

A stack of several books is positioned on top of a purple pyramid. The books are rendered with a semi-transparent, glowing effect, showing their spines and pages. The pyramid is a simple, three-dimensional shape with a flat top. The overall aesthetic is digital and stylized.

**the triad**  
prose

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a 2002 chapbook

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# Simon's Secret

He sat in front of his mirror, trying to reach God--trying to see the Spirit through his eyes, his deep-set dark blue eyes. His office cried softly to itself in the silence--the vents rumbling, the clock ticking, the wind breathing on the window. The walls were white and two bookshelves collected dust for what seemed like centuries. The late afternoon called for Confession, the precious sacrament given to sinners; a line of churchgoers had formed near the Confessional. God would forgive them. Through him.

He needed his time in silence, though; that's why he waited in his office. Even priests hungered for their own personal confessions. He turned away from his mirror on the desk and breathed out, looking at the crucifix hanging on the wall opposite him. The bronze carved elegantly, Christ's figure frail and empty. Hollow. Yet, he still looked to it for guidance, truth--hope, faith. It was something tangible, malleable. Material symbols provided that comfort.

*Forgive me my sins Father,* he thought.

*Forgive me--*

He ran his fingers through his jet-black hair, taking deep breaths, ready to leave the office and enter the Confessional. Until he heard the wind's whisper again on the window. Stronger.

It was time.

*Bless me Father for I have sinned:* they all said that. One by one. The Confessional was like the true closet meant to hold all the skeletons people held in their own personal closets. When people needed to clean them out, they'd go to the Confessional and transfer their guilt, fear, sadness, anger, confusion. Everything.

Nothing needed to be unforgiven; every sin deserved to be taken in, no matter how wicked. He would hear everything, even secrets: *Father, I cheated on my husband--Father, I'm having sexual thoughts about my teacher in school--my dog died Father--Father, I was raped a few days ago in an alley--Father, I'm jealous of this guy who goes out with the prettiest girl on campus--Father, I'm having problems with alcohol and I keep beating my wife.*

Nothing surprised him. The way the Confessional was designed did help

him be the counselor he needed to be: he would sit in one half of the Confessional, faint light from a lamp embracing him, and there would be a small slit in the wall, four by twelve inches, and a sliding screen mesh door allowing the voice to travel without the speaker being seen; and on the other side of the wall would be where churchgoers confess their sins. In dim light. It was easy to hold judgement back when he couldn't see them; it was also easy for them to confess, knowing they couldn't be seen. Knowing they couldn't see him as well.

The Confessional was an airtight bubble. Intimate and impersonal at the same time.

Forty-six minutes had passed, and he heard countless confessions--back to back. He didn't have any time to reflect on them. Come to think of it, he never did until they were all over for the day. He would forgive, bless, 'Hail Mary's, 'Our Father's, thanking him, and seconds later another would enter, whispering shame through the small window. It was an endless barrage of broken humanity.

"May the Lord Jesus Christ forgive you your sins and give you peace. Amen."

"Thank you, Father."

He smiled, although he knew the lady couldn't see his joy. She left the Confessional. Cleansed. Breathing out, he tugged at his collar, bearing the effects of closed spaces and binding clothes. He really did enjoy Confession; but humorously he thought of bringing up the suggestion to the church elders that priests could wear tanks and shorts while inside the Confessional. They would never agree to that.

He then noticed the silence, realizing the line of confessing men and women petered out. Another person didn't walk in. He was left alone.

This, however, didn't mean he could leave. Time for confessions lasted for a fixed period. Just in case anyone else walked in the church, aware of Confession, a priest needed to be on call to serve. He remembered one time when the church held Confession and only a small turnout arrived; he finished Confession in about fifteen minutes, leaving the rest of time to rest inside the closet. Even sleep. He chuckled at the memory.

The familiar drone of the organ bled through the walls of the Confessional. Soothing, comforting. He loved the sound of the church. He loved the church, period. It was his home. His refuge. Although there had been many moments when he felt he didn't deserve such a sanctuary. Secrets plagued his mind--no, not the secrets of those who confessed. His own.

And the horrible thing about those secrets he had--was that he felt he couldn't confess them to any other priest. Only to God. However, he questioned that misfortune at times: why did it feel so bad not confessing to another human being? Wasn't it enough confessing only to God? Didn't that justify him?

He tried once in another church across town--confessing to a priest. The rite was hollow and superficial. He remembered his hands shaking and his voice cracking at the mere sound of himself saying *bless me Father for I have sinned*. He never told his deepest secret. Other sins, yes: he admitted to having sexual desires, leading to thoughts of lust; he remembered fits of rage in his office because one time one little girl confessed that her stepfather raped her and he couldn't break the covenant of Confession by speaking out on it.

