

# THE GOD OF WANKING

PETER CAFFREY





## **OTHER BOOKS BY PETER CAFFREY**

The Devil's Hairball

The Butcher's Other Daughter

Whores Versus Sex Robots (And Other Sordid Tales  
of Erotic Automatons)

**THE GOD OF WANKING**  
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# **THE GOD OF WANKING**

**By Peter Caffrey**

# 1: The Old Shrine

Sweat wicked around Diego as he lay in bed, the lingering fragments of his dream still vivid in his memory. Mentally re-playing the erotic images, his groin pulsed, an electric sensation radiating through his body. His dream woman had been plump, curvaceous, a bit like Maria from his class at school, but with a woman's curves rather than girlish folds of fat. She was older than Maria, but young enough to still be arousing; not as old as his mother, not crumbling old, but more the age of Aunt Imelda who'd caused a scandal when she left her husband and children to run off with an itinerant trumpet player.

The dream woman's nightdress was flimsy, transparent like a mist settling across her contoured body. It was so sheer Diego could make out the curves of her pendulous breasts as she leaned in towards him, her nipples dark and tempting, begging to be caressed.

The woman had whispered his name slowly, her velvet-teen voice feminine but with a hint of huskiness. As she spoke, her lips remained parted for longer than necessary. Tempting, teasing, she'd almost sighed her words.

As she shifted her legs, the nightdress rode up revealing her thighs. At the top of her legs he'd glimpsed a wisp of black wiry pubic hair, her sex concealed but within his reach. Then he'd snapped awake, aroused, so close to the edge he wanted to scream out in frustration.

Staring into the darkness, Diego urged sleep to take him once more, transporting him back to her bed. He longed to return to the dream, to the woman and her ample thighs and smudge of special hair. His lips tensed, puckering in an imagined kiss, as he thought about gently teasing her nipples between his fingertips. The tingling sensation in his groin increased, as did the ache in his balls, his erection throbbing as a

reminder of his pent-up agitation.

With every minute he remained awake, the vision of the dream woman faded. Her face blurred, her curvaceous body melted away, yet his raging erection remained unfaltering, demanding his immediate attention. Unable to dredge up a clear image of his nocturnal paramour, he switched his focus and thoughts to Maria. In a few years' time she'd be older and...

The feeling of arousal deserted him, abandoning him to the misery of unrequited lust. As pretty and plump as Maria was, she didn't match the sexuality of the dream woman. Maria was just a girl, but the dream woman was exhilarating, dangerous, flirtatious, willing to allow Diego to use her body for whatever whims he had.

As he struggled to cling to the fading memory of his night-time desire, his cock twitched, reminding him of its needs. It didn't care whether he was thinking about the dream woman or Maria, or even Aunt Imelda that time she drank too much gin and kissed him for longer than was usual. It just wanted release and would refuse to let him sleep until its demands were satisfied.

Pushing his hand down the front of his pyjama trousers, Diego took hold of his throbbing cock. As he did, the night breeze from the open window flicked the bedroom curtain aside and a finger of moonlight sneaked in, illuminating the crucifix hanging on the bedroom wall. Christ the Saviour glared down from the cross, the crown of thorns atop his head. His scowl condemned Diego's sinful act. Jesus wasn't a fan of masturbation, regardless of how compelling a case Diego's prick was making in favour of onanism.

Taking his hand from his penis, Diego closed his eyes, but he still felt the Redeemer watching, damning his soul to Hell for entertaining the idea of self-abuse.

Diego's cock twitched again, an aggressive reminder of its needs, but the shame and fear of damnation nagged inside

his head. Turning over to face away from the crucifix, presenting his back to Jesus, Diego's hand crept towards his erection, but he knew the crucified Messiah was still watching, judging him as a pervert, putting him on the list for eternal suffering in the fires of Hell.

Climbing from his bed, Diego crept to the door. Ear pressed against the wood, he listened. Muffled snores told him his mother and father were sleeping. With care, he turned the handle, opening the door an inch at a time. Stepping softly, as if creeping through a serpent's nest, Diego inched along the landing and went down the stairs, making sure to miss the creaky step.

