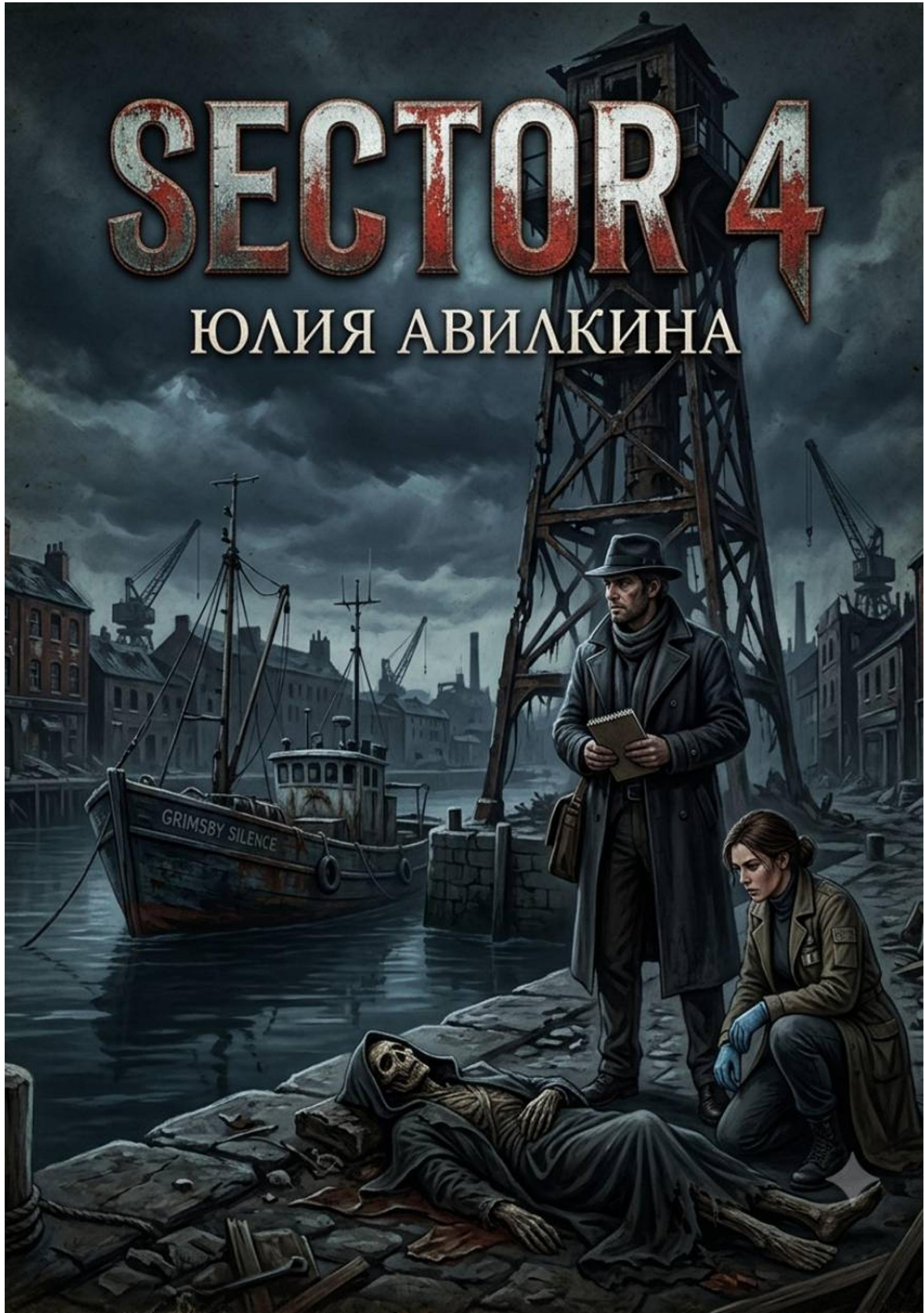


# СЕКТОР 4

ЮЛИЯ АВИЛКИНА



Юлия Авилкина

## **Sector 4**

«Автор»

2026

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Grimsby is not merely a town; it is a place where reality itself has begun to fray. When lead investigator Alek Myers arrives, he finds a port paralyzed by an unnatural, bone-chilling silence where echoes die and the sea refuses to move. As Myers and Medical Examiner Veronika Simon investigate a series of deaths—victims found completely purged of all fluids—they uncover a terrifying pattern hidden within the city's infrastructure. From the crumbling Dock Tower to the forgotten files of the municipal archive, the evidence points to a recurring, inexplicable deformation of the physical world that began decades ago.