But he left his darkest secret unsaid; and truth be told, he simply wanted to be absolved. He wanted to hear the priest say... *I absolve you of all your sins*. Even if he didn't confess all of them.

He reflected on his past, much in the same way as a person looked in a mirror--the images of his past were reflections of him. Not simply events, or instances. His mother and father were extremely devout in the church--so devout that all expectations, standards, moralities were thrown on his shoulders.

He remembered that his parents were two reasons why he became a priest. His father pistol-whipping him repeatedly because he used the Lord's name in vain was a constant reminder of how he needed the cloth to cover his wretched existence. His mother would demonstrate the evil in lust by sexually violating him, making him feel uncomfortable--only to show him how imperative it was to flee from sexual immorality.

Sexual thoughts were his demons; they tempted the dark half of his soul more than any other vice did. That was the third reason why he wore the cloth. Somehow, he felt that the cloth would keep him clean. It would protect him from those demons...

"Bless me Father--for I have sinned."

He snapped back to the task at hand; he didn't even hear the person come in.

"Tell me your sins and you will be forgiven." The person breathed in and out. "How long has it been since your last confession?"

"I've--well, I've--maybe fifteen years or so?"

He shook his head, grinning. The voice on the other side was like a whisper; he could hear the subtle tone and pitch, but it was so soft, giving him

the impression that the person was severely ashamed. The person sounded male. He peered into the screen door and saw the blurry image of a man hanging his head in shame.

“Patience is a virtue, young man--don’t worry, I can spend the whole day listening to everything you’ve done.”

The man laughed a little. The priest knew that humor was God’s gift; it could heal hearts in seconds.

“I’ve committed many sins, Father.” said the man.

“Get them off your chest--it’ll make you feel better, I promise.”

“Well--I can’t tell you every sin I’ve done, ever,” he chuckled. “Not that I don’t want to, though. I mean, I have work in a little while but I wanted to take this time to confess one sin that’s been eating me alive.”

“I understand. Go on.”

The man breathed in and out again.

“Father--I’ve lived a pretty tragic life, I guess. For a long time I’ve been having these--feelings.”

“Feelings?”

“Desires. Temptations? I guess?”

“Well, that’s perfectly natural.”

The man shook his head. “Not like this--not like this. Recently I gave in to one of those temptations. I went to this party at a club, see--there were lots of people there, nicely dressed. It was a lot of fun. Then I met this *person*.” He wasn’t going to be specific. “And I felt really attracted to that person. You have no idea what I’m talking about I’m sure.”

He chuckled, looking down. “I can surprise you, young man--just because I wear the cloth doesn’t mean that the cloth is clean. There are some stains--but God forgives us all,”--he cleared his throat--“and there’s nothing wrong with feelings of attraction.”

“Then would it be wrong if I acted on them? Because I did...”

He looked deeper into the window slit. “How did you act on them?”

“I ended up sleeping with that person, Father...” The man’s voice began to tremble. “This was just last week too.”

*Last week?* thought the priest.

Something itched inside his gut; he began to recognize the tone of the man’s voice. But he still couldn’t place it. He almost dismissed it, though; many times, he felt he recognized a voice during Confession because most people who confessed went to church regularly, conversed with him constantly. Still, this was different. He already concluded that this man never

went to his church. Ever.

The thought kept itching.

“Well,” said the priest grudgingly. “We all make mistakes. You know? But Christ can clothe you with righteousness through what you’re doing right now--repenting. And He will forgive you.”

“You really think so? I have my doubts. This is horrid--I feel ugly. There’s more that I haven’t told you--and I bet you’d change your opinion if I told you everything.”

“Oh trust me--I’ve heard many stories. God holds no favoritism. He will forgive any sin.” He brought his face closer to the window. “But you must repent.”

The man sighed. “I know, Father--actually it’s kind of funny.”

“What’s funny?”

“Well--the person said the same thing to me when we were making out. Because, you know, we were actually both feeling guilty during the thing. We were pretty smashed too, so it was sort of funny. I told umm... the person, that we were sinning, that it was bad. It was so bad. And Simon said that I must repent.”

He recognized that the man found too much comfort in speaking, dropping his guard--because the man mentioned a name without knowing it. But it took him about two seconds to realize the name: *Simon*. And he caught his breath, confused.

“Simon?--who’s Simon?”

The man covered his mouth in shock. “Oh Lord!--I said his name. Oh no I’m sorry. No. Wait. Yes, well.” He could actually feel the man blush. “Oh please don’t kick me out of the church I know you all think people like me are heathens. I’m sorry. I mean--”

“Wait--” It clicked. A hammer crashed a chord in his head. His heart stopped. “Who are you?”

Silence.

