

In the Name

Holy light filled the room and echoes of thunder bellowed in. The arched ceiling loomed above, watching down like a guardian. Bright white columns shot up and through, holding the place together. A strip of wine red carpet blanketed the center aisle, covering hard ceramic. Stains on the carpet up front, left from spilt communion. Nothing but electric chandeliers and dim, yellow lights on the columns to light the place. Fuck. All the investments in the world couldn't make this place feel any more welcoming.

John sat, legs wide, on the steps up front, the Cross standing tall behind him. The pews were his only congregation for now. They didn't seem to want him there either. He poured another glass of Macallan. This would make it his fourth. Another puff on his cigar. La Gloria Cubana Serie R. He pulled and exhaled. Robust and nutty, just the way it should be. The clouds lingered in the stale air. It would be harder for God to judge him if he couldn't see him.

His phone jingled, the Simon and Garfunkel signaling his wife. He held the phone in his pocket, fingers stroking the surface. He sighed and pulled it to his ear. "Hello?"

"John? John, where are you?"

"I'm working on tomorrow's sermon, Honey."

"You can't do that here?"

"I can't think right unless I'm here, you know that."

"And is Danny there with you?" A familiar tension in her tone.

"I'm not with Danny."

"I know he's there. I know what you do with him. And you call yourself."

He shut the phone. Throwing it, the thing shattered against the column next to where the Stevens family sits. Hell, he didn't want to hear how bad he was. Didn't need to hear it. He gave all his efforts to do good, but his best efforts seemed to prove powerless. And where was Danny? He was supposed to show up over a half our ago. The rain smacked the large, stained glass windows. A rapping against the large wooden doors rose above the storm. The same couldn't be said about the muffled shouting. Danny.

John downed his drink and shot up. He rushed to the doors, cigar smoke trailing. Standing straight, he pulled both doors open. Thunder cracked. His love stood shaking, sobbing. "Father John. I'm sorry, Father." Rain-dulled blood covered his fragile frame.

"Danny, what did you do?" He grabbed Danny's shoulders.

Danny choked on words. "I fucked up, Father. Oh, God forgive me. Father, I fucked up." He spoke young, like he hadn't been alive for half a century.

"What is this blood? What did you do?"

Danny raised his arm, pointing through the open door, to his car. Bloody water dripped from his finger. John hurried out, the scotch stifling his steps. Reaching the car, he dropped his cigar on flooded land. The windshield cracked, stained bright red. A large dent in the front of the car. John turned back to the church. "Danny, are you OK?" He was making his way to the car.

Danny tapped the back window with his quivering hand. "Father, this is not my blood."

"Open it."

"Fuck. Father, I'm sorry. It was an accident. I swear. I'm so sorry. Forgive me, Father."

Danny's breath spilled onto John, reeking of bourbon.

“I said, open it.”

A small boy lay inside, wet and motionless. Yellow raincoat now red. His head split like the seas. A white chunk of skull beamed through the gap in his forehead, washed clean of blood by the rain. Strands of soft brain wormed from the opening. The boy's bruised eyes still wide open, staring through everything in front of them. Blood vessels had burst, turning the whites crimson. “Danny, how? What the fuck did you do?”

“It was hard to see. The rain, the lightning. He was running across the street.” He swayed, feet shuffling. “I had a few drinks. Oh, God. My God, why have you done this?” He wrapped his arms around John.

“This is not God's doing. This is man's.” He led his fingers through Danny's hair, kissed his head.

“Father, what do I do? What can I do?”

John's legs were stone. Resting his head against the side of the car, he took deep breaths. Beads of guilt dripped from the boy to the fabric lining the inside of the car. John pulled the boy's eyelids shut, but the eyes stayed vivid in his mind. What could he do? Danny had enough to deal with.

“I can't go to jail, Father. My kids.”

