

**THE HARROWING**  
by  
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PROLOGUE

The memorial was buried deep in an oak grove in the heart of campus. A graceful circle of trees, and the curved marble bench.

On this late November day the grove was dark and hushed, just a whisper of rain that dripped from the thick canopy of branches, leaked down onto the aged marble, streaking the stone with black, like tears.

Vines and brambles had crept over the path, cutting off access to the quiet circle, leaving the bench all but forgotten now, like the students whose names it bore.

Above the layer of rotting leaves covering the seat, they were cut into the marble like names on a tombstone. Five names, a date, and a simple epitaph:

***IN MEMORIAM***

Five students dead, so long ago.

What could it matter now?

## CHAPTER ONE

It had been raining since possibly the beginning of time.

In the top tier of the cavernous psychology hall, Robin Stone had long since given up on the lecture. She sat hunched in her seat, staring out arched windows at the downpour, feeling dreamily disconnected from the elemental violence outside, despite the fact that every few minutes the wind shook the building hard enough to rattle the glass of the window panes.

In milder weather Baird College was the very definition of pastoral. Wooded paths meandered between ivy-swathed stone buildings. Grassy hills rolled into the distance, dotted by trees... all unmarred by the slightest sight of civilization.

But now the old oaks lashed in the wind under roiling dark clouds that spilled icy rain on the deserted quad. In the bleak light of the storm, the isolation seemed ominous, the campus hunkered down under the pelting rain like a medieval town waiting for the siege.

The cold of the day had sunk into Robin's bones. The wind outside was a droning in her ears, like the hollow rush of the sea. Inside, Professor Lister's soft German accent was soporific, strangely hypnotic, as he spoke of Freud from the wood-planked dais far below.

*"The state of sleep involves a turning-away from the real, external world, and there we have the necessary condition for the development of a psychosis. The harmless dream-psychosis is the result of that withdrawal from the external world which is consciously willed and only temporary..."*

Robin's moody reflection stared back at her from the window... dark-eyed, somewhat untidy, elfin features framed by a tumble of nearly black hair. All in all, a chance of prettiness if she weren't so withdrawn, guarded.

She pulled herself away from the glassy ghost of herself, blinked around her at a sea of students, moored behind tiers of wooden desks.

People were shifting restlessly, looking up at the clock above the blackboard. A little before three, Wednesday. Tomorrow was Thanksgiving, and everyone was impatient, anxious to escape for the holiday. Everyone except Robin. The four-day weekend loomed before her like an abyss.

*Thanksgiving, right. Thanks - for what?*

At least there would be no roommate.

She sat with the thought of no Waverly for four days, and felt a spark of something - not pleasure, nothing so life-affirming as that - but a slight relief, a loosening of the concrete band that lately seemed to permanently encircle her chest.

No mindless, venal chatter. No judging cornflower blue eyes.

*And no one else either*, Robin reminded herself. *No one at all.*

The anxiety settled in again, a chill of unnamed worry.

*Four days in creepy old Mendenhall... completely alone...*

The Professor's soft voice whispered in the back of her head. *"In psychosis the turning-away from reality is brought about either by the unconscious repressed becoming excessively strong so that it overwhelms the conscious, or because reality has become so intolerably distressing that the threatened ego throws itself into the arms of the unconscious instinctual forces in a desperate revolt..."*

Robin glanced down at the Professor, startled at the confluence of thought. She wrote slowly: *"Reality has become so intolerably distressing..."*

She stopped and quickly scribbled over the words, blackening them out.

Somewhere close another pen scratched furiously across paper. Robin glanced toward the sound.

Across the aisle from her a slight, intense, bespectacled young man was hunched in his seat, scribbling notes as if his life depended on it. A mini-tape recorder on the desk in front of him recorded the lecture as well, in the unlikely event that he missed something.

Robin had seen him a few times around the dorm: pale skin and hollow circles under his eyes behind his glasses, shoulders hunched under the weight of an overstuffed backpack, always scurrying to or from class, as scattered and distracted as the White Rabbit.

He looked younger than the other students - and older, too. Probably skipped a grade or two and rushed into college early, full-throttle, driven by parents or some inner demon of his own. Robin knew something about that.

She studied him, feeling relief in concentrating her attention on something outside herself.

There was a coldness about him - an ancient guardedness that she recognized as unhappiness. His face always set and unsmiling - if possible, more tense and miserable than Robin herself. Yet there was something luminous about him as well

- almost holy, something like a monk in his ascetic intensity.

She thought these things with detachment - as from a great distance, merely observing. It did not occur to her to speak to him, or smile, or communicate in any way. It did not seem to her that they were on the same dimensional plane... she watched him through glass, as she watched the storm.

So she was caught completely off guard when the young man turned and looked her straight in her eyes.

She stared back, startled.

The young man immediately blushed behind his glasses and quickly dropped his gaze to his yellow pad.

Robin sat, flustered. The bells in the clock tower above the main plaza outside struck once, sounding the three-quarter hour. A hollow sound... reverberating over the campus.

On the podium below the white-haired professor paused, listening to the bell. The chime died, and he turned back to the class.

"But while Freud contended that the forces which drive us come from within us, our own unconscious, his disciple and colleague, Jung, believed there was a universal unconscious around us - populated by ancient forces which exist apart from us, yet interact with and act upon us." He paused, looked around at the class.

"So who was right? Do our demons come from without, or within us?"

He half-smiled, then closed his binder. "And on that cheery note, we'll end early, since I know you're all anxious to get away."

The class collectively surged to its feet, reaching for coats and notebooks and backpacks in an orgy of release. The professor raised his voice over the tide. "I'll need all of you to discuss your term paper topics with me next week, so please make appointments by e mail. Have a good Thanksgiving."

Robin closed her notebook and stood, feeling as if she were rising through water, but only part way. The surface seemed far above her. She was drowning in herself.

Nothing but herself, for the next four long days.

*Do our demons come from without, or within us?*