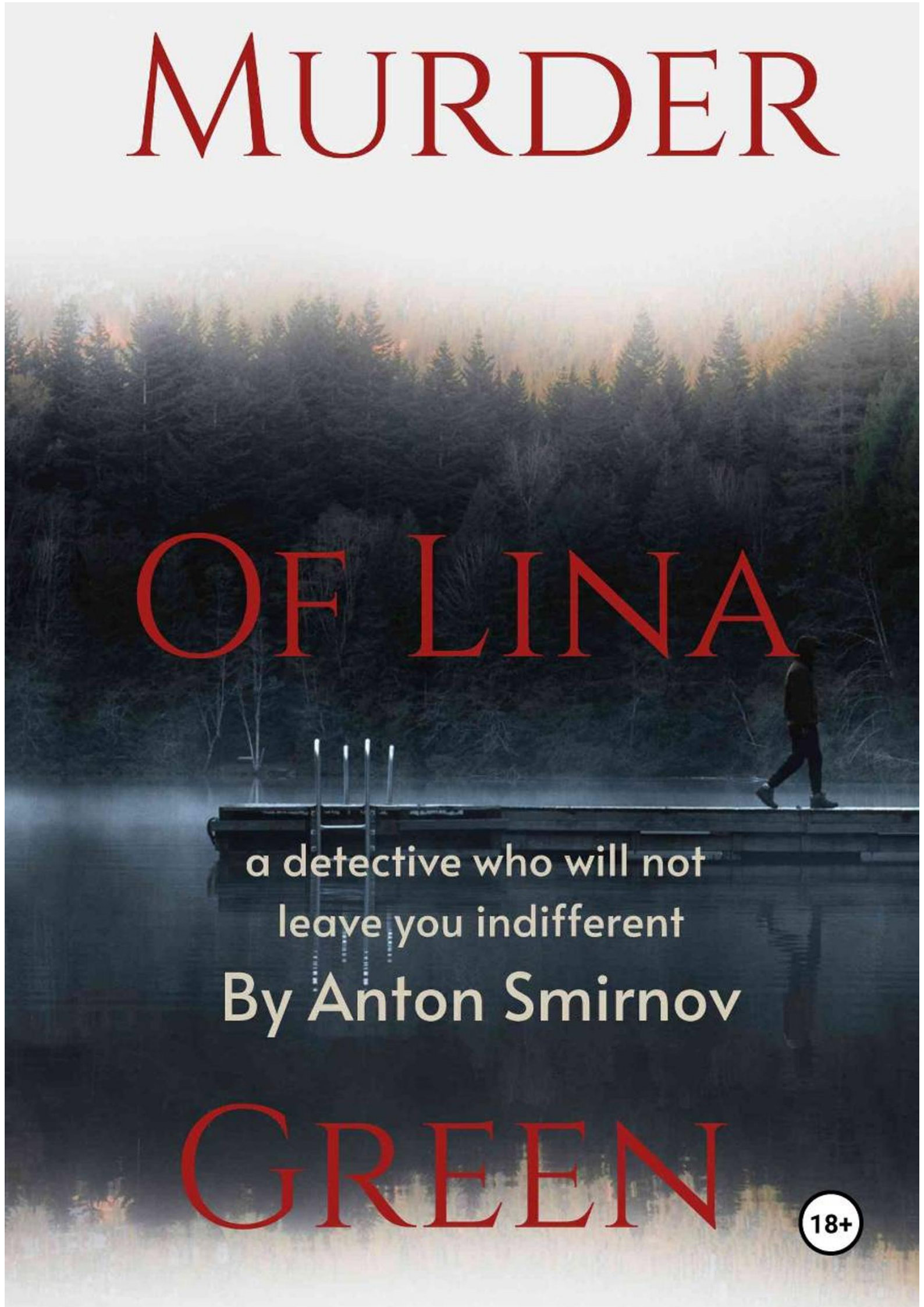


The background of the entire cover is a photograph of a misty forest. In the foreground, a wooden dock extends into a calm body of water. A person is walking along the dock from right to left. The trees in the background are dense and covered in mist, with some light filtering through the canopy.

