

PHAROS

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18+

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«Автор»

2026

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PHAROS / M. Эoa — «АВТОР», 2026

Sometimes reality tests our limits, knocking the ground out from under our feet. Pharos is the first story in the cycle. A hot, viscous, almost feverish text. As if someone opened a door behind which you had long been expected. Reality melts. Boundaries dissolve. And something ancient begins to look back at you. This is a story about the price of attention — about how a word, once released, starts living its own, very old life. Cosmic. Intimate. Merciless. Powerful, poetic prose with rich imagery and inner rhythm. Niche adult literature for those who love Kafka, Lovecraft and Clive Barker. Enter in peace. Or leave in peace.

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PHAROS

Andre

Fatigue and exhaustion push André to the limit. To the point of frenzy. Early morning. The day is just beginning to sink the curved talons of a heat-swelling sun into his body, his brain, and his inflamed mind.

— Two and a half hours remain until the zenith. I must finish what has been initiated.

The noise distracts him. To the right, outside the window — a swarm of hornets, a couple of hundred hungry predators battering against the mesh screen. They spring back, bounce off, converge again, writhe and wail, unable to breach the interior. André averts his gaze, attempting to gather his thoughts. The oppressive black paint of the walls is eaten away in places by an old, cracked web of craquelure — traces of eras bygone. This color clouds the mind, envelops from within, and drags it into a tight, coiled knot.

Voices are already rushing in from the street with full force. André turns his head and squints. A microscopic spark ignites within his smoky-hazel pupils, flares up, and dies out. Construction workers, yelling, scatter sharp, jagged gravel near the house, throwing up a fine, stiflingly foul, sweetish dust. It feels as though they are burying someone's ancient ashes, lost in time, once kept in an abandoned and shattered ceramic urn. The stench and the heat turn his soul inside out, penetrating the room and filling it from within with a peculiar, venomous luminescence.

He stands up abruptly. A crushing, screeching, deafening hum resonates inside his skull, subsiding only for a single heartbeat before resuming with a renewed, furious strength, clamping his temples even tighter. André looks out the window. Zinc and ceramic roofs, stacked upon one another, weirdly curved at the edges, blind him with the merciless reflections of the rising King, meticulously concealing a part of the road from his gaze.

Three figures emerge, floating from the shaded banyan tree. Beneath the deafening roar of rusty iron, they dance upon the road, driven by a rhythmic drumbeat laced with jazz. Men? Women? He cannot decipher. One of the figures abruptly freezes, halting its vortex-like, swaying movements, throws its head back, and laughs out loud. Its vibrant, plump, crimson lips with a mazarine undertone drift like a succulent cloud through the grayish haze amidst all this chaos.

She stares directly into André's eyes, pressing her palms against her ears, and begins to slowly back away. Without breaking eye contact, she retreats into the shadow.

André swiftly shifts his gaze to the clock. 10:28. Time is slipping away.

— You run faster — they stop you, catch you, and drag you back to your previous state.

A rustle on the terrace. The shifting murmur of hornets outside the window. The dancing on the road. Thoughts begin to scatter, and the sun inexorably swells and oppresses. The digits freeze upon the final line, the room sparkles, and the blackness itself begins to shine.

Precisely at that moment, a persistent knock rattled the door. It was the landlord. André exhaled and thanked him, accepting the massive, ripe watermelon brought inside.

He returns to the text once more, yet those vivid crimson lips continuously resurface before his eyes. At 10:43, André surrendered. Soft, slippery, moist, and thrilling flesh glides toward him from the far corner of the dark room. It approaches, then recedes, then violently builds its cadence, accelerating.

A deafeningly wild shriek resonates right in the air beside him. The room begins to contract, crushing him. His heart batters frantically, his thoughts blur. The text drifts through the air in black ink and, merging with the walls, penetrates a creature unknown to his mind, only to emerge from it

altered in color — the color of crimson gold. The letters dashed against the boundaries of the room; André began to suffocate, clutching his throat. Only then did it begin to assume form.

A black, pulsing droplet amidst golden sparks.

A naked maiden with crimson lips.

A figure cloaked in a massive, fiery mantle.

André strained to discern a face, but it did not exist: instead of a head, there was only a vast, shifting ripple of indigo. The entity hovered over him.

— Write, — it hissed.

André caught his breath. The walls leveled out, the vision vanished, and words and digits poured line after line, ribbon after ribbon, fusing into a single, indivisible, dark cluster of ink, dense as the eyes of the blackest night. He stopped, reread what was written, raised an eyebrow in astonishment, and stepped out with a cigarette onto the balcony, already incandescent from the sun.