His kids. John couldn't love anything as much as that man loved his kids. He'd be damned if he let Danny go to jail. It was time to be his brother's keeper. “You need to clean up your car before tomorrow morning. Clean all the blood. Burn your clothes. If anyone asks about your windshield before its fixed, you hit a deer. And the boy. I'll take the boy.” If there was any time for God to be watching, it should be now.

“What do you mean you'll take him?”

“Wait here.”

He ran inside to grab one of the brass candle holders. Gripping it tight, he rushed to his car. John swung at his windshield, cracking it slightly. Grunting, he swung again. He beat his sins into the metal. God's might filled his arms, defeating his fatigue. He crushed his windshield, crushed his hood, the brass ringing like church bells. Our Father, who art in heaven, let your son be forgiven.

Tossing the candle holder back through the church doors, John stumbled back to Danny's car. “Give me the boy.”

“What do you mean?”

“Pick him up and place him in my arms, Danny.”

Danny hesitated. John sighed. He swung into motion, lifting the body from the car and cradling him into John's arms. “Wait here. I don't want you to watch this.”

“Okay, Father.”

John hauled the boy to his car, standing in front of it. He looked to the storming sky, trying to see his creator through the clouds. He kissed the unbroken part of the boy's forehead, drew a cross. Crying, John threw the boy onto the front of his car. Forgive these sins. Forgive. Gripping the boy's clothes, he smeared the body back and forth, covering the car with blood. He froze, coughing. Scotch swelled in his stomach and burst out. Puking on his tires, he tried to pull himself together. For once in your damn life, do the right thing. Go through with it. John wiped the body back and forth once more. He cradled the boy again, gulping down air. Fiddling the keys from his pocket, he threw open his back door. He laid the boy across the seat. The

boy's eyes had come open again. This time John didn't close them. He slammed the door.

Lightning strobed.

Danny stayed by the car, just as John told him to. John held his shoulders. "Okay, Danny. Everything's gonna be okay. Everything's gonna be fine. I just need you to listen to me very carefully. Can you do that?"

"Yes, Father. Of course."

"You go home. Go to your children. Tell them you love them and you'll never leave them. Tell them God loves them. Tell them God is watching over them and he'll protect them. Tell them you'll protect them. Go home, feed your children, and live your life. This night did not happen. You and me did not happen. None of this happened. Now, go in peace."

Danny hugged John.

John rubbed his hand through Danny's hair.

"Thank you, Father. Thank you for everything."

"I don't deserve your thanks. Save them for God."

"Goodbye, Father."

"John. How many times have I told you? Just call me John."

"Goodbye, John." Danny kissed him, saliva still saturated with Wild Turkey.

Danny drove off, speeding down the road. Water spurt to the sides as his tires slashed through. John staggered back into the church. He shut the doors behind him, partially silencing the rain. As far as he remembered, the phone in the back room still worked. A dial tone sounded as he picked it up. He fingered 9-1-1.

"9-1-1. What's your emergency?"

“I hit a boy.”

“You beat him?”

“With my car. He's dead. I killed him.”

“What is your location?”

“I'm in Saint Vincent's Cathedral.”

“Off Route 4?”

“That's right.”

“I'm gonna need you to stay.”

He hung up the phone. They'd be coming either way. The Macallan was still in the sanctuary. He stood the candle holder back up and headed in. The wooden pews thumped as he slid his hands across them. He reached the front, his hands still soaked with the boy's blood. Sins should be washed away. Approaching the large stone bowl, John cleansed his hands in the holy water, turning it red. A tingle of warmth shot through his body. He wasn't sure if it was the alcohol or the holy spirit. It didn't matter. For the first time, it felt like he'd done right by someone. He'd helped someone with more than just their confession, really helped someone. He'd be viewed as the killer of a child by most. But there'd be someone who knew. Someone who knew he could be decent.

Taking his seat in front of the Cross, he poured another glass of Macallan. He pulled a Lucky Strike from his pocket and lit it. A long, harsh drag. The smoke fogged the sanctuary.

It would make it a hell of a lot harder for the Devil to find him if he couldn't see him.