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Аннотация

In a small town in Texas, Whitney Graham lives, whose life changes on an ordinary, rainy evening, with the appearance of a previously unknown insect.

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A lump, lumpy with moving, hook-shaped, sharp protrusions, flew into the closed kitchen window with lightning speed, generously sprinkling the velvet carpet on the floor with splashes of glass. The gray, dried-up mass hit the china cabinet with a crash, so that Whitney Graham's black porcelain plates turned into a fine, coal-dark crumb. A light wave of cool, evening air slipped into the rooms. Trembling, Whitney stared tired into the impenetrable darkness of the evening street, trying to catch her eye on some landmark. She couldn't see anyone or anything.

Then she put her ear to the thin, plasterboard wall that separated her from the kitchen. The oppressive silence reigned inside, and outside the one-story house, the west wind, the herald of an impending hurricane, howled stronger. In this part of Texas, powerful trade winds were perceived as a pattern, replacing the heat of the day with the withering cold of the night. But, so far, it was far from the thundering, airy meat grinder tearing the tiled roofs from the walls.

– One madam, two. The hoarse, distorted, raspy voice didn't sound like someone Whitney knew. The girl slowly stood up, looking around in search of something heavy. The shortness of breath caused by the influx of hot, suffocating air was dizzying.

"Fool," Whitney whispered, so that her lips parted only a

quarter of an inch, "why did I leave it there?!"

She was talking about a Colt Cobra two thousand seventeen, a light, short-barreled revolver with a six —round drum. The gun was lying on the very top of the china cabinet where the blow fell," Whitney suggested desperately with annoyance.

The crunch of the thin, transparent glass pressed down by the heavy sole became louder and louder. Whitney grabbed a mug from the table with the remains of half-drunk coffee, while spilling a little on the keyboard. Got ready, to quit.

– Hey, dog shit, – a distant exclamation was heard on the street, – what are you up to?!

The taut, ringing strings inside Whitney's heart have become much weaker. She exhaled contentedly when she saw the reflection of a lantern in the window, and heard the voice of Larry Queens, a neighbor across the house.

"One captain, two captains," the unknown man grunted and wandered away to the light.

The minutes dragged by as Whitney waited. Not a single sound, the street was silent. With small steps, squeezing a mug with a skull pattern in her hand, the girl went to the kitchen. The edge of the beam from the flashlight lying on the ground barely made its way into the dark room of the kitchen, but this was enough to see the consequences of an unexpected visit. Here and there were dark gray traces of mud from boots, mixed with wet sand. A thick smell of sweet – salty burning, mixed with notes of mustiness, hit the nose.

Recovering a little, Whitney ran to the closet, slipping on the spread of oil from a broken glass bottle on the way. She didn't know how much time she had spent on the damp floor, and she wasn't sure she hadn't fainted at all. Opening her eyes, Whitney almost groped her way to the weapon. The gun was in, place, and Whitney with a habitual movement, she brought the trigger into the firing position.

– Larry, are, you here, old man? Whitney asked, stretching out her hands with the gun in the direction of the broken window.

One of the cups clattered behind him. Choking on the damp, evening air, Whitney turned around and fired several times in that direction. Now it seemed like the best idea to get out of the house. Looking around in jerks, Whitney reached a large, bare tree, covering twenty-four feet in a few seconds. Her lungs were whistling, and her heart was staggering with every beat.

– The neighbors probably already managed to call the cops, – she thought hopefully, looking towards the windows devoid of light.

A fine, energetic rain was thickly covering the sleepy surroundings of the small town of Touchland with waves. At the end of the street, on the very edge of the settlement, clutching a revolver, with the remaining three cartridges, Whitney stood waiting for help. Her hair was, stuck together and stuck to her face like seaweed, slimy and wet.

For some reason, Whitney remembered the Lutheran church, where her mother brought her and her sister at the age of seven.

That day it rained a similar, long, unpleasant rain. The woman needed to solve several court cases on her debts, and a familiar priest, Father Bastian, offered his help in looking after the girls.

The story of the daughters, that the gray-haired, church minister undressed in front of them, the mother took warily. Still. Not really, believing. Father Bastian was listed in a very good account with the parishioners, and this could have a negative impact on everyone involved in the story. Of course, the man himself denied everything said about him. Rumors are known to be faster than the wind. Soon after, Mom took Whitney and her sister out of school, moving to a neighboring state.

