

1st - Reaper

The cry of a single raven broke the silence of the night. The light of the moon threw nightmarish shadows, one of them being close to a human shape. For a few seconds the shadow laid on the wet grass of a park, then he began to move towards an old Victorian estate. As the raven cried a second time, the head of the shadow turned around and finally light fell onto the face of the man the shadow was belonging to. It was the face of an old man who had already seen too much in his life, but his eyes still radiated power and a strong will.

After some more seconds he came to the great wooden door and took out a pack of picklocks. He tried the first one, but it didn't fit. A silent curse escaped from his mouth. Hectically he took out the next one and almost dropped it.

'Stay calm' he told himself. 'There is no need to rush.'

Finally he managed to open the lock. He slowly moved the door. With a long and painful scream it swung open. He was there. Just one last step to go...

He stopped for a moment to take a deep breath. It had taken him twenty years to get to this point. A few more seconds wouldn't matter. He left the door open and looked around. Gloomy light came from somewhere above, but his eyes already got used to the darkness. In a corner he noticed a broad stairway with a blood-red carpet on it. The source of light was up there and his target probably was as well.

As he climbed up the stairs, he envisioned a stream of blood running down the carpet and melting with it's tone. It would vanish like it's owner. But no, he told himself. This was not about assuaging his bloodthirst. It was just about revenge. Cold, determined revenge.

Lost in his thoughts he hardly noticed that the stairway had ended, revealing a long corridor. At it's end, light fell out of a half-opened door. Soft-footed, he approached it while taking a silver dagger out of his coat. Somehow he managed to get through the door without moving it.

Now there he stood, a dark figure, surreptitious like an assassin, in the corner of a dark room with his victim lying on a bed in front of him. Next to it there was a small table with a candle on it. After twenty years... Twenty years of plotting his revenge... And now he was so close. So close to the man who had taken everything from him. The man who had killed his wife and burned down his house. Who had destroyed his life. But tonight, this would end.

He came closer and raised the fist with the dagger. As he was about to jab out, he noticed a small book with a violet binding on the bedside table. The word "diary" was on it, written in calligraphic letters. He wanted to end this as fast as possible, but something made him open the book. Maybe he wanted to understand why all this had happened, maybe he

wanted to understand why that man had done all this to him and maybe he hoped to find solace by understanding it. He didn't know, but he opened it anyway.

"Dear Diary," it said on the first page.

"I'm starting to write to you because something happened. Something terrifying.

Something I can't keep for myself. I killed somebody. A woman. I can still see her face when I close my eyes. I didn't want to kill her! Just because I was hungry I broke into her house. The only thing I wanted to have is something to eat!

But somehow she must have heard me rummaging the kitchen. And then suddenly she was in front of me, with a knife in her hand. In my panic I grabbed for one as well, but as she noticed my movement she stabbed forward. Probably she just feared for her life like I did. The same mortal fear depriving me of my senses. As a reflex I raised my knife and she ran into it. Just a reflex...

I didn't want to kill her."

Some scrawly and crossed lines he couldn't read followed.

"When I sat there next to her dead body, I couldn't even realize what had happened. My biggest anxiety was that I might have been put to jail. Jail! What are 10 years in jail compared to this?

But in my fear I couldn't grab a single clear thought. Trance-like I took books and wood and.., everything I could find, stacked and burned them so that no one would find out. But as I came out of the house, her husband, maybe having seen the flames and the smoke, descried me. I ran away, hiding from justice."

He skipped a few pages.

"It have been ten years since then and still I can't stop myself from thinking about it. Neither at daytime nor in my dreams. It is probably going to hunt me forever.

I wonder how her husband is feeling now. Does he hate me? Of course he does. How does he live on? Does he think of it every day like I do? Or doesn't he even live anymore? I wish I could talk to him and explain what I did, but I fear his reaction. Maybe he would kill me. But well, maybe that's a fair punishment for my misdeeds..."

At that point he closed the book and turned his head to look down at his former enemy. All this years, he had thought he was hunting a monster.

And now he realized that this man suffered as much as he did. Somehow he felt an affinity to him. A single event had bound them together for a lifetime. He could still kill that man, but it didn't mean anything to him. Furthermore, wouldn't he be the cold, deadhearted monster if he did so?

He took the pen lying next to the book and wrote "I forgive you" on the last page, then he left through the open door.