**THE FOG**

That was probably the most boring winter afternoon I had ever had in my entire life. I decided to spend a couple of days in the small town in the mountains where my grandma lived, trying to get away from everyone and fully devote myself to that bl…sorry, sorry, I know, I promised, no curses! All right, so I was supposed to be working with my heart and soul on the series of painting I had to present at the admission exam (and on which, of course, kind of depended my whole future), but it clearly seemed to be impossible to get my Muse in the right mood for working.

I was sitting on the zebra-patterned armchair in my grandma’s cozy, crazy living room, with odd punk girl bands posters hanging on the walls and leopard patterns everywhere, trying to get some inspiration from some old dusty magazines.

«Gran, please, turn down the music! I can’t even think properly!», I shouted.

«For sure, that isn’t the music’s fault, darling!», replied her, entering the room and starting to rummage nervously on the shelves, scratching her shaved head, «Oh sweetheart, I think I finished the tobacco for my pipe! Please, wouldn’t you be the kindest grandchild in the world, and go to the old Bill’s shop at the corner to get me some? I’ll make tea and cut a nice piece of cake for you, while you’re away».

I actually didn’t mind to go out for a while, since I wasn’t clearly able to put together anything good, so I said yes, got the keys and went out. For a moment, I thought I went blind. The fog was so thick it seemed to be already dark. You couldn’t even see your own feet properly. The cute wooden houses seemed rather creepy, in that ghostly atmosphere, and, of course, there was no one around. I felt a cold shiver running down my spine, but I wrapped myself up tightly in my coat and walked down the road, heading to the shop.

After a while, I realized I had been walking for a bit too long, but I still hadn’t see the shop. Actually, I could barely see anything, that’s true, but how could it be possible? I turned around a couple of times, trying to understand where I was, and suddenly right in front of me appeared a haunting, dull shadow. I got a bit closer and realized it was the tall, creepy tree at the end of the main street. I had definitely gone too far!

At the same time, though, I realized there was something really strange about the tree. I got closer and closer, trying to understand…and I nearly screamed. Eerie human figures, dressed in ripped clothes, were hanging from the rami, swinging. Their loops, slowly moving and squeaking, sounded like the murmuring of an old, army song. Right away in my mind all the spooky stories grandma used to tell me when I was a child started to pop out. I remembered she told me about that big scary tree, from which, during the war, soldiers used to hang the partisans, and about their poor, angry souls, still wandering around there I felt like I just had been thrown in a pool full of ice cold water. I started to move back, slowly, but suddenly the shadows started to stretch their arms and legs, like they were trying to jump down on the ground. I simply freaked out and turned back to start running, just to bump into the old Frank, the village lunatic, who was right beside me. He was pointing at the tree with his trembling finger, whispering something I couldn’t hear. But the scariest thing were his eyes…his eyes were completely white!

I screamed so loud I think the whole town heard me, and ran back to the house as fast as I could. For the whole time I heard the fog, that terrible, sticky fog evily whispering all around me.

I finally got home, rushed inside and slammed the door beside me.

«Hey, honey! Did you find the tobacco? Oh, and your friend Pete was looking for you. He came here just a few minutes ago, he said he was going to the shop, too. Did you see him?», asked grandma with her usual cheerful voice.

«Oh, no…», I whispered. And we heard a loud, desperate scream coming from outside…