

Mea culpa.

Carlos said he'd meet me in a coffee shop. Don't remember which one exactly, but it was one of the big chains, known for serving drinks that were all plastic and luke-warm and always dressed up like they were the best thing you'd ever taste. It wouldn't have been my choice of venue to discuss something as important as we were about to discuss, but hey, Carlos was calling the shots. I'd offered him that final chance to be in control. Besides, the shop stayed open late.

The thing about the *Lacrimae Mortis* is that they're sort of difficult to describe, no matter how many times I've tried. "Imagine how a human being can kill someone," I used to say. "You'd need to damage the body to the point of death, right? That's not how it is when you're using the Trigger. With the Trigger, life just flees before your touch. There's no murder, no mess to clean up. It's clean and simple. That's why it's so easy."

I didn't say any of those things to Carlos. He wasn't ready to hear them. He didn't even need to understand what was going to happen.

"Of course, there's the body," I used to explain. "But nothing can tie you to the crime unless there are motives or witnesses. I normally just leave the corpse to be discovered. You see, they made it far too effortless when they created us. Everything you need to pull off the final deed is hidden within you, like a part of your soul. You call it forth when you need it, as though it's a physical object sitting uncomfortably in your pocket, like a diary... or a scythe. Like I'm about to do for you."

So I suppose I was meeting with Carlos to stop anyone else falling victim to his delusions. We spoke for a while about how he was using his daughters as payment for his own addictions. He confessed to me, as I knew he would, eventually breaking down into sobs and wails, as people always do. He was a bad man, a criminal, and he was hurting other people. I asked him how he'd evaded the law, and he told me everything. It was all too easy for him, because he was clever, and the police were all too willing to look the other way in exchange for Carlos pointing the finger at rival dealers. You see, Carlos wasn't just a crook, he was a back-stabber too. That was another reason I'd chosen him.

"I can redeem your soul," I lied. "Repeat after me: Mea culpa."

Confused by the grief I had stirred within him, Carlos obeyed. His own words contorted and hissed like snakes, boring back into his mind. He realised that it was his time to die, to rid the world of his shame. As he got up to leave, silently, I knew that I'd never see him again.

I often wish someone would let me take the blame for my own sins, so that I could rest like Carlos and all the others. Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea culpa.

Seems like I'm stuck here.

Join me for a drink sometime.