Before he could even draw a breath to inhale, his body was instantly coated in droplets of sticky, corrosive sweat. His brain clouded over, André swayed, and in that exact heartbeat, the sharp, piercing prick of an incandescent needle seared the ring finger of his left hand. A burning pain crept up through bones, veins, and tendons, ascending like a jagged pike all the way to the elbow, fracturing and wrenching his consciousness. The hornet — a child of ubiquitous forces — had succeeded in tasting his crimson nectar and, having fulfilled its supreme role, plummeted to the feet of the astonished André. The swarm of winged micro-warriors, which had assaulted his apartment for the fifth consecutive day, scattered in an instant, as though they had never existed at all.

— I accept, — he croaked quietly, staring into the massive ommatidial eyes of the fading giant.

Crushing his cigarette butt, André returned to the manuscript. His hand throbbed, disrupting his focus, but he mastered it. The necessary chapter was complete. He leaned back in his chair and glanced at the swelling finger, while the crimson, venomous lips resurfaced once more in his mind.

11:41. It is time. The suffocation, heat, dust, and noise that had tormented him throughout his stay in the city of Gu dissolve of their own accord. The sun is at its zenith. Clouds drift in, thickening. He takes a deep breath, exhales, and... transmits the ninth article, his labor, with that very finger humming with venom.

No antiseptic is close at hand. Throwing on a tank top, he dashes out into the street — the nearest pharmacy is a couple of minutes' walk away. A downpour erupted, and the streets began to rapidly empty.

The pharmacy proved to be closed. André was surprised but continued to walk through the wall of tropical rain, catching the refreshing, invigorating torrent with his entire body, absorbing this gift from the heavens. The wind struck his face like soft clusters of grapes, exploding upon his lips with warm sweetness. André exulted amidst the fury of the elements: lightning struck the ground close beside him, and he played with it, leaping from puddle to puddle. Thunder rumbled resoundingly overhead.

His feet carried him further. He did not notice running past the next pharmacy — the one that was open. Soon he was already ankle-deep in water. Each subsequent step demanded straining effort; the elements refused to yield. Suddenly, he collided with a passerby rushing headlong through the wall of rain — wearing nothing but a tank top and plaid shorts, without an umbrella. Their gazes were not destined to clash even for an instant: both merely pressed their palms to their hearts and scattered in opposite directions, with each leaving one hand pressed tightly against their chest.

After a couple of minutes, André's feet suddenly halted before a small signboard. Above, in a menacing snarl, a raging bestial roar bellowed once more. André pushed the door — it yielded, and a resonant bell heralded the arrival of a guest.

It was a small junk dealers shop: rows of books, baskets with amulets, bones, and feathers, dried roots, shark cartilage. On the lower shelves languished bottles filled with murky sludge where scorpions and reptiles floated. Below, the cast-off sloughs of snakeskins stirred faintly.

A sudden anxiety envelops André. Out of the corner of his eye, he notices a female praying mantis lying in wait in the left corner, perched upon the top shelf of an old cabinet. Her head was slightly turned toward the door. The shadow touched her massive, dark-green body, making her color appear to André as almost coal-black. Her eyes captured every movement without a single blink — for now, she merely observed: motionless, predatory, graceful.

André averts his gaze, winces, and encounters yet another mantis in the lower right corner of the room. The male — small, almost imperceptible, as if not alive at all. The gray body with a brownish tint blends into the dust of the shop, betrayed only by barely discernible movements: he sways softly on thin legs, ready to bolt at any sign of danger. The wings are slightly ajar, the head turned submissively toward the female. André senses this unsettling, lethal thread binding the two even across the distance. They feel each others vibrations — the executioner and her victim.

Right now, they are watching, evaluating, memorizing him — André, who had stepped into this strange shop on this rainy day.

— Delighted to see you, mister. In weather like this, one hardly expects a guest. And suddenly — such a surprise, such a surprise... mister... — from a far corner, a slightly hunched little old man in a coal-gray apron briskly stood up and waved his hand at him.

— André, my name is André, — escaped from his chest like a wild bird. Like a gunshot.

"Why? Why did I reveal my name to him?" — was all he managed to think.

The old man deftly jumped down from a massive chair and scurried over to him, extending a thin, wrinkled palm:

— André... André... Well, a pleasure to meet you! I am Mr. Asrov, — the old man stated quite amiably, and continued, lowering his voice slightly: — You were not brought here by chance. Yes. Yes. Permit me, may I look at you?

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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