

## One night at Ms. Novack's

Knock-knock. The door did not have a doorbell. It was nothing intriguing, as the house as a whole seemed to be something out of a previous century: the old door with the lionish door handle, the wood floor, of wood so old it looked green, the cracking of the floor every step you took. And this was the outside; he was just imagining what could it be like on the inside.

Knock-knock. Again. Is it possible that no one is home? He booked a room in this pension last week, it was the best he could find at the time. He was already starting to get impatient when the door was opened from the inside, very slowly and loudly, almost as a nail scratching a blackboard. The dim light from inside illuminated a figure of which he could only see the shadow, and then he saw this very old woman figure appear at the porch. "Nighty-night. You must be Mr Gemetzel, am I right?", said the old woman. She looked like she was taken away from a fairy tale. Not in a good way, of course, as she was no fairy godmother; she looked like the evil witch the fairy godmother is supposed to protect the damsel from. She had very yellow and decayed teeth, and a breath so bad he could smell at the distance she was talking – about three or four feet. "Yes, you certainly are right. I am Mr Gemetzel. But you can call me Robert. And you are...", he said. "Ms. Novack. Nice to meet you, young man. Come on in, come on in...", she added, moving her bony arms frenetically towards the inside of the house. She did not have to say it again. It was quite cold outside, after all, and Robert didn't really want to be seen in that situation by any passerby.

The inside of the house was very much like you would have imagined from the outside. It had indeed a very heavy atmosphere, like an abandoned house whose windows weren't opened for a couple of years. The air had a very sharp smell, probably a problem with mold or fungus. The lights were all very weak, which made every object project a very big and weird shadow. Ms. Novack also kept several candles lit, more so than electric lightbulbs. This intrigued Robert a bit, as this seemed very old-fashioned. "Why do you keep so many candles, Ms. Novack? If you don't mind me asking... Isn't it... dangerous?", he asked, trying not to sound insulting, but at the same time thinking that everything about this house was indeed old-fashioned. "Oh my, not at all. I don't like these new technologies, in these new thingies lies the real danger.", she said wholeheartedly, as if this was a very important and personal issue to her.

They were walking towards the staircase. When they were close to the bottom step, she reached out to grab his suitcase, her old, frail, pale hands as cold and sticky as a frog skin. He shivered, disgusted by the touch. "It's okay, I can carry my luggage, thank you". He could feel that she got a little offended by this gesture, but it was better to be safe than sorry. He didn't want she touching his things. When they got to the top of the stairs, she showed him his room, in the right corner. "You can feel at home in your room, I will be downstairs making supper". He felt relieved that she did not insist in trying to organize his stuff. That could ruin everything.

He checked the room. It was not as bad a he had thought. Ms. Novack apparently had changed the sheets, there was a cloying flowery smell on the room. He went downstairs, still carrying his suitcase. It might not be a good idea to leave it alone like that.

Running down the stairs, when he reached the middle of the staircase he could smell the dinner Ms. Novack was preparing. It was kind of foul, like an almost rotten fish. He entered the kitchen. Chop, chop chop. She was cutting carrots to put in pan. She was startled when she felt him coming to the kitchen. She turned and pointed the knife to him. "Oh, you scared me senseless". It was a very old knife, like basically everything in this house. But this seemed like a different kind of old, like it could be part of the family heirloom. It had a wooden carved based, with some small carved details he could not distinguish. It was a bit rusty but it wasn't bad. It wasn't bad at all. "Oh, sorry. Just wanted to see if you needed any help", he said, trying to look for a good excuse. "No, no. I will call you when it's ready", she said, moving those scrawny hands towards him.

He decided to wait in the living room. It was a poorly illuminated, dusty room. There was a grey sofa with two brown armchairs to each side, all positioned to get the best peek at the old TV standing on a wooden rack. He tried to turn on the TV, but to no avail; there was only some image and sound very distorted by some kind of interference. He sat on one of the armchairs, feeling a little displeased. It was like this whole house was abandoned for a couple of months only to collect the higher amount of dust possible. He stayed there, running his fingers over his suitcase for a few minutes, until Ms. Novack called for him supper.

She directed him to the dining room, a small room that was located just behind the stairs. She made him seat at one of the edges while she brought all the dishes and the pot with the food. She would accept no help. The dinner was soup. Fish soup. More like rotten fish soup. It looked like she just cut the raw fish and mixed it up with water and dirt. It tasted as disgusting as it smelled and as it looked. He didn't eat much, afraid of what such dish might do to him. Ms. Novack wasn't very pleased by this, so she offered him some tea and snacks. "Sure", he said. It couldn't be worse than this, after all.

He went to the living room and Ms. Novack went to the kitchen to prepare the tea. Robert sat on the same armchair as before. She brought the tea and two tea cups in a very rusty silver plate. She served his cup first, then hers. She turned the old TV on. It worked now. She sat on the sofa that was between the two armchairs, where she could get a better view of the TV. An old horror movie was on. It seemed very cheap too, as the costumes looked like the ones kids use in Halloween. He was amused by the fact that this old hag was watching a movie about another old hag. HAHA. He wondered if she could see this connection between herself and the movie character. They watched it for a few minutes, and then it was time for the interruption. The old lady got up very slowly and moved towards the TV. She switched the channels and a news program was on now. She slowly got back to her seat in the sofa.

"...five women. His m.o. is the same: he approaches the victim at her house at night when she is alone and then attack her. We have a sketch done by the police of the suspect". She gasped. She looked at him, terrified. The drawing looked at lot like Robert. "Well, it was time we got to business", he said, getting up, always holding his suitcase tight. He turned the volume on the TV to the maximum. He felt relieved, as he wouldn't have to tolerate her despicable presence anymore. He opened his suitcase on the coffee table, grabbing his favorite tool. Nobody in the neighborhood heard Ms. Novack's screams.