



Hello Baron

Maxim Zaripov
Максим Зарипов

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Аннотация

Theres a house in the neighborhood that no dog ever enters. But what lies hidden in House Number 13?

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Максим Зарипов, Maxim Zaripov Hello Baron

Prologue

The neighborhood is quiet. Too quiet.

It is Friday evening, and the streetlights are flickering on, casting long shadows across the lawns. Most dogs are inside with their humans, eating dinner, waiting for the evening walk. But I am not inside. I am outside, creeping through the tall grass, my belly low to the ground.

Every dog in Raven Brook knows the rule: Never go near House Number 13.

The humans say the house is empty. They say the owner moved away years ago. But we know better. We know someone lives there. We know someone watches from the windows.

His name is Baron.

I should not be here. I know I should not be here. But I had to know.

My friend, a golden retriever puppy named Max, went to House Number 13 three days ago. He was chasing a rabbit. He was stupid, brave, and curious—just like me. He never came

back. His human, Mrs. Henderson, has been crying every night. She put up posters. She asked the neighbors. No one has seen Max.

But I saw him. Or I saw something that looked like him.

Yesterday, I found a tuft of golden fur caught on the wooden fence near House Number 13. Just a few strands, but I recognized the color. I recognized the smell. It was Max.

So here I am. I am small—a terrier mix, quick and quiet. I can fit under the wooden fence. I press my body flat and crawl through the gap. The wood scrapes against my back, but I do not make a sound.

The yard is overgrown. The grass is tall and dead, yellow and brown. Weeds push through the cracks in the concrete path. The air smells wrong. It smells like old meat, like copper, like something sweet and rotten. My nose twitches. I want to sneeze, but I hold it in.

I creep closer to the house. The windows are dark, but I see a faint light coming from the basement. The basement door is slightly open.

I see something in the dirt near the porch. It is blue.

I crawl closer. It is Max's collar. The blue nylon is torn, and the metal tag is bent. There is dark, dry blood on it. Not a lot, but enough. My stomach twists.

Then, I hear a sound.

It is not a bark. It is not a growl. It is a low, broken sound. Like a whimper, but deeper. Like something is in pain.

I freeze. I hide behind a rusty barrel near the side of the house. My heart beats so fast I can hear it in my ears.

I peek around the barrel.

Near the basement door, there is a shape. A dog.

It is a Laika. A Husky. His fur is dark brown, almost black in the dim light. His eyes are brown, but they do not look like a dog's eyes. They look... empty. Like he is not really here.

His tail is curled in a perfect ring over his back. The very tip of the tail is pure white.

The white tip twitches, just once.

Baron.

He is standing over another dog.

The other dog is small. A female. Her fur is light gray, matted with dirt and blood. She is not moving. Her eyes are open, but they do not see. Her neck is bent at a strange angle.

Baron is not attacking her. He is not growling.

He is standing very still. His head is lowered. His ears are flat against his skull.

Then, he makes the sound again. A low, broken whimper.

He lowers his head and touches his nose to the gray dog's face. He sniffs her. He licks her ear, gently, like he is trying to wake her up.

But she does not wake up.

Baron steps back. He looks at his paws. They are covered in blood. Not much, but enough to stain the white fur on his toes.

He looks at the basement door. He looks at the gray dog. He

looks at his paws.

He is shaking. His whole body is trembling.

Then, he does something strange.

He picks up the gray dog in his mouth. He is very gentle. He holds her by the scruff of her neck, like a mother carries a puppy. He carries her toward the basement door.

He stops. He looks back. He looks at the yard. He looks at the fence.

He is checking. He is making sure no one is watching.

I hold my breath. I press myself against the barrel. I do not move. I do not blink.

Baron carries the gray dog into the basement. The door creaks shut behind him.

I wait. One minute. Two minutes.

Then, I hear a sound from inside the basement. It is not a bark. It is a sound like metal hitting metal. Like a tool dropping. Then, a low, long howl. It is the saddest sound I have ever heard. It is the sound of a dog who has lost everything.

I do not understand.

Is Baron the one who killed her? Did he hurt her? Or did someone else hurt her, and he found her?

Why is he crying? Why is he so gentle with her body?

Why is there blood on his paws?

I step back. I need to leave. I need to tell the other dogs. I need to tell Max's human.

But then, I hear it.

Snap.

A dry branch breaks under my paw.

The howling stops.

Silence.

Then, the basement door opens.

Baron steps out. He is alone. His mouth is clean. His paws are clean.

But his eyes... his eyes are different now. They are not empty. They are sharp. They are looking.

His brown eyes scan the yard. They scan the fence. They scan the barrel where I am hiding.

They stop.

They look right at me.

He does not growl. He does not bark.

He just stares.

And then, very slowly, he tilts his head. Like he is curious. Like he is deciding something.

I cannot breathe. I cannot move.

Then, I run.

I run as fast as I can. I scramble under the fence. I do not look back.

But I can feel his eyes on me. I can feel him watching.

I run until my lungs burn. I run until I reach my yard. I collapse under the porch, shaking.

I do not know what I saw. I do not know what happened in that basement.

But I know one thing.

Baron is not just a dog.

And House Number 13 is not empty.

Hello, Baron.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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