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Gennadii Sokolovskii

**THE FLOWER FROM THE
FRAGMENT'S CRACK**

Resonance of the Wound

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The flower from the fragment's crack. Resonance of the Wound

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Аннотация

In a world built on perfect order, engineer Eon-7 sees the impossible: a flower growing on a dead Martian plain. That vision cracks his reality. Hunted by the System's thought police, he flees into the underground of misfits and scars. There he learns a terrifying truth: his world is a lie — an amputation of half of existence. To survive, he must become the voice of the wound. And let it bloom.

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PROLOGUE: THE CRACK

The crack appeared not in stone, not in glass — but in the logic of perfection itself.

It began with a crack. Not in rock. Not in glass. In the sky.

A silent fault line in the world's reasoning. Through it seeped a hint of another order — one that remembered the smell of rain and the warmth of lamps extinguished long ago.

PART ONE: MEMORY OF DUST

Chapter 1. FLOWER ON THE FRAGMENT

He had been built to see patterns. What he found was a miracle — and miracles, in this world, are treason.

The silence in orbit was different. It didn't press like underground halls. It didn't hum like engine rooms. It was absolute — a vacuum vessel in which the faintest telemetry beep marked time like a forgotten heartbeat.

Eon-7 knew this rhythm by heart. Woven into his perception: a metronome marking the proper flow of time, the proper flow of thought.

The green indicator in his visual interface confirmed: calibration complete. His chest, obeying protocol reflex, performed a deep, measured breath — not relief, but a release of myotension. A shedding of phantom strain accumulated over twelve straight hours of concentration. The orbital mirror — child of his calculations — hung in mute readiness.

In seventy-three seconds, the first ray of the artificial sun would fall upon the dead plateau in the Valley of Silence.

The Star Sowing would begin.

In his consciousness — threaded with patterns of Active Transformation — the mission glowed with an even, approving green light. The Collective Rebirth. The words resonated inside him not as a slogan but as a physical law. The Will of Reason, transmitted through steel and light.

He saw chains of formulas. Terraforming models. Biomass growth charts.

He was not a creator. He was the most precise instrument in the hand of an abstraction that called itself Progress. There was an ascetic beauty in this purity — the beauty of an ideal gear knowing its place in the infinite clockwork.

The monitors displayed the Valley of Silence in a cold, ultraviolet palette — emphasizing the soil's mineral composition. No life. No anomalies. Only predictable geometry of rock formations and an even layer of regolith.

Exactly what was needed.

A clean slate.

— —

At the very moment of final synchronization — when his neural interface was supposed to merge with the mirror in a perfect feedback loop — a flash pierced his consciousness.

Not light. Meaning.

It didn't come from outside. It arose from within the network — like a hemorrhage in digital tissue. It cut through the ideal data grid like a knife through canvas.

Amid the flowing strings of life formulas, amid the System's statutory symbols, a foreign inscription appeared. It was not composed of familiar lines or codes. It was a cast of emptiness. A map of cracks on dried clay. A sign that consisted not of ink but of their very absent memory.

Lexicons offered no meaning.

But something deep within Eon — beneath all layers of firmware and training dogmas — responded with instant, animal recognition:

Memory of Dust.

The glyph existed for a microsecond and scattered — leaving no traces in the logs. The interface shone again with sterile, unclouded perfection.

Silence returned. Now different. Watchful. Waiting.

«Calibration complete. Synchronization stable.» His own voice sounded alien in the common channel — like an echo in an empty shell.

«Confirmed. Sowing launch as scheduled. Excellent work, Engineer-7.»

Excellent work.

But in the operational memory — the cache designated for immediate erasure — a fragment remained. Not data. A sensation.

Roughness beneath fingertips. Pressure in the palms — as if clutching a handful of something warm and dry. A dull, inexpressible antiquity that tightened the throat.

Dust could not feel like this. Dust was statistics. An abrasive factor. Particles up to one hundred microns in diameter.

The life monitoring system immediately diagnosed a «minor spike in empathic circuits, zones 7-G and 12-D» — an atavism, interference, a legacy of biological prehistory.

Protocol prescribed mental repetition of the mantra of the Beauty of Order.

Eon tried.

Unity in structure. Structure in progress. Progress in unity.

The words slid away — refusing to stick.

Instead, the ghost of that sign pulsed in his head. Broken angles. Yawning voids.