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# Юлия Авилкина

## Sector 4

### Chapter 1: The Place Where Echoes Die

Grimsby didn't greet Alek Myers with sound. It greeted him with density.

As the investigator's car crossed the port's invisible boundary, the air inside the cabin grew heavy, as if infused with cement dust and icy seawater. The town didn't sprawl before him—it loomed out of the fog in gray, jagged monoliths of brick warehouses. There were no bright signs here, none of the usual bustle of a port town. Grimsby felt like a massive machine that had been shut down long ago but was never unplugged.

Alek parked by the waterfront. Stepping out, he instinctively adjusted his coat collar. The wind didn't howl; it pressed—sticky and salt-laden. The sound of his own footsteps on the pitted asphalt was strange: short, clipped, as if the space itself were swallowing every vibration.

In Grimsby, there were no echoes.

He walked past a row of boarded-up shops. The old paint on the doors had bubbled and peeled, exposing gray wood that had been soaked through with salt over decades. The smell was thick—a mixture of rotting fish, rusted metal, and something else Alek identified as the scent of stagnant, dead water.

The body was discovered on a concrete ledge of the pier, nearly at the water's edge. The police line—bright yellow tape—looked foreign here, a too-colorful stain against the monochrome landscape.

Two local constables stood at a distance. They weren't talking. They were simply staring at the sea, their postures held with a weary indifference that made Alek feel uneasy for a moment. It seemed as though a man's death was merely a change in the landscape to them, as inevitable as the tide.

"Veronika Simon," a woman's voice said. "Medical Examiner."

She was already there. Alek hadn't heard her approach; perhaps she had been standing by the body from the start, blending into the pier's shadows. Veronika wore a long, dark coat, her face a pale blur against the gray docks. She didn't offer a hand or a smile. Her gaze was fixed on the deceased—the way one looks at a broken part that must be inspected before being discarded.

"Alek Myers. Lead investigator from headquarters," he replied, stepping closer.

The victim was a man in his forties, wearing a work jacket. He lay on his back, staring at the gray sky with glassy eyes. There were no signs of a struggle; his clothes were dry despite the proximity to the water.

"What do we have?" Alek asked. His voice sounded unnaturally loud in the silence.

Veronika knelt beside the body. Her movements were clinical and precise.

"No external injuries. No signs of violence. Judging by the skin, he's been dead no more than two hours. But there is one anomaly, Mr. Myers."

Using her gloved fingertips, she gently lifted the victim's eyelid. Alek leaned in.

"Look at the mucous membranes. They're bone-white. It's as if there isn't a single drop of fluid left in the body."

Alek frowned. He had seen drowning victims and poisoning cases, but this man looked different. He looked... scrubbed. Purged of life with surgical precision.

"Do bodies with these signs show up often in Grimsby?" he asked, looking at Veronika.

She finally raised her head. Her eyes were cold and transparent, like the harbor water.

"In Grimsby, people usually just disappear," she answered. "The fact that this one stayed... that's news."

She fell silent, and the stillness instantly collapsed around them, swallowing the sound of a distant port crane. Alek straightened up and scanned the waterfront. The Dock Tower rose above them like a silent sentinel. Its red brick had darkened with moisture, its empty, slit-like windows resembling eyes. For a second, it seemed to Alek that the tower leaned just a bit lower, listening to their conversation.

He checked his watch. The second hand had stalled.