Once in the living room, he dropped his pyjama bottoms and took hold of his erect cock. As he started to jerk, he glanced towards the wall. The portrait of the Sacred Heart stared back at him, Jesus watched on with contempt, his heart burning from within his chest as a reminder he'd died for Diego's sins. The Lord had given his life for mankind, and all Diego offered in return was to stand in the living room, trousers around his ankles, wanking himself off.

Pulling up his pyjamas, Diego wanted nothing more than to return to bed and sleep, but his cock wasn't allowing any abandonment of the intended act. It wanted release; it demanded release. The ache, the throbbing, the tightness in his balls gnawed painfully at him. The discomfort would only become worse unless he completed his act of self-gratification.

César, his school friend, said a build-up of sperm could lead to an exploding ballsack. César often told the others such a disaster happened to a boy who lived on his lane. He used the story as an excuse for regularly wanking; eight, nine, even ten times a day. César didn't care who knew about his masturbatory activities; he seemed to revel in his ability to constantly jerk off. The one thing he could be sure of was his ballbag wouldn't detonate.

Diego realised he had no choice. His cock wouldn't allow him to sleep, and he didn't want to risk his scrotum rupturing. There was only one place he could finish himself off without Jesus throwing disapproving glances. Moving into the kitchen, he silently turned the key in the back door and slipped out into the warm night air. At the end of the garden path, he unlatched the gate and stepped into the alley. Tiptoeing towards the delapidated stone shrine, his cock perked up as if it somehow sensed completion was close.

The shrine was abandoned. No one bothered with the old ways, not since the missionaries came and promised work, plumbing, electricity, and a convenience store in exchange for the villagers converting to Christianity. The shrine's roof had partly collapsed, making it damp and cold. The walls were sticky with mould. For years the only visitors were local children playing, but in recent months, Diego had started using it for another purpose.

Lifting the rotting boards blocking the entrance, he went inside. Pyjama trousers around his ankles, he attacked his cock like a dog with fleas. A sliver of moonlight picked out the face of the dried and crumbling corn effigy, its head a woven ball of leaves with silks as hair, its eyes slices of stalk, its grin a cob of corn with intermittent yellowed and blackened kernels. The effigy watched Diego with a leering grin, almost encouraging him to jerk harder.

In Diego's mind, the corn man was the God of Wanking, encouraging him to enjoy himself and forget about the disapproval shown by Jesus on his cross.

Diego's stroke became more furious as he pictured the dream woman's breasts, her nipples, her smudge of pubic hair, but as he increased his tempo her face faded and became Maria's. She was dancing, her white school blouse soaked through from the rain, the cloth sticking to her plump body. The arrival of Maria into his fantasy reduced his state of arousal, so he

tried to force the dream woman back into his mind. He tried, but she wouldn't appear.

There was nothing else for it. He allowed Maria back into his thoughts, ramping up the depravity to make up for her less-than-sensual appearance. As she danced, her skirt fell to the ground. Turning to face away, she bent over and pulled the crotch of her regulation blue school knickers to one side. Then, with her index finger extended, she slowly inserted it into her bumhole.

Diego's whole body shuddered as his cock spat its shot into the darkness, pulse after pulse of tingling sensations shooting through his groin. A few more twitches and it was done. He stood, legs trembling, as the inevitable feeling of shame crept over him.

Pulling up his pyjama pants, he took one last look at the corn effigy. It was grinning, pleased with Diego's work.

As he headed back to the house, Diego wished he felt the same.

## 2: A Lesson in Lust

Brother Ignatius swept into the classroom, his brown sackcloth habit billowing behind him. The loud bang as he slammed the door snapped the children awake, a few trembling with fear as the monk moved to the blackboard.

‘Silence!’ he shouted with an angry scowl etched onto his face, despite none of the children talking. His eyes flickered over his pupils like a hawk watching its prey, daring any of them to challenge his authority.

‘Exercise books, now’ he decreed with aggression, the command underlined by the snapping of his fingers to illustrate his impatience.