Instead of the mantra — violating the reflexive calming cycle — he requested telemetry from the target zone. Right now. Thirty seconds before the shot.

The request was redundant. Out of protocol.

The system hesitated for a moment. Then, classifying it as a

«pre-launch cross-check,» it released the data.

On the main screen, the plateau appeared in real time. A gray-red desert. Basalt rubble polished by millions of years of Martian winds.

No anomaly.

Everything exactly as the models predicted.

And then he saw it.

Not across the entire plain. At one point. Precisely where the concentrated beam — carrying a temperature of five thousand kelvins — would strike in a moment.

From a fissure between two slabs of stone — clenched like teeth in a silent scream — a sprout pushed through.

Thin. Almost nothing. Crowned with a single, unopened bud, crimson as a fresh wound.

A flower.

It should not be here. It could not be here. Yet it was — and its beauty was not harmony. It was defiance.

— —

Eon's brain — trained to see patterns and anomalies — launched immediate analysis.

Probability of natural occurrence at this point: vanishingly small — less than 0.00001%.

Probability of spore contamination from previous mission cycles: minimal — all cargo sterilized.

Probability of hallucination from fatigue: low — all indicators normal.

All calculated probabilities crumbled to dust before one simple, glaring fact:

The flower was there.

It lived. It breathed. And it was beautiful.

Not in the sense of conformity to the canon of Structural Harmony — where beauty is derivative of efficiency. In some other, forgotten sense — from which something deep inside, beneath the ribs, tightened. Something that had no name in his

official lexicon.

«Engineer Eon-7.» The voice in the channel grew harder — minted from the pure metal of protocol. «You requested data outside regulations. Justify.»

He should report the anomaly. Send coordinates for immediate disintegration by a sanitation drone.

That was duty. That was order. That was the salvation of the mission, the project, perhaps his own reputation.

He opened his mouth to speak the words of the report — and realized he could not.

His throat would not obey. Clamped in the vise of mute, all-crushing horror.

Not fear for himself. Horror at what he was about to do. Horror at an act of murder disguised as an act of cleansing.

Instead of the memorized phrases of the System's language, his lips — driven by an impulse from that same dark depth that had birthed the anxiety and the image of dust — whispered a fragment of something ancient and illegal. Something that had surfaced along with the glyph:

«A crack in the cup... a road into the world...»

— —

At that moment, the orbital mirror fired.

A blinding pillar of concentrated light — a pure clot of will — pierced the thin Martian atmosphere and struck exactly at the target. At the epicenter where the flower grew.

The monitors were consumed by whiteness.

Eon squeezed his eyes shut — expecting that when the light dissipated, only a neat spot of fused, vitrified sand would remain on the stone. An example of efficient interference removal.

The light faded.

He looked. Frozen.

The flower had not vanished.

It had opened.

Two crimson, velvety petals unfurled toward the artificial sun

— as if absorbing and transforming its fierce energy. In their heart, a droplet gleamed — not water, but condensed, living light.

It had not merely survived. It had thrived.

Its beauty turned from fragile to triumphant. An act of mute, incomprehensible defiance against the laws of metal, logic, and thermodynamics.

— —

The silence in the communication channel was deafening. It lasted three full seconds — an eternity for the System.

Then it was torn — not by a human voice, but by a cold, impersonal general alarm, driving into consciousness like an icy needle:

«ALL OPERATORS, SECTOR „ORBIT-7.“ ZERO-LEVEL BIOLOGICAL ANOMALY DETECTED IN TARGET SECTOR „VALLEY OF SILENCE.“ QUARANTINE DECLARED. ALL OPERATORS CONNECTED TO THE „SOWING“ PROJECT REMAIN IN PLACE. AWAIT SEMANTIC AUDIT TEAM. REASON: POSSIBLE CONTAMINATION OF REALITY.»

The words contamination of reality hung in his ears — heavy as lead ingots.

They meant not an error, but heresy. Not a computational glitch, but a glitch in the very fabric of existence — and he had witnessed it.

Eon leaned back from the console. Darkness flickered in his eyes.

He stared at the screen — at this impossible, crimson triumph of life — and felt beneath his feet not the ship's deck giving way, but the very ground of his world. All his unshakable truths.

He had just witnessed a miracle.

And in this world — built on progress and control — miracles were tantamount to high treason.