MURDER

OF LINA

a detective who will not
leave you indifferent

By Anton Smirnov

GREEN

18+

АНТОН Смирнов

Secret of Lina Green

«Автор»

2026

Смирнов А.

Secret of Lina Green / А. Смирнов — «Автор», 2026

Creative torments torment James Havebrook, a young but already promising writer. Inspiration, like an elusive ghost, left him. In search of salvation from writer's stagnation, he leaves for a secluded provincial town lurking in the shadow of New York. There, among the dusty pages of the past, he finds a mysterious diary. Its author, with frightening frankness, tells about the murder of a girl named Lena Green. The discovered diary becomes not only a source of new inspiration for James, but also a powerful stimulus. He decides to get to the bottom of the truth, to find the killer, whose crime has remained unpunished for decades. An incredible labyrinth of riddles and coincidences leads him to unexpected discoveries. James learns who the author of a diary written twenty years ago is and discovers that behind one murder lies another. The denouement turns out to be stunning for him, but the main thing is that his new bestseller is finally finished.

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Содержание

Глава	5
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	11

АНТОН СМІРНОВ

Secret of Lina Green

Глава

Smirnov Anton

The Mystery of Lina Green

To my mother, wife and daughters

Prologue

Year 2002

"Hurry, he's running in a westerly direction.

"He's running too fast!" Where did he go?

Two police officers chased a man who was deftly escaping from the chase.

"Damn, where is he?"

The mysterious stranger, however, managed to run into the library and hid there. He heard the police passing by, but the librarian, who was standing nearby, did not give him away. To which the stranger nodded to him as a sign of gratitude.

"I need to hide one thing. As soon as there is an opportunity, I will return for it. Will you help me?"

The librarian led the man into one of the halls without any questions and said:

"There is a private collection in this hall, there are no visitors here. You can hide it here.

The man took out a package, carefully unfolded it and took out a book.

"For safety, I don't need to know where you'll put your item. With that, he left the room.

The disappearance of Marcus Peters

1976 year

"Get in the car, Marcus.

"Catherine, I'm so glad to see you!"

"Shall we ride?"

"Of course, I don't mind!"

"What the hell?!" Someone blinks their headlights.

"Marcus, I'm afraid!"

"It's okay, Catherine, turn up the gas!"

"Oh my God, they're going to push us out of the way... God, Marcus..."

Nowadays. The year is 2024.

My name is James Havebrook, and that's my story. At certain moments, my life was very unsuccessful. Now I am a famous writer with a huge check in my pocket for a tidy sum. Every publishing house in the country wanted to get a contract with me, but until recently I was a big loser with a lot of problems and instability in life.

It all started in the summer of 2023 in New York. I worked as a journalist in the literary magazine "New Life". The magazine was based on reviews of new books, films, and on top of that, it published stories by promising beginning authors. This magazine also contained my stories, but I hardly came close to writing a masterpiece. In addition, my inspiration left me, and my articles were published less and less often, and my conflicts with the editor only intensified. Finally, we agreed that I needed a full-fledged vacation, by the end of which I would have to provide the editor-in-chief with something masterpiece. It seems to me that he saw talent in me and understood that this was only a temporary crisis that needed to be survived and inspired.

"James, I know you're capable, and you can write a good story. However, at the moment you are at a dead end..."

"Are you firing me?" Robert, you can't do that to me! I was one of the best. Yes, I had a creative crisis, but don't give up on me!

"Listen, Havebrook, don't interrupt me. I'm not firing you, I'm just giving you time to understand yourself, gain strength, inspiration, and rest. And as soon as you bring me a story that I will read in one breath, we will continue to work further..."

— That is, this is a sabbatical?

