

Razor

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He was an exactingly precise man, and so it was quite unusual that he arrived home three hours early. He had cut his annual European business short, booked a sooner flight back, and drove home a calm four miles over the speed limit.

The garage was empty when he returned, although it was nearly five in the morning. He had expected this. He continued driving down the street another block before pulling to the side of the road, parallel parking, and stepping out. His dark suit showed no wrinkles from the long flight; at any second, he looked ready to leap out of reality and into the pages of a men's magazine. His shoes were shined to a slight sheen. Walking home, he set a brisk striding pace that sent a slight wind ruffling through his hair. His face was a tomb.

When he reached his own little patch of heaven, he wasted no time in unlocking the door, stepping across the threshold and pulling the door shut behind him. The entryway into his house was made mostly of dark wood, elegantly tiled across the floor and walls. The furniture was spindly and tasteful, and the molding around the doorways was ornate. After locking the door behind him, he strode across the foyer and ascended the sweeping staircase. The framed portraits along the wall held little interest to him. They showed his family, smiling, his own face stirring with the slightest knowing grin as pleasant children laid in his lap or reached around his neck.

Reaching the landing, he ran one hand lightly over the banister and turned, heading toward the master bedroom. He left no marks on the carpet, walking lightly and with a practiced motion. The house was silent around him.

When he crossed the threshold of the bedroom, he paused for a moment to examine it. In his week of absence, precious little had visibly changed. The walls remained the same muted shade of blue, the bed was still neatly made, and the grand armoire stood just as imposingly. He walked to the bed and sat down on one corner, slowly untying his shoes. He pulled them off along with his socks, resting his bare feet on the carpet for a moment. He scrunched his toes in the fabric, but his face remained impassive, eyes mostly unfocused. They were furnace eyes, stocked by passion, fueled by heat, showering sparks instead of tears.

He lay back on the bed, on top of the comforter, avoiding the soft mass of pillows entirely. Stretching across diagonally, taking up both spaces, he could barely fit without touching any edge or pillow. He was scheduled to arrive home from his trip in two hours.

For a long hour he lay like a dead man, neither asleep nor awake, eyes open but unblinking. The ceiling held little fascination for him, and so he did not see it; beyond the ceiling lay the stars and the night, but these he ignored as well. His vision pierced so far into space that he saw a place without light entirely, a place where no other man had ever gazed so intently. It was tremendously cold within his gaze, and had even a single muscle in his body been relaxed, he may have shuddered. But this abyss also failed to occupy him, and he was soon gazing through it as well, further still, past the boundaries of his world and into the next. Only then did he slowly close his furnace eyes.

He rose off the bed and stretched his muscles in a practiced pattern. Meticulously, he undressed, laying his suit in a folded pile on the bedspread. Once he was naked, he lowered himself and leaned forward on his hands, beginning to exercise. He carefully moved through a series of positions, practicing perfect form and discipline. Muscles trained to tight, supple power over the years allowed him to work his body hard, and he did. He knew his limits well and never overstepped them.

Once he was finished, his body burning and slightly shining, he strode powerfully to the bathroom, and stepped into the shower. His hands, almost unconsciously, turned the water as cold as it could go; his body seemed to steam slightly, and he felt not the chill. He washed and conditioned his hair, soaped his body, and cleaned every bit of traveling grime from his form. After finishing, he dried with efficient motions and stepped in front of the mirror. With a comb and brush, he fixed his hair carefully. He swooped the front across, tucked the back down, and cleaned the edges from around his ears.

He sat on the small stool, feeling the cold metal against his burning skin. Taking a small pair of hand-scissors in his pianist fingers, he trimmed his fingernails and toenails down to the nub. From the second drawer down, he pulled out his file and rounded off the edges, removing any corner or inconsistency. From the same drawer, he drew a jewelry box, which he opened softly. Inside, among other glittering treasures, were a pair of small gold earrings he was unfamiliar with. He smiled darkly.

Replacing the box, he instead busied himself with his lotion, applying it to his hands and face. It evaporated almost instantly, and he gently tested the softness of his own skin, accepting the results.

Next, he opened the third drawer down, withdrawing his antiperspirant and cologne. Both he applied with careful motions, the familiar scents

providing no comfort. From the same drawer, he drew a bottle of perfume and sprayed a slight amount into the air. It was an altogether pleasant, although alien, smell. His head cocked slightly as he placed each note of aroma within the whole, noting the depth of the scent. It was quite new to him. He was scheduled to arrive home in an hour.

Lastly, he slowly opened the top drawer, drawing forth his toothbrush and paste. He carefully brushed his already sparkling teeth, including the gums and tongue. Afterwards, he replaced the objects and took out his floss, spooling out a length and setting to work with it as well. The last of the water was gone from his body now, and as he mechanically cleaned his mouth he looked at the sheen of his tanned skin, the thin tufts of hair, the corded muscle. Quite unlike himself, he lost track of time and gazed for a long moment at his ribcage. Underneath, supposedly, was his mortal heart. Such an unbearably fragile casing.

Rising from his stupor gently, he threw out the floss and took out his shaving cream. His long fingers applied an even coat across his rough cheeks, chin and neck. From the same top drawer, he drew his long, straight, sharp razor, and began to shave casually. He was due to arrive home in forty-five minutes.

With practiced grace developed over a lifetime, he drew the blade back and forth over his skin, whipping the cream off it with every stroke. The edge bit across his cheeks and around his lips, slicing every hair from his face. Against his burning skin, the blade was almost turned to molten metal, shining red from within. It moved across his skin with increasing vigor.

When at last his face was clear and hairless again, he carefully washed the razor, wiping the edges with his thumbs. He set the blade squarely in front of him, on the edge of the counter.

From within the top drawer, he pulled out a small black box. He opened it gently, then set the open box next to his razor. There was a simple diamond band inside it, a ring that should have been on a finger. He looked down at his ring, on his own finger. His wedding ring was a band of pure fire against his terrible skin, but still he grabbed it, burning his carefully kept fingertips as he yanked it off. Held within his palm, the ring burned brighter than a sun. His furnace eyes could barely gaze upon it.

He placed his own ring within the box, next to the ring already there. Together, the two nestled, practically one within the other, and the coldness of the second cooled his considerably. The two bands reached an equilibrium of ice and fire, until they sat inert.

From downstairs, he heard the front door open and shut, and the sound of frantic heels over the hardwood floor. He closed the ring box with his burned hand, and lifted his razor. He was due to arrive home in thirty minutes.

He slid the long, straight, sharp razor along his neck.