

This story contains mature themes and situations. I guess this is where I say no one under 18 admitted without parent or guardian

-----  
The Worst Christian: Installment III

The Post War Years

"So what the fuck happened over there? What changed you?"

I could feel my skin crawling. Nastier than goose bumps, more like maggots burrowing their way beneath my epidermis. I stared into my glass. Scary how whenever I do not have an answer I hope that maybe something inanimate will give me one.

I finished my drink in one swallow, then waved for bartender. He came over and I not so subtly ordered a double shot of Sapphire.

"Yeah the war." I could feel Poppy looking at me. She was wondering what I would say next. I was wondering what I would say next. Even without looking I knew her eyes were not accusing me. The bartender returned.

"Do you know anyone else who went?" I killed the shot in one. It wretched in my stomach. I clenched my eyes shut. My stomach churned, bile and gin into my throat surging, wanting to spill out onto the bar. Deep breath. Swallow. Deep breath. Look at Poppy.

"No, just you."

"Well I don't know anyone who came back."

\* Outside the night air was frosty. Cold and clear. It seemed nothing was in the sky to block the stars. Icy clear they shone like dead diamonds against the backdrop of the night. In my lungs moisture crystallized with every breath. I tried breathing through my nose. I seemed to remember reading in a high school text that the capillaries in the nose would warm the air before it got to my lungs. Instead I just seemed to freeze the shit out of my nose hairs.

I imagined that the ice forming on me was something like the stars in the sky. No matter how I looked at them they never seemed fiery. No matter how I looked at me I never seemed alive.

Somewhere in my brain the alcohol had finally kicked in; it relieved me of the cold. I remembered an old girlfriend who used to curl up in snowbanks to sleep. An amazing girl.

Poppy had agreed to bring my car home later, as I was well to shot to even think of driving. I suppose that means Serg had to drive her car, hmm.

So I began to walk.

Walking is one of those amazing things. Humans rarely do it unless they are forced to. I once had to walk two miles to get my car from a repair shop and all my friends thought that I was insane. They suggested I take a cab. Not that they knew the actual

distance, all they knew is that it was up by the bank and that was at least five minutes by car. Five minutes by car, that is what, a week on foot? How we made it to the top of the food chain I will never understand.

Poppy had offered to drive me home, along with my car, but I declined. I felt that it was best if I tried to clear my head with the night air. To try and walk off the effects of everything I had dumped into my blood over the evening.

I decided to take the back streets home. It would take a little longer but it would be quieter and there was less of a chance of anyone, especially Poppy driving by and offering me a ride. In another part of the city, even a block or two away, I would not have considered taking the back streets. Not here though. Clifton is a historic district, old money and anachronistic gas lamp lined streets.

During the spring and summers all the lawns and gardens are well tended and manicured. However unlike similarly attended suburban homes here the houses sit well back on the lawns. Trees, shrubs, and decorative fences politely allowing those who pass by a modest look, while keeping the residents private life, well private.

The winter weather had stripped the grand old trees bare of their leaves, instead trimming the old branches, as well as the houses, lawns, and shrubs, with a delicate masterwork of ice and snow. The cool blue winter night, tinted warm by the gas lamps, twisted a mystic thread through the entire scene as I walked serenely down the street taking in the views of winter splendor.

Nausea gripped me.

Something began kicking and clawing its way up the base of my spine. The roots of my hair began to tingle and itch. My toe caught a gnarled root that had, over the years, pushed its way up cracking the sidewalk with the determination and perseverance only trees have.

Things began to spin lazily. Then they began spinning in rapid phosphene traced swirl. Making circuit at a million miles an hour around the inside of my eyes. The cracked cement tiles of concrete felt bitter cold against my palms. They bit and scraped raw my palms and my knees as I fell into the ground

The cement sharp bite brought my eyes back into focus; not surprisingly to focus on cement. My shoulders seemed to be gaining weight exponentially by the second, pulling me headlong towards the ground. All I could think of was getting off the sidewalk, out of site. After a moment of concentration I managed to summon up the strength to drag my pain riddled body up the nearest driveway.

Like an animal, I searched out dark seclusion in which to deal with my suffering. I found sanctuary alongside the garage of a modest white Victorian house. The combination of snow dusted shrubs a nearby oak sheltered me from the view of anyone not looking for me as I curled fetal into the ice laden ivy and pachysandra.

The ice and snow felt delicious against my hot skin, a mother's kiss on a fevered forehead. The onset of the sick had been quick, but only mildly unexpected. K- had been warning me for years about mixing drugs and alcohol. Face to the cold hard ground I thought distractedly of the four flat, white octagonal tablets I had swallowed with my last drink. The mental images caused my stomach to twist, wrench, knot, and flop in preparation for the imminent purging.

"You know better." A lean voice mentioned offhandedly. The voice came from towards the driveway behind me, quiet and calm. A mother's loving scold in subtle male tones. I attempted to right myself but found I was in way too much pain, and had to settle for turning onto my side, my shoulder grinding into the dirt, behind me there was nothing.

Cold blue light filtered through the bushes and bare tree branches casting delicate lace work shadows across the ground and the garage wall. The rest of the driveway slipped away in black shadows fading to ink. I suppose that is what I noticed, something inky fading to zero where at the least there should have been darkness.

It was from the darker night that the voice came from again. "They didn't help you in the trench, why should they help you now?"

The adrenaline shockwave twisted me so fully around I found myself leaning on my hands, slowly edging away from the nothing. It moved slowly and deliberately towards me. As it came forward a trace of light cutting through the branches slid over the black ice surface. The light shimmered across the skin, chest, shoulders, a contortion of a face and horns. It took another step causing me to jump back.

"Watch" came the voice as my left palm sank down onto something cold and sharp "out." The horns shook from side to side making it look like a ram. "That was glass, and it will hurt like hell tomorrow."

The thing arched and came forward over me, bringing itself in where I could better see it. A bone svelte man like body rippling with lean feral muscle under polished obsidian skin. Long boned fingers with heatless touch removed the glass shard with care. It clamped both glassy palms to my wound to stave off the blood flowing in generous rivulets down my arm. I slowly looked away from the hands and forearms to see long legs with far too many joints.

He said nothing else, even as I stared into his eyes. The two black marble spheres, all pupil, no white or iris, set into that monster's face. The flattened nose set just above a mouth too wide with shark grin row upon row of recurved gleaming black teeth. Crowning the head of the thing were two curling horns curving back over the bald head and then forward in a knotted inward spiral. The fingers stroked across my wound soothingly.

Slowly the adrenaline and endorphin wave crested and ebbed out of my body leaving the drugs to redouble their effort to extract themselves from my body. The blood pounded in my head like

violence, my stomach a tumbling dryer of glass. I curled over on my side face to knees as I began to dry heave.

"You're wondering who I am. I am you." I twisted my body away in self conscious agony. Dirt and frozen leaves pressed against my forehead. He kneeled next to me with great pity, "Why are you doing this?"

Eyes clamped shut, teeth in my tongue I tried to fight a thought through the white pain in my frontal lobe.

"Fuck..." was all I could splutter half heartedly as the wrenching took control spilling bile and the sparse contents of my stomach into the ivy.