The class produced their books and opened them to blank pages, pencils at the ready. Brother Ignatius turned to face the blackboard and, producing a length of chalk, wrote in large capital letters: LUST.

He turned quickly, glaring at the children in an accusatory way as if he expected some type of misbehaviour, before turning back and underlining the word twice.

The children sat, staring at their teacher, unsure what to do.

‘Write it down in capital letters,’ the monk bellowed, ‘and underline it, twice.’

As the children scribbled, César whispered to Diego, ‘He’s going to talk about wanking; you mark my words. He’ll tell us we’ll go blind and be sent to Hell if we pull our puddings, but I bet he does it, him and all the other brothers. I reckon they’re at it all the time, and after evening prayers they probably wank each other off.’

Diego looked down at his exercise book, attempting to hide the grin crawling across his face. If Brother Ignatius saw

him smiling during a lesson, he'd be punished. The pain of being caned wasn't the worst part; Diego hated the humiliation of having to take down his trousers and underpants in front of everyone. The monk had created a whole ritual of humiliation that went with any corporal punishment he dished out.

Brother Ignatius didn't allow frivolity in his class, especially not when he was teaching about sin. These lessons gave him an opportunity to accuse his pupils of all manner of hideous acts. He'd singled out the overweight children, asking why they thought it was acceptable to gorge themselves on food when babies in Africa were starving, during his lesson on gluttony. They'd also been the victims of his cruelty when he taught about sloth, telling them they were fat because of their laziness, and describing how the fires of Hell would melt down their hideously blubbery bellies. As a result, all the children in class kept their heads down, eyes focused on the books, for fear of becoming the monk's target.

The sound of sandals slapping on the concrete floor grew louder. Brother Ignatius was meandering between desks, seeking out his first victim, and the increase in volume of his footsteps meant he was getting closer.

'César,' the monk barked, leaning in too close to Diego for comfort. 'Do you know what lust is?'

Diego prayed his friend didn't ask if it was wanking. He wouldn't be so stupid. Even with all his bravado, César wouldn't risk incurring the wrath of the brother.

'Is it impure thoughts, Brother Ignatius?' César asked.

Diego breathed out slowly, relief flooding through his guts.

'It is, César, but it's more than that,' the monk replied. 'Impure thoughts, impure actions, desires, perversions and all manner of other aberrations. It is the decay eating away at a man's soul, the self-induced disease which condemns the weak to burn in the eternal fires.'

There was a momentary silence. Diego waited for the brother to move on and find another victim, but he didn't.

'Tell me, César, do you ever have impure thoughts?'

'No Brother, I do not,' César replied, his voice rich with innocence.

'Very good; if only all my pupils were so pure.'

That was that; Brother Ignatius would move on and find another patsy, but César decided to continue the conversation.

'Unless you're counting accidental impure thoughts, Brother.'

Diego tensed. What did his friend think he was doing? Surely he wouldn't consider goading the monk.

'Accidental impure thoughts?' Brother Ignatius asked with contempt. 'Explain yourself.'

'Well, if I was at the shops with my mother, and the lady assistant dropped her pencil and bent down to pick it up, I might see something I didn't intend to see. That could create impure thoughts, even though it wasn't my intention to have them.'

Diego knew Brother Ignatius had leaned in closer, because the smell of his breath became more pronounced, a mix of stale tobacco and cheap rum.

'And tell me, César, what would you do in such a situation if accidental impure thoughts infected your mind?'

'I'd take action to remove those thoughts, Brother.'

'Aha!' Brother Ignatius cried triumphantly. 'I knew you were weak. You'd no doubt indulge in masturbation.'

'Pardon, Brother?' César said with surprise.

'This action you'd take; you'd masturbate, César. That's what you're saying. You'd sin.'

'No Brother. I wouldn't touch myself, not ever.'

'Then how would you eradicate the impure thoughts?' the monk demanded, challenging the boy.

'I'd pray, Brother. That's what my mother taught me.'

The slap of sandals on concrete receded as Brother Ignatius returned to the front of the class.

‘Sodomy,’ he bellowed, his angry countenance forbidding the children to snigger.