A couple of years later, Whitney read in the newspaper that Bastian's father was caught in bed with the child of one of his parishioners. "The monster was sentenced to thirteen years in prison," the article read, ostentatiously sticking out the words. This news didn't touch the girl a little, now she didn't care. Only mom, wore a mask of thoughtfulness from that day much more often.

Whitney quickly forgave the offense for distrust, but she could not build a previous relationship with her mother either.

The skin, chilled with moisture, trembled. Whitney lost count of the minutes, not realizing how long she had been leaning against an old, wet tree. Her legs were already aching from exertion, and the closing of her eyes betrayed fatigue. She looked around, and once again made sure that the street was silently empty.

Then Whitney went to Larry Queens, looking for help. She couldn't remember how she'd made it all the way to his house. The impatient, timid drumming of blows on the door remained unanswered for a long time. It seems like an eternity passed until an orange-red light bulb turned on over the porch of his house. A puffy face appeared in the doorway, which was ajar by five inches.

– Damn it! Whitney exclaimed, catching a glimpse of the older man. The rays of a small lamp illuminated a skull split in two, from which a burgundy liquid was slowly oozing. The right side of the cheek and forehead with a convex mole was much better preserved, and the man could still be recognized.

– Why are you yelling? Queens asked irritably, licking his split lips.

– Something broke into my house. Larry, please call the police!

Nodding, the elderly man disappeared inside the house. Evening silence enveloped the area, and even, it seems, drops of water flowed silently from the soft tiled roof. Whitney could only hear the heavy tread of Queens' retreating footsteps, disappearing into the dense blackness of the rooms.

– Listen, what's your name, – Larry's voice rattled from the depths of the house, – you'll have to come in and help me. Dial it yourself, I don't feel well.

After spending about a couple of seconds fiddling with the door chain, Whitney got inside. The suffocating rancid air of

the rooms squeezed the lungs, and Whitney Graham's neck and forehead were covered with cold, salty perspiration.

– Where are you, Larry?

A warm wave of air and a short, rustling sound near her ear were followed by the crash of things smashed behind Whitney's back. Something heavy plopped down beside her, bouncing to the side. Whitney's hand, clutching the gun, jerked, and a flash of light lit up the room for a moment.

– There are only two bullets left, – a strange thought flashed through Whitney's mind when she managed to make out the unnaturally hunched figure of Larry Queens. Now the back of his head was completely covered by a pink–red arthropod creature that looked like a spider. A small body, dotted with many eyes, throbbed and fidgeted on a gray, broken head, fingering two dozen curved paws.

Larry himself seemed hideously thin. And yet, in the next instant, the man easily lifted a large pedestal. Whitney's eyes had time to get used to the darkness, a little, and she managed to notice in time how Larry launched an improvised projectile at her.

– Hey come closer. It's time to call! Lari commanded in a trumpet voice, lifting the bedside lamp from the floor with his crooked hands.

Whitney's shot landed in the center of Larry's head. Quins' body crunched and collapsed to the floor.

Turning on the light, Whitney found a terrible mess reigning

in Larry's house. Among his scattered belongings, there was a mobile phone turned off. After putting the device on charge, Whitney sat down next to the mummified body of Queens. The bullet left a through hole, completely bloodless. The liquid, viscous and transparent, flowed only from the body of the many-legged creature, saturating the space around it with a bitter, nauseating aroma.

Whitney plopped down in Larry's worn-out chair, only now feeling how tired she was. My legs ached terribly from the strain, and the weight, squeezed with monstrous force. Whitney covered her face with the sweaty palms of her hands, and then ran her fingers through her hair. A nerve impulse burned through every cell of her body. Whitney raised her hand with the revolver and pulled the trigger.

Pink – red arthropod with a lot of eyes, it casually slid off the back of her head, crawling under the sofa.

Whitney's heart was racing to get out. She jumped up, feeling the back of her head, and trying to keep track of the place where the spider-like creature was hiding. Fortunately for Whitney, Queens smoked a lot during his lifetime, and among his things she came across a box of matches.

On the street, powerful currents of air violently swayed the extinguished lampposts, and tree branches slowly grated on the cold, extinguished windows of silent houses. The flames greedily enveloped the rooms where Larry Queens used to live, releasing thick, acrid clouds of smoke into the sky.

Dragging her tired legs, Whitney wandered off to seek help. Yellow tongues of fire brightly illuminated the naked, slimy bodies of unknown spiders crawling out of the red-hot remains of the house.