Alek shook his wrist and held the watch to his ear—silence. The mechanism that had never failed him had simply ceased to exist.

He looked back at Veronika. She stood motionless, hands in her coat pockets, staring toward the point where the fog blurred the line between sea and sky. There was no politeness in her silence. There was only the wait—the wait for him to realize exactly where he had arrived.

## **Chapter 2: The Anatomy of Silence**

The Grimsby morgue occupied the basement of the old port hospital. Alek Myers entered alone, ten minutes ahead of schedule. The space claimed him before Veronika could; it bore down with a concentrated chill and the sharp bite of formaldehyde, which felt like a natural extension of the air here.

Alek walked slowly between rows of empty stainless steel tables. The fluorescent lights overhead cast a dead-white glare, leaving no shadows and making every object—from the enamel trays to the floor drains—defiantly sharp. There was no life here, but there was no peace either; the low, vibrating hum of the refrigeration units created a background drone that made his teeth ache. This place felt cleaner and more honest than the fog-choked streets outside. Here, everything was called by its true name.

He stopped at a table where the contours of the first body were visible beneath a sheet. Alek didn't pull it back. He simply stood in the sterile silence, feeling the cold seep through the soles of his boots.

Veronika entered soundlessly. She wore a pristine white lab coat that seemed to glow in the harsh lighting. She didn't offer a greeting. Instead, she walked to the instrument stand, and Alek found himself watching her hands. She checked the scalpels' edges and ran a finger along the clamps—slowly, with a kind of meditative focus.

"You're early," she said without turning around. In this tiled box, her voice sounded brittle. "Wanted a moment with him without witnesses?"

"Wanted to see how this place works," Alek replied.

Veronika finally turned. She snapped on a pair of thin latex gloves; the sharp crack of the material was the only signal to begin. She stepped to the body and, with one fluid motion, pulled back the sheet.

"Then watch."

The next hour passed in near-total silence. Alek had seen dozens of autopsies, but Veronika worked differently. There was no mechanical routine in her movements. She touched the tissues as if reading a complex text in a forgotten language. The scalpel opened the skin without resistance, but what followed wasn't what Alek was used to seeing.

There were no splashes. No dark stains on the sheets.

Veronika worked the tools, removing the organs one by one. She weighed them and dictated the data into a recorder, her voice the only tether to reality. Alek stared into the empty chest cavity. It looked like the study of a dried-up riverbed.

"Heart is normal. Valves are clear. Lungs show no pathology," her voice grew increasingly monotonous. "But look at the vessels, Investigator."

She made a deep incision into the femoral artery. A vacuum. Not a drop. She took a clean gauze pad and pressed it against the cut. The gauze remained dazzlingly white.

"The body weighs twelve kilograms less than it should for this build," Veronika looked up at Alek. "He isn't just exsanguinated. He's empty. It's as if the very essence of life was siphoned out without damaging a single vessel on the outside."

She set the instruments down. The sound of metal on metal rang out like a gunshot. Veronika stared at her gloved hands for a long time—hands that remained spotless even after a full internal exam.

"This isn't in the textbooks, Mr. Myers. This isn't medicine. It's... an extraction."

Alek walked to the window, where twilight was beginning to settle. The morgue felt like the only place in Grimsby where the truth was stripped bare, yet even here it slipped away, leaving behind nothing but the cold and white gauze.

### **Chapter 3: The Second One**

The abandoned fish processing plant smelled of old death. Beneath the scent of salt and rotting wood was a faint, elusive aroma of machine oil and stagnant water. It was darker here than outside; light struggled to pierce the boarded-up windows, casting long, dusty streaks across the concrete. From the rusted beams above, remnants of nets hung like tatters of filthy cobwebs.

The second one lay by an empty salting vat. Same clothing—a coarse windbreaker, heavy boots. Same age. But this time, there was no waterfront, no open sky. Only low ceilings and the echo of his own footsteps, which felt far too loud in this concrete box.