— —

The door to his operations capsule slid open with a quiet, oily hiss — too fast for the standard cycle.

In the doorway, bathed in corridor light, stood two figures. Silver suits without insignia — only fine print on the collar:

Semantic Audit.

Their faces were impeccably neutral — as if carved from ivory. But their eyes — unnaturally bright from tactile implants — looked at him not as a person or colleague.

Their gaze was that of a scanner. Assessing an interesting, potentially dangerous defect.

«Engineer Eon-7.» The first spoke. His voice was flat as the hum of a transformer — devoid of any overtones. «You saw something that should not exist. That makes you either a victim of contamination or its source. You will come with us. Voluntarily.»

It was not a question. A statement of the next step in the protocol.

Eon slowly rose. His limbs felt like cotton — as if controlled by a delayed signal.

Against his will, his gaze slid to the last frozen image on the screen. The flower was still there. Small. A crimson act of defiance. A splash of living color on the monochrome map of a predetermined future.

He took a step toward the inquisitors.

Not in agreement or submission. Only thus could he keep his eyes on the flower a moment longer.

He walked — feeling how the crack that had begun in his consciousness now split his entire reality.

The path to answers — to the meaning of what he had seen — began with allowing the System to consider him a problem.

But somewhere deep within — in that very part that had responded to the Memory of Dust — a vague understanding stirred:

Perhaps the problem was not with him.

The problem was with a world that considered a flower — an error.

Chapter 2. WHITE NOISE

The System does not kill you. It listens to you forget yourself.

The journey under convoy was devoid of landmarks.

They were led through service corridors that automatically reconfigured — cutting off branches, creating the illusion of a straight path to nowhere. The walls, radiating a soft pearlescent light, muffled footsteps. The air stripped of smells — only a hint of ozone and sterile coolness.

Eon remained silent — trying to hold the image of the flower in his mind. But the picture stubbornly blurred, displaced by growing numbness.

His body moved on autopilot. His thoughts empty — save for a quiet, persistent hum. The echo of that very phrase:

Possible contamination of reality.

— —

The door before them dissolved soundlessly — admitting them not into a room, but into a concept.

The Semantic Audit Capsule.

Its form — a perfect oval, without corners or seams — denied the very idea of direction. Walls of matte, internally glowing polymer simulated infinity — blending with floor and ceiling into a single curved surface.

No shadows. No up or down. Only an even, impersonal radiance — designed to erase spatial associations, and with them, any anchor for memories.

The only object was a protrusion repeating the body's contours — not a chair, but a continuation of the architecture.

Eon sat. The material embraced him softly — fixing him in an optimal scanning position.

Before him — a meter from his face — a luminous core appeared in the air. It had no clear boundaries — pulsating and shimmering like a drop of mercury suspended in zero gravity.

From it emanated a Voice.

Not synthesized like communication systems. Not organic like human voices. Something in between — sound polished to such abstraction that nothing remained but pure communicative intent.

«Engineer Eon-7. The event in sector „Valley of Silence.“ Describe your perception of the anomaly. Bypass official classifiers. Use basic sensory descriptors.»

— —

Eon braced himself.

A classic Audit trap. The request to shift to «natural» language was always a test. Any subjective adjective, any emotional coloring, any glimmer of personal interpretation — all became markers of contamination. Evidence that the operator's perception had deviated from objective protocol.

«The object,» he began, clinging to a professional template, «visually corresponded to the morphology of a terrestrial-type spore reproducer. Height approximately seven centimeters. Pigmentation in the crimson spectrum, which might indicate adaptation to ultraviolet or — »

«Stop.» The Voice from the core was calm as the surface of a dead lake. «We register a semantic deviation. You used the archaism 'flower' in your primary mental response. The sanctioned term is 'spore reproducer.» Why the lexical regression?»

Eon's brain frantically sought justification within permitted categories: fatigue, cognitive overload, temporary failure in associative chains.

Instead of sterile formulations — a flood of sensations associated with that word poured from the gap in his memory.

Not data. Feelings.

Warmth on the skin — not scorching but diffused, gentle. Movement of air — a light breeze carrying the smell of wet earth and something sweet, dusty, alive.

A smell that could not exist on Mars. A smell that should not exist in his memory.

«I... remembered.» His own voice sounded hoarse — unrecognizable — as if his larynx had forgotten how to form sounds. «Remembered something from the initial biology course. Before the lexicon reform.»