"Let's assume so!"

"Thank you, Robert... Can I go?"

"Yes, go and think it over." If anything, you know my phone number.

Robert Wilson was the editor-in-chief of New Life magazine and a very understanding man. He once taught a journalism course at my university, and I was his student. He always saw potential in me and therefore, after completing my training, he gladly hired me to work for him. And at first we worked fruitfully, I was even invited to work in other magazines, but I was devoted to my mentor. He was a handsome man who wrote dozens of stories and novels. One of his first was awarded various awards, and this indicated that he was very successful in his field. Now he is over sixty, he has his own family, but he did not have his own children, so many students were like children to him. Robert Wilson, despite his age, was still popular with both women and young students. Perhaps it was all about his charisma and strong mental abilities, because it seemed that this man knew about everything in the world.

Finding myself free from work in the middle of the day, I didn't want to go home, so I decided to take a walk. Wandering aimlessly through the streets, I saw a bar and decided to stop by for a couple of glasses of whiskey – it was my favorite alcoholic beverage. The clock showed 21:00, and alcohol had already hit my head, so I decided to go home to sleep and think about what to do next in the morning. As I walked in the direction of the house, I thought of Lisa.

"How is she?" What does our relationship lead to? And is there love between us?

As it turned out, I asked myself these questions for a reason. As soon as I crossed the threshold of the house, I saw her reproachful gaze, filled with anger.

"Where are you hanging out?"

"I was in the bar, I was fired today," I lied.

"It's not surprising, you're a loser!" And that's what you're all about!

"Thank you for your encouragement, that's what I need right now," I grinned.

"We should break up. I wanted to tell you even earlier, but today we have reached the limit in our relationship. I'm leaving, and there's no need to try to stop me..."

"All right," I replied indifferently.

Tears flooded her eyes, but she took her things and proudly stepped over the threshold of my house, and I never saw her again. Probably, it is for the best. Lisa was an ordinary doll, falling only on money and prestige, which was at a certain point in my life, so to speak, at the beginning of my career.

I need to unwind, take a break from the frantic rhythm of the big city, be alone with my thoughts, breathe fresh air, take a break from people and transport. I have to go to a small town, a provincial

one, where all of the above factors are combined. And, by the way, I know such a town: as a child, I often visited there, but over time I outgrew this town, but still the desire to return to it after a while was palpable.

Lingfield is a provincial town near New York City, with a population of about 5000 people. Quiet and peaceful, it seemed that nothing ever happened here. The city itself is surrounded by a forest consisting mainly of Weymouth pine. The people here were kind and suspicious of outsiders—a kind of community in which everyone was connected and familiar with each other in one way or another. James Havebrook could hardly be called an outsider, because he spent a lot of time here as a child. His father is from Lingfield, so young James often came here for holidays to visit his grandparents.

I packed my bags in a hurry, got into my Range Rover and hit the road. The road was supposed to take no more than three hours. Cities, high-rises and bridges flew by, but at the moment I was not particularly interested in the beauty of big cities: I wanted to be in a cozy house on the shore of the lake, which once belonged to my relatives, and now it has long been empty. It's hard to imagine such comfort in New York, where there are people and cars around, and everyone is constantly busy and in a hurry. And besides, New York is a city of tourists, so you can relax in this city only in bars and with a lot of alcohol, so that when you return home, you would sleep like a dead man, not hearing anything and not thinking about anything.

Here in Lingfield, on the shore of the lake, is my grandmother's house. My father grew up in this house, and it was a pleasure to be there again, to soak up the scents of the fresh pine forest, to walk along the beach and feed the birds, to escape from the reality of the big city and just merge with nature, where in the morning the birds sing, you can hear the dogs howling, and there is no fuss.