Alek Myers heard Veronika Simon's approach before he saw her. The sound of her steps on broken glass was quick, almost impatient. When she stepped into the circle of light from his flashlight, she didn't even slow down.

She knelt beside the body and immediately, without the slightest hesitation, pulled back the collar of the jacket. Her fingers settled on the carotid artery. The movement was too precise. Too practiced.

She wasn't looking for a pulse. She was looking for confirmation.

"Empty again," she said after three seconds.

There wasn't a trace of the bewilderment Alek had seen in the morgue. Veronika didn't flinch; she didn't frown. She simply stated a fact, as if checking off a report at the end of a workday.

Alek looked at her profile in the harsh beam of the flashlight. She didn't raise her head. She knew he was there, felt his gaze, but her composure was impenetrable.

"You expected this," Alek said, his voice a statement, not a question.

Veronika's fingers tightened for a moment, bunching the fabric of the jacket, but her face remained still.

"I'm a Medical Examiner, Mr. Myers. I always expect the worst."

She stood up, dusting off her knees. Alek didn't answer. He simply recorded the moment—the exact second she failed to be surprised. He didn't write it in a notebook, but deeper, in the realm of intuition. A shadow fell between them, thicker than the gloom in the corners of the plant.

Alek shifted the flashlight beam from her face to the wall behind the vat.

"There's something here."

On the peeling plaster, between rusted pipes, were charcoal traces. It wasn't a chaotic outburst of madness. Alek stepped closer, examining the nodes and intersections. The lines had vectors. Whoever had stood here with a piece of coal hadn't just been scratching the stone—they were keeping a chronicle. The distances between the points followed a hidden rhythm, like intervals between heartbeats or the ebbing tide. Every point was a finish line; every line was a path.

It was a diary stripped of words by its own uselessness. Here, time had been replaced by space. Whoever had drawn this map possessed a frightening consistency: the pressure of the charcoal was steady, without tremors, without signs of haste. The person had recorded locations in the exact order they were meant to happen.

Amidst the seemingly chaotic tangle of graphite, at the very bottom, Alek recognized a silhouette. A rectangle topped with a sharp dome. Concise, but unmistakably recognizable geometry.

"The Dock Tower," he said quietly.

The tower was the reference point. It stood at the center of this drawn world. All other lines radiated from it like ripples on water. Veronika stepped closer, her shoulder nearly touching Alek's. She didn't look at the image of the tower itself, but at the way it had been rendered. The charcoal had crumbled from the pressure in that spot; the artist had returned to this silhouette again and again, tracing the contour until the stone was black and glossy with graphite.

She remained silent a second longer than professional interest allowed. Alek saw her studying those deep, fierce scratches, as if trying to feel the physical force of the person who had left them.

"It's logical," she finally said, her voice flat. "The tower is visible from any point in the port. The best place to avoid getting lost in the fog."

She didn't look at the map as a whole. She only looked at that black indentation in the plaster—the mark of someone else's obsession.

In the corner of the drawing, where the charcoal had splintered, Alek noticed one more detail. A tiny watch. The drawing was so schematic that the hands were impossible to discern, but the circle and the two dashes inside were obvious.

Alek reached toward the wall to touch the charcoal, but stopped. Outside, from the direction of the port, came a low, vibrating hum—as if a massive ship were passing very close by, though the channel was empty. The hum resonated in the floor, in the empty vats, in the wall itself.

When the sound died down, Alek turned around. Veronika was silent. She stared at the drawn tower as if it might answer her.

Veronika set her instruments down. The sound of metal on metal rang out like a gunshot. She stared at her gloved hands for a long time—hands that remained spotless even after a full internal exam—and then shifted her gaze to the dazzlingly white gauze pad. Alek walked to the window, where twilight was beginning to settle. The morgue felt like the only place in Grimsby where the truth was stripped bare, yet even here it slipped away, leaving behind nothing but the cold.

#### **Chapter 4: The Center of the Map**

The Dock Tower was the only vertical in this flat world. It towered over the port like a scorched finger pointing into the gray void.

