour, the calm working quarter continued to live according to its usual schedule, as if there was nothing. All the same sleepy pedestrians, restlessly resting in a languid Sunday inaction, and hurrying on urgent matters – also, quietly passed by a motley gallery of endless multi-storey buildings, past universally pasted up glossy posters with the image of the president, past the ill-fated miserable corner, where most recently lay half-dead Aft. Everything seemed to freeze in the naive children’s yard game “freeze-die”, remaining in its spotlessly clean places, and what could change the usual course of the monotony of life: a casual episode, a meaningless accident, the death of an extraneous pedestrian, the death of a dozen ants or maybe the death of hundreds of ants? And, in general, can something really change the “usual course of events”? How tragic, terrible must the denouement be in order to at least somehow change the thinking of “passers-by”? Is everyone immersed in their own micro world?

## Chapter 12

### GREEN

Gently saving the crystal sparkle of happiness, sparkling with a gilded cloud of airy love, Amina walked with Ave along the picturesque alley of old-world rose blossoms and regal silky pears, lilyfully holding on to her paws. They enjoyed a light philosophical conversation about the industrial and cultural development of megacities, a couple tirelessly wandered around the street labyrinths of the city for the third hour, and fate fatefully pulled them to the coveted fontanel, which was always visited by those on duty from Sixty-second Street, and not only from her, but also with many others, for life-giving juice. As always, a small line missed a murmuring spring.

– Hi, friends! – as soon as the ants asked about the order, a completely unfamiliar ant approached them and started a conversation. – Can I ask you for one interesting question?

– Hi-hi! – the couple immediately answered in one voice, and, smiling at the fact that their answer so gloriously coincided, they looked at each other and laughed.

They examined the emmet from head to toe and, without saying a word, unanimously decided: “Let him turn, since he needs it so!” Approaching, like most ants waiting for their portion of juice, he was dressed pretty well, one might even say in his “corporate” style: the working denim suit looked a bit old, but indecently clean, fresh and perfectly ironed – they immediately noticed to themselves and Amina and Ave. A plastic badge with a mysterious logo shone on the lapel of a checkered jacket with a golden rhombus. Mirrored sunglasses were fixed above his eyes, apparently, he raised them in anticipation of a very bright sun.

– My name is Ashley! I can introduce you to local attractions. Everything is absolutely free for your pleasure! Maybe while we walk around the nearest corridors of history, eh? There is a desire? – the ant burst heavily, which did not bother him at all, and he, with a funny smile, awkwardly shook his head towards the gate of the Re-Ru Grande temple, located right there, some fifty meters away. – The walk will be interesting! Take a walk I promise for your interest! Don’t waste your time, take a walk and relax! How do you like this prediction, a-ah?

– Well, o-o-oh? If only for a few minutes... – Ave made a decision for two. – How long is this event scheduled, my dear...?

– Ashley! Ashley is my name. Yeah, how long, how long?.. Absolutely and not for long, well, for life, if only for two... It’s impossible to guess a song!.. Life is a big puzzle, at ti-i-imes, it may not work out as you expect...

– No, no, for the rest of our life we can’t... We would have, for half an hour, your historical excursion, so unexpectedly drawn, – it would have been just right, well, for a maximum of an hour! – Ave looked at Amina. She stood and wordlessly shone with happiness. The ant decided that a couple of words should be added in her direction: – And, it seems, we have already found a walk for a lifetime...

– It seems? Or have you found? Or does it “seem”? – here Amina could not resist and laughed contagiously.

Ashley stood and only foolishly smiled, wondering what his new acquaintances were talking about.

– Then there is nothing to put off, go ahead!

Perky Amina and Ave looked at each other: “Well, wow, we and adventurers are with you for life!” – and rushed for an accelerating step guide.

“And where did he come from?” There have never been any excursions and accompanying here? Just some miracles are happening... I hope that everything is only for the good!” Nevertheless,

interest in learning about the local surroundings overcame a momentary fear, or rather, there wasn't a special sinless struggle: Amina and Ave made a tempting offer for those who walked without a special purpose, and the couple in love decided to spend their free time to good use, listen and see what was "interesting" will introduce them to the newly-appeared guide.

– Come, see what is there. Let's hope we enjoy it! – said Amina, as if confirming the train of thought of a friend.

“Well, isn't it really scary?” Do not say scary? Ashley giggled slightly. – How is it, the song is sung? “Make a first step!” It seems that we decided to do it, right, friends?

– True, true! – Ave mimicked him, a little childishly.

Amina looked at him reproachfully, smiled and bowed her head, as if to say: “Well, why, why are you like that?”

The charming guide gave the ants miniature lanterns, which came from somewhere in his paws, turned on a large lighting device in his paws, and confidently began to descend down the stone stairs leading to a wide oval platform.

The matte gray steps, smoothly polished, became darker and gloomier with every step, in places icy gloss with a slight perspiration gleamed on them. While there was no special need for flashlights, the sun's rays in places penetrated the mysterious underground room, and almost everything was clearly visible.

Having descended five or six meters down the steps, Amina felt a little uneasy, icy trembling with small beads one after another went all over the propodeum, rolling into the complex eye, mercilessly twitching the near-iris mucous membrane, then into the powerful and strong protonum (the upper part is the forearm) \*, then in a rough tendril, then in one upper paw, then in another, then it sank to the thigh, and nervously tugged, and tugged, and tugged again, as if for a flimsy thread of a cobweb of every part of the body.

In the frightening depths from the right square platform, neatly fenced by a low fence of two bricks, as if the rays were scattered in different directions, smooth, smooth with brown trim stone corridors. There were six tunnels in total, and each darkly darkened in the gloomy depths. At first it seemed to the ant that she had already seen a similar picture-drawing, and then she triumphantly remembered that it was a school textbook on ancient history, telling about the world landmark – Re-Ru Grande.

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