

*Night without Marie*

*-Chapter 1-*

"Isn't it astonishing how much you can leave out and still have a resemblance of the whole, the original?" my thoughts were now not only swaying wildly from one side of my head to the other, they seemed to swoosh out like a tidal wave, make a morning run through the park and come back sweaty, beaten and happy with this look of pride and accomplishment that you usually find in children who managed to scoop up most of the peanut butter jar before you noticed it. I had been drinking just a little bit, only soothing the pain, not stopping it - making it more melodic. What my thoughts did, well, was kind of a side effect. The important thing was the mellowness, the ease, the possibility to keep breathing freely.

"Boy, it's fucking freezing, aren't you going to come in?" a voice softly yelled at me from the warm security of the kitchen - I had been sitting on the cold balcony for the better part of an hour now.

"Nah, it's not even really fresh, Pete. If you weren't such a wuss, you'd be sitting out here with me instead of sounding like my mum!" was my response, in that joking sound that you can still manage to produce regardless of how sad you really are - at least I imagine that my sadness hides in it quite well. Not that it would have been necessary, Pete knew quite well that I was hiding on his balcony, and he knew that I wanted to be alone with that glass of Pitu. The liquor had got me started thinking about this whole "how much you

can leave out" business in the first place. I had wanted a Caipirinha, but Pete, the lousy friend that he was, didn't have the limes at home, and you can't make a Caipirinha without limes, just won't cut it. He proposed lemon juice, from a plastic can. No can do. It was the liquor pure then, better than nothing, much better than nothing to sooth the pain.

The pain.

I had managed to avoid the reason of my sudden appearance so far. Maybe it was time to change that before he got angry - after all, I had stood at his doorstep, unannounced, at 1am in the morning on a Wednesday, and I felt like he didn't want to go back to sleep before he knew if I was to stay the night, kill myself, commit a crime or just empty out his bar, which was so lousily stocked.

"You know what, I'll come in, but not because it's cold, only because my drink is empty and I don't trust you to bring me a new one that isn't spiked with sleeping pills to get rid of me" - now I wasn't even able to maintain my jovial tone anymore. A luck that I was talking to Pete, he knew when not to be too sensitive, as much as I knew when he deserved some answers without having to ask for them.

"Yeah, I was thinking about that, but I was afraid that you'll only respond to horse tranquilizers, and I'm fresh out of that stuff" Pete replied in a mildly annoyed tone from the kitchen.

"Come on in, but brush your clothes off. I don't want the whole forest spread on my floor." Pete was right, the autumn wind carried all kinds of stuff

with it, scooped up from the trees next to his house. The concrete floor of the balcony looked like it could sprout its own forest next season.

"Alright, mamma, alright."

Back inside the kitchen Pete was standing behind the counter that crossed almost half the room in the middle with its heavy marble finish and was, depending on the time of day, used for a quick breakfast counter (from which you could oversee the big TV in the living room and catch the news), a centerpiece of the occasional cooking with friends or just a bar - which was the case now. I grabbed one of the high-legged bar chairs that accompanied the counter from both sides.

"Listen, Pete..." I began in that 'let me explain myself' voice.

"If it has anything to do with Marie, I don't want a word of it. You know I can't handle one more word of it, old friend, and I don't mean to sound too harsh here, it's just the truth. I'd have to kill you on the spot." Pete replied quickly, and not jokingly at all - at least up until the last part. And even that was only half a joke, I was sure. He would at least start a fight with me, and I was likely to lose it. Not something to look forward to.

You see, I had a story with Marie, a twisted one, a long one, that kind of story that excites you and draws you in until you are almost lost in it. With Marie, I got lost in it, we got lost, and it was good, great even. It just wasn't... easy.