He couldn’t breathe. And for some reason, he couldn’t hear the organ playing anymore. He lifted his hand. Itching to slide the small door. Opening the window fully so he could see clearly into the other side of the Confessional. He could hear the man’s breathing--heavy and frightened. He could see the outline of the man’s face--trembling.

“Forgive me,” whispered the man.

Long seconds later, he finally slid the tiny door to the side to see the man. And what he saw--terrified him.

The man looked at him, startled. “Simon? Is that you?”

He forgot how to breathe--hearing his name spoken. After two years of being a priest, he was used to being called *Father*. In fact, he couldn't remember the last time someone called him *Simon*. Maybe *Father Simon*. But not *Simon*.

Simon looked into the man's eyes--like maplewood, innocent and natural. But the man's eyes also radiated shock, bewilderment. Even anger. Suddenly the confession dissolved. There wasn't a wall between the two--at least there wasn't one mentally, emotionally. Their eyes met like two wolves fighting for dominance within their pack.

“Who are you?” said Simon.

“You know who I am!” he whispered. The silence made Simon's ears bleed. “Why didn't you tell me you were a priest?”

“What are you doing here?”

“Why didn't you ever call me back?”

“Because it meant nothing!” Simon whispered, clearing his throat. “It meant *nothing*. We were both drunk--in fact, I really couldn't remember that night!”

The man's eyes turned red. “So *I* meant nothing to you--you used me. Didn't you.”

Simon heard the organ cry into his body, the chords ripping him apart, burying his eardrums deep in pain as he held his breath. Surreal and sacrilegious: the moment felt that way to him. The man he saw as wicked staring at him from the other side of the Confessional in a place of holiness, knowing that he himself hid behind the same sin. He knew that. As much as he tried to hide from it--he knew it.

“You--you wanted--you looked at me with those eyes--”

“And you came to me and offered me a drink! Remember?”

Simon's bottom lip trembled. “This isn't the place, or time.”

The man tilted his head a little, his eyes wide. “What. You want me to wait outside after you've taken off your collar?--maybe meet me somewhere for another drink?”

“How dare you--”

“No, how dare *you!* You hypocrite,” he said, peering in closer to the window. “You, hiding behind this wall--this church. You who claim to know the god you preach, and then you do this with me?--you call *me* a sinner?” He whispered a laugh. “Even though I'm probably damned already--at *least* I don't hide from Him--like you do.”

Simon snarled. Fury coiled inside him like a python strangling prey. The inner peace of his priesthood kept him from thrusting his arms through the window to reach for the man's neck. But his heart cried for blood. Simon thought so hard that he felt his eyes bulge, still watching the man snicker at him--the man's eyes locked directly into his mind. And he thought of the only thing he could do...

"May the Lord Jesus Christ"--Simon motioned with his hand the sign of the cross--"forgive you your sins. And give you peace. Amen."

Simon then violently slid the door shut. Turning off the lamplight. Leaving him in darkness. Waiting for the man to leave.

Simon heard his shallow breathing on the other side--the breathing of an angry beast. The man seemed to want to say something. Anything. But Simon waited. He waited in the dark.

He still saw the blurry image of the man through the mesh--even through that, he could see the fine lines on the man's forehead, eyebrows slanted wickedly. A predator waited for Simon to reveal himself--ironic that he, a priest, remained in the dark while the evil existed in the light.

It seemed like one breath lasting for seven days that Simon waited. The man suddenly exploded out the door, walking away--his footsteps heavy and hard. Simon cried. Silently. So that no one could hear him. So even God couldn't hear him...

It took him about a half an hour to finally leave the Confessional, still shaking. Angry, hateful, piteous: those kissing devils fondled his soul while he kept a facade on the surface to keep others from sensing anything wrong with him. His head reeled, dizzy. The organ seemed to play louder. And he kept seeing that man's face in his head. His hot brown eyes. He heard the man repeat those words. Those stabbing words.

He wanted to escape. He wanted to hide. He couldn't stay inside the Confessional forever. Secrets were cloaks, easily burned by the fire of truth. His cloak turned to ashes. No one to turn to, nowhere to run, nothing to do to save him from the guilt--he rushed to his office, turning on the light and slamming the door.

Breathing heavy, Simon fell to his knees--tears streaming down his cheeks as he looked at the bronze crucifix on the wall. Hollow. Empty. The wind still whispered on the window. This time at night. The vent still rumbled. Simon cried for several minutes.

*You can't hear me, can you...* he thought.

Simon brought himself to his knees, looking down, heaving. He turned



around, facing the mirror--trying to gather his emotions. He looked up, facing himself--his tear-streaked face, his tussled hair, his empty cobalt-colored eyes. Like dead stones.

Simon opened the drawer in his desk and pulled out a pair of scissors. Pulling off his collar and dropping it to the floor, he aimed the scissors at his neck.

*Well I can't hear you either...*

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