I got there quite unnoticed and parked my car near a small diner, which I decided to look into after the road. When I was a schoolboy, my grandfather and I often came here, ate pancakes for breakfast, and at lunchtime I adored their burgers with chips. At that time, they seemed to me the most delicious of all that there is in this world. My grandparents died more than five years ago, and I never found the strength to come here: without them, I felt completely uncomfortable here, I loved them very much.

On the threshold of the diner, I was met by a nice waitress, she looked no more than twenty. She had blond hair and graceful curves that were accentuated by her uniform. She smiled and offered to sit down at a table near the window, and I gladly agreed.

"What shall I treat you with?"

"Coffee and a couple of sandwiches first," I ordered.

"We have excellent lasagna," the waitress suggested. "My name is Marcy."

"Thank you, Marcy," I smiled back. "Carry your lasagna."

"Are you passing through our house or visiting us?"

"Hurry up to visit, I decided to change the scenery and live in your wonderful town."

"Great, I think we'll be friends, because most of the town comes to our diner. How can I contact you?"

— James Havebrook. My grandparents lived here, and I used to be here. Perhaps you and I have seen each other once, and I would not mind if you suddenly want to join me and give me a tour of Lingfield.

Marcy was embarrassed and ran off to fulfill my order.

A couple of minutes later, she brought me coffee and sandwiches: but we had to wait for lasagna.

"It's okay," I shrugged.

"What do you do, Mr. Havebrook?"

"I'm a writer!" I think I'm a writer. Now I am looking for inspiration for my novel.

"It's so exciting, promise to write about this amazing town!"

"I don't mind at all," I smiled.

"Marcy, the lasagna is ready for the guest!" The owner of the diner shouted from the kitchen.

She ran off to get my order.

I began to eat with pleasure. The food seemed ordinary, homemade, you won't find such a thing in the metropolis. After eating the sandwiches and finishing my lasagna, I got up from the table, left my tip, and went outside, satisfied with my satiety. I decided to go to the house by the lake and settle in.

The house was completely tidy and peaceful, only a layer of dust from long-absent residents. Since the death of my grandparents, only my dad has been here. Obviously, he had put things in order here, but more than five years had passed, and no one had appeared here. I examined the first floor. The kitchen – so many pleasant memories flashed in my head! It seemed that I could even smell the smells coming from the stove: it was my grandmother making pancakes with maple syrup for me, and my grandfather was sitting at the table and reading the morning newspaper. Everything here is as I remember. In the living room there is the same sofa standing in front of the fireplace, on it there is a photo of me as a child, my parents. I decided it was a nice opportunity to light a fireplace and succumb to memories with a glass of whiskey and a good cigar. A photo album came to hand. I flipped through a few pages: here is a photo of my young grandparents, you can see that they are in love, there is so much joy in their eyes, so much love. I felt uneasy at the conclusion that I would never see them again. Brushing off the delusion, I nevertheless pulled myself together and began to sort things out.

After getting used to my dwelling a little, I went for a walk around the modest town. I have always been attracted to this kind of cozy cities. Cute little shops, narrow streets, friendly locals, everything is clean, it is impossible to find even a cigarette butt on the ground. As I wandered the streets, I noticed a few interesting places to look into, including the police station. Who knows, maybe I'll find inspiration in this place.

I swerved once again, and it was as if a building suddenly grew up in front of me. This building was quite old, as indicated by its narrow and high windows, as well as the architectural style in which it was made, but still it had been restored not so long ago in an attempt to preserve the spirit of that time. I came closer and saw the inscription "**PRIVATE LIBRARY**". As a child, I was not particularly interested in such places, although I may have been here once. Pulling the handle, the door swung open in an instant, and I found myself in a large hall, where I was met by the old librarian.

"Good evening," he greeted me politely.

"Good... Can I look around here? You see, I am a writer, however, recently in a deep crisis, and I am looking for something suitable and motivating for myself.

"Are you a writer from New York?"

"How do you know?" I just arrived.

"The whole city here already knows about it. In small towns, it's hard to hide anything.

"Yes, I suppose you are right.