(Which, if you asked Pete, was the understatement of the year.) Pete had every reason to be fed up with anything that involved Marie, he had any right to at least think about killing me if I so much as mentioned her again. The problem

was... it was about Marie. The reason why I was here. The reason why I needed to be a little bit drunk, or a big little bit. The reason for the pain in my head that didn't leave, and that I didn't want to silence, only soothe. I couldn't tell him that, not now. Maybe not even tomorrow. Someday. On the phone, from a safe distance.

"Relax. This ain't about her, Pete. I just - ah fuck it, I'm getting almost sentimental when you look at me with your big tired eyes..." Pete got a look on his face that advised me to better get to the cheese quickly and cut the crap.

"But seriously, man. Thanks for the drink, thanks for opening the door in the first place. I appreciate it. It's not that the world is coming to an end, but I desperately needed to get out of my place..."

"...and somewhere where booze was free, I see." Pete was losing his patience. I'd have to give him something to work with, fast.

"I'll replace the Pitu, no worries. No, I came here because I needed your advice, to be honest. There aren't many people who I'd trust with this, and you just happen to be the one who is closest. And has at least some liquor at home."

"I'm listening. What's the news?" he sounded less agitated now, more tired, but emphatic.

"You see, I've started to notice a change recently, something personal, and I don't know how to handle it. I feel stupid even talking about it, but I have been scouting the options online, and now that I'm close to taking action, I am hesitating, like - do I really want to do this? Do I need this? Will this

change me in a good way? Am I just stupid? Do other people also have the same type of problem and solve it in the same way? Should I just accept fate and not fight nature?..."

"For crying out loud, what are you talking about?" Pete stared at me with a blank look. So much for the Pitu sending my thoughts sailing through the big wide world. Now I had to finish it and pray that he believed me.

"Fuck, man, I'm losing my hair. I'm getting bald. I'll look like fucking Dr. Evil without the twin. The skin of my head already shines through like the sunset through the clouds, but it isn't pretty. So either I cut it off and call it a day and throw all shampoo away for good, and also throw away all chances with women under thirty, or I go do something about it. I'm thinking of getting a hair transplant, and I need your advice on it."

His fist hit me in the stomach with such a sudden force that it felt like he hit my spine with his knuckles. Apparently, he had seen right through me. Liquor did not make me a better liar, it seemed.

"Aw, fuck! What'd you do that for?" I was holding my stomach, eyes and teeth clenched, knees bent like I was trying to get into the fetal position whilst standing up. Part of me was surprised I was still standing up at all.

"You asshole. Trying to feed me bullshit like that in the middle of the night. Lying to me, that's what the fuck I did that for. I should really kill you. It is about Marie, right? RIGHT?" Pete was not amused. I couldn't feed him more crap.

"It is. Listen man, I'm sorry, I wanted to..."

"Shut up. I'm too angry to talk to you know. I'd rather hit you again than listen to what's really up with you and Marie. I've had it. I've had it with you two!" Pete almost screamed in frustration. He looked like he wanted to break something. "You can sleep on the couch, but don't dare to puke on it. There's a blanket in the cupboard across from the TV. I'll see what I do with you tomorrow.

I nodded.

Pete turned around, shaking his head in disbelief, and went to his bedroom without saying anything more. I knew he did not regret hitting me. And that was alright. I had deserved it. Feeding one of my best friends a load of bullshit, that's just no way to behave... but I had so desperately wanted to be in company, not be alone anymore, not be sober anymore, without having to get closer to my pain. I had taken the weak route, and I had immediately paid for it. That's what makes good friends, I guess.

I finished my third or fourth glass - I had taken a small one, still I couldn't deny the dizziness by now - put it into the dishwasher, put the bottle where it belonged, shut the lights in the kitchen and went into the living room that was only lit by the street lights on the opposite side from the balcony, which itself was looking out to the trees and the small trickling river behind the house. The light was cold and casting more shadows than actually illuminating the room. Still it was enough to let me find the blanket and the sofa. I stripped off my shoes, put my jacket on the floor next to them, together with my keys, wristwatch and phone, and laid down. Sleep came quickly.