The ascent began in a cramped vestibule smelling of damp stone and centuries of dust. The spiral staircase was so narrow that Alek's shoulders brushed against the coarse walls. Veronika led the way. Inside this confined vertical tube, the sounds of their breathing and footsteps merged into a single rhythm.

Halfway up, where the steps were worn smooth, Alek stopped at a narrow slit-window. He needed to catch his breath, but when he looked through the gap, his breath hitched for a different reason.

From this height, Grimsby revealed itself in its entirety. It wasn't a city—it was a maze drowned in gray cotton. From above, it was strikingly clear: the points where the bodies were found were arranged with geometric precision. They weren't random. Alek realized that from here, from this tower, you really could see everything. Every alley, every pier, every movement. The person who had drawn the map in charcoal on the plant wall looked at the world through these exact eyes. From above. Dispassionately.

"Higher," Veronika called out without turning back. Her voice echoed down the stairs.

They climbed into the lantern room at the top. Here, the wind whistled through cracks in the masonry, and the massive Fresnel lenses, covered in fractures, resembled the eyes of a giant, sleeping insect.

Veronika walked right up to the glass. Her silhouette against the gray sky looked fragile, yet incredibly fitting for this place. Alek stood beside her.

"You can see everything from here," she said in a flat voice, still not looking at him.

Alek said nothing. Suddenly, the tower came alive. The massive lenses flared with a sharp white light, slicing through the fog for miles. The beam struck the wasteland, pointing toward the direction where the sea had ceased to be the sea. Alek checked his watch. The chronograph was frozen at 10:14. In that same second, the tower light died, leaving them in absolute darkness.

### **Chapter 5: The One Who Knows**

The boat repair shop on the far edge of the docks was a place the sea hadn't yet managed to fully digest. It smelled of thick tar, old wood, and acrid shag tobacco. Time within these walls hadn't just slowed down—it was stuck in the crevices between the floorboards like years of accumulated dust.

On the workbench, under the dim light of a single bulb, lay a plane with a cracked handle, meticulously wrapped in an old, oily rag. Nearby stood tin cans filled to the brim with nails, sorted by size. Everything here—from the knife worn down to its hilt to the heavy vise—bore the imprint of decades of routine, grueling labor. This world was emphatically tactile, physical, and devoid of mystery.

Matt sat on a low stool, methodically sanding an oar. His hands, like gnarled roots, moved in time to some internal metronome.

Veronika Simon entered first. She didn't knock; she simply pushed open the heavy door, entering like someone returning to a house where she had been known too long and too well.

"Uncle Matt," she said softly.

The old man didn't look up. The rhythmic sound of sandpaper on wood didn't falter for a second. Alek Myers stayed by the entrance. He saw how Veronika changed: her professional armor, so carefully constructed in the morgue and the tower, grew thin here. She stood before this man not as a Medical Examiner, but as a witness returning to the source of her first fear.

"No blood, Matt. Again," she said.

The sandpaper stopped. Matt slowly raised his gaze. His eyes, faded by salt and wind, settled not on Veronika, but on Alek. There was no hostility in that look—only a weary recognition, as if he had already seen this man during one of his long vigils.

"I saw his car in the port," Matt's voice was raspy. "Strangers always bring questions the town can't answer. And the water... the water has no mercy."

Veronika took a step closer, blocking Alek's path, as if trying to protect the old man or herself from what was about to be said.

"In the archives... we found the records," her voice sounded strained. "Forty years ago. My father never spoke of it. Why was he silent?"

Matt gave a crooked grin and reached for his tobacco pouch. He pointed the end of a hand-rolled cigarette toward a dark corner of the workshop, where the contours of a small boat were visible under a layer of dusty tarp.

"I repaired your father's boat that autumn of '86, when it all happened," he said dryly. "He came, took it, went out to sea... and never brought it back for an inspection again. It's still sitting right there. He just stopped going out on the water. Your father was a smart man, Vera. He knew: if you don't talk about something, it might decide it doesn't exist. But the water... the water remembers everything."

## **Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.**

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