"Please, watch whatever you want." And if you want to borrow a book, I will make a form in your name, and you will be able to get any book without hindrance. However, our library is private, so all books are paid...

"Okay, I understand you, thank you.

"Maybe you're interested in something?" Can I help you navigate?

"I don't even know, while I'm just looking closely.

"We used to have a hall with private collections. We kept the books and records of various people who were afraid of losing them. In the past, this hall was closed from prying eyes, but now a lot of time has passed since people stopped paying the rent for our halls, and the books became our property, they were obliged to do so by contract. Therefore, you can look there. The hall is located in the left wing of the library. Come on, I'll see you off...

"You've intrigued me. I have just arrived, and you are already pleasing me with something unusual.

In New York, you can't get into private collections so easily, even if someone doesn't pay rent, because it's privacy... And even there, without prying eyes, there is someone to look at these collections.

The hall was quite spacious. The librarian, by the way, his name is Mike, was an elderly man, but still very vigorous for his age. After escorting me to the place, he obediently left, and I was left alone. Looking at the books from floor to ceiling, I ran my eyes over the shelves. In general, nothing unusual: classics and gift editions, for the most part nothing that could interest me at the moment. But still, without haste, I examined the regiments: Hugo, Hemingway, Blake, Dostoevsky... A thick volume without a title on the spine. I wondered what it was. Tolstoy with "War and Peace"?! Taking the book from the shelf, I distinctly heard something fall. Then a certain bundle attracted my attention. As it turned out, it was a book wrapped in a towel or something. I carefully unwrapped the towel and saw a book without any titles. When I opened the first page, I realized that this was not a book at all! This is someone's diary. Glancing through the text, it immediately caught my eye that the diary was not so simple. Several times on one page I came across the word "murder". I smiled, no, not at the murder, but at the fact that I think I had found my homework. However, the diary was hidden, and it was unlikely that Librarian Mike would want to give me a book that was not in the register. So I hid the book, and I took the same volume that was untitled on the spine. As it turned out, it was really Tolstoy with his "War and Peace".

Mike started a form and wrote down a book. I paid a deposit for it, and in a month I had to pay 30 dollars and return the book no later than in a month. Otherwise, another \$30 will be added to it. However, I didn't care, I was ready to return it right away, in my pocket there was a much more intriguing read. But I did not show it, saying only goodbye:

"Thank you, see you!"

"All the best!"

I was very hungry because of my excitement, and I decided to go to the diner where I stayed for the first time.

"Have you decided to have dinner?" "I was greeted nicely by the same waitress as in the morning, I think her name is Marcy.

"Yes, I'd like to have something to eat!" "Looking around, I didn't even notice how hungry I was.

"Great, now you will be our regular customer, I hope," she smiled.

"If it's possible," I couldn't hide my smile either.

"What shall I bring you?"

"Let's go to your taste, I trust you..."

"Excellent!" While I pour you coffee to brighten up the wait...

She left to fulfill my order, and I, sipping coffee, stared out the window with a thoughtful look. Maybe this diary is a joke? Although it is obvious that it was hidden there, so it matters. I was bursting with curiosity, and nevertheless I decided to look in and read a few entries.

3 June 2002

I didn't think something like that could happen in Lingfield. She was a friend, not sexually, more platonic, she was dear to me, and now she's gone. I don't know how to cope with it and how to survive this pain – it shackled my body and soul. Every day I replay that terrible incident in my head and can't find the answer. It's been a couple of weeks since her death, and I'm still writing day after day to find a clue, but nothing comes of it. This is a dead end! I promise you, Lina, I'll get to the bottom of the truth, no matter what it takes.

"Your order!"

I didn't even notice how she approached. I was so engrossed in reading that I couldn't see anything around me.

"Thank you," I muttered.

"Enjoy your meal!" If you need anything, just tell me, I'll come up in a moment.

"yes," I replied detachedly.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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