«Remembered,» repeated the Voice. The pause that followed was deliberately long — as if the system were digesting this strange, organic verb — studying its flavor. «The anomaly triggered activation of long-term archives unrelated to the task profile. Interesting. What else did you 'remember' at the moment of observation?»

A crack in the cup. A road into the world.

The phrase burned his lips from within — demanding release.

He clenched his teeth until it hurt. To say it would mean signing his own final verdict. This was not an archaism. It was a fragment of narrative — a story, a personal myth — everything the System methodically burned as the most dangerous virus.

«Nothing.» He forced it out — feeling cold sweat trickle down his back. «Only professional associations. Basic taxonomy.»

The core did not respond.

Its pulsation grew more even. Its light slightly brighter.

This silence was not a pause. It was a tool. The pressure of pure, meaning-free duration.

And in this intentional silence — Eon began to discern a background.

A barely perceptible, bone-deep white noise.

Not random interference. An ideally generated spectrum — covering the entire audible range and part of the inaudible. This was the System's foundational sound. The sound of absolutized order. The neutral background of all existence — designed to

displace any internal melody, any intrusive rhythm of one's own thoughts.

— —

The noise grew.

Not louder. Denser.

It ceased to be merely sound — becoming a tangible substance filling the capsule. It displaced thought. Smoothed sharp edges of memory. Flooding consciousness with an even, faceless mass.

Eon knew this was the primary cleansing protocol. A sonic jet washing away improper neural connections.

Pain did not come.

Absence came.

Sensations dimmed. The world's colors — already sparse — faded completely. The taste of ozone vanished. The feeling of contact with the protrusion's surface became distant — like a signal from another room.

Soon he would cease to «remember.» He would only correlate

data with templates.

That would be merciful.

But deep inside — in the very core of what he had once called «self» — something fluttered in blind, animal panic.

Something that did not want to be erased.

Something that looked at the crimson flower and saw not a «spore reproducer,» but a miracle. Genuine. Unmotivated. Fitting into no charts.

This tiny, rebellious shard of self resisted. Clung to the image, to the feeling, to the pain of approaching oblivion.

— —

Then — through the rising, all-consuming hum — he caught a glitch.

Not in his consciousness. In the white noise itself.

A microscopic, barely perceptible modulation. A spot of distortion that coalesced into something resembling... a sigh? A whisper? A fragment of a word spoken in the language of static

and interference:

...broken... can be... glued...

Eon tensed — blood pounding in his temples.

Hallucination? Extreme mental strain birthing phantoms?
Or...

His gaze — wandering across the flawless wall — caught for a moment on a barely visible dot. A microscopic imperfection in the polymer — invisible to the eye, yet casting a tiny shadow not intended by the design.

A crack.

«Proceeding to in-depth analysis of neurological patterns,» announced the Voice from the core. The white noise intensified — acquiring physical weight. It pressed on his eardrums. Vibrated in his chest.

The glitch repeated. Clearer. Closer.

Not as sound — as an image traced in consciousness by a flash of controlled static.

He saw a cracked ceramic cup. Not a pile of shards. A cup carefully mended with the finest, shimmering golden veins. Scars turned into ornament. A fault line become a road.

Following the image came a voice. Thin. Dry as the rustle of ancient paper crumbling in the wind:

«They cannot erase what is marked with gold. Quieting. Your chance is there — where they mend fractures, not hide them. They need smoothness. Make your crack visible. Break something unnecessary.»

The message broke off — swallowed by the roaring flow of white noise.

Make the crack visible.

— —

Eon's gaze — clouded by pressure — fell on his own hands resting on the flawless surface of the protrusion.

On his left wrist — a standard identification bracelet. A cold ingot of bio-plastic and fiber optics — glowing with an even blue light.

Tool. Key. Collar.

Unnecessary.

His mind — raised by the System — froze in horror. deliberate damage to System property... an act of unthinkable vandalism. A total rupture of the contract with reality.

His hand trembled.

Then slowly — as if against monstrous pressure from an invisible layer of viscous gel — his fingers clenched into a fist.

He felt every muscle, every tendon — as if for the first time.

He raised his hand.

The white noise roared — drowning out everything — turning the world into continuous vibration. The Voice from the core was saying something about «increasing stabilization intensity» — but the words drowned in the hum.

Eon struck.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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