‘Fellatio. Cunnilingus. Bestiality. Pedication. Masturbation. These are all acts akin to dancing with the Devil. The only time sexual activity is permitted is for the procreation of life. Even then, it is not to be enjoyed. Lust is a one-way ticket to eternal damnation.’

César nudged Diego and passed him a folded piece of paper. Expecting it to be a comment about the Brother’s lecture, Diego opened it. Instead, he found a crude drawing of the monk, cock out and wanking. Surprised by the content and unprepared to stifle his reaction, Diego laughed. He tried to turn the laugh into a cough, but the tension sweeping through the classroom made it obvious he’d failed.

‘Diego, do you find this funny?’ the Brother roared, his anger spiking as he strode across the classroom. ‘Do you think the sin of lust is something to laugh about?’

Diego tried to slide the drawing under his exercise book, but spotting it, Brother Ignatius snatched the paper.

‘What’s this? Do you think passing notes to your halfwit friends is more important than learning about sin? Never forget how Jesus died, nailed to the cross, to save you from your despicable sins.’

As the monk unfolded the paper, Diego stood and walked to the front of the classroom. There was no point in protesting his innocence; it would only result in both César and him being caned, and the other children would hate him for being a snitch. The best thing was to take the punishment and say nothing.

Brother Ignatius shook with rage as he opened the desk drawer and produced the cane. Flexing it in his stout hands, he nodded to Diego who dropped his trousers and underpants.

Bent across the desk, ready for the stinging pain, fists clenched with fingernails digging into the palms of his hands, Diego resolved not to cry.

Counting the lashes in his head, he reached twelve before the pain shattered his determination. With tears streaming down his face and what felt like blood running from the welts on his buttocks, the blows kept coming. The stinging of the switch felt like fiery blades cutting into his skin, and even when Brother Ignatius tired and stopped, the agony continued.

Trembling, fighting the urge to collapse, Diego straightened up and pulled up his pants and trousers. As he staggered back to his desk, Maria smiled at him. Was it a supportive, sympathetic smile, a sign of comradeship, or was it salacious, flirtatious, a signal she wanted him? Had she enjoyed watching the monk cane his naked backside? As Diego settled his swollen and battered buttocks onto the hard and unforgiving wooden chair, he had a raging erection.

Maria's smile had been dirty, almost lecherous. Did he see her tongue slide over her lips as he passed by? The more he thought about it, the more he was certain he had.

After school, the boys wanted to talk about what had been the biggest beating ever handed out by Brother Ignatius, but Diego made an excuse and headed home. His parents wouldn't be back from work, so he had some free time. The throbbing, burning, raging monster inside his pants needed attending to before his ballsack exploded.

### 3: The Fornicator Awakens

Limping homewards, his buttocks still burning with the sting of the cane, Diego's erection steadfastly refused to yield. He tried to focus his attention on passing bald men with ridiculous comb-overs, or toothless grandmothers carrying sacks of vegetables from the market, but it remained rampant. Counting the cracks in the footpath did not see it falter, nor did conjugating the Latin verbs which the monks were so keen on teaching. His prick stayed rigid, stiffened by the memory of Maria's excitement as she watched his bare buttocks take a whipping.

He arrived home to an empty house; neither his mother nor father had returned from work, which meant he had time to deal with his throbbing member. Despite the welcome solitude, the judgemental religious artefacts scowling from the walls denied him the peace he needed to deal with his urges. Dumping his school bag and slipping out the back gate, he headed for the shrine.

It wasn't the best idea to visit his secret place during the hours of daylight. If people saw him, a teenager, going inside they might get nosy, but this was an emergency. His erection wasn't going away, and a ruptured ballsack was the last thing he needed. The thought of Maria in a state of arousal was overwhelming.

Inside the shrine, concealed in the gloom, he unzipped his fly and pulled his cock out. As he started to stroke, he pictured Maria pulling down his trousers and pants and spanking his bare behind with the back of a hairbrush. As he approached his peak, a voice, deep and resonant, echoed off the walls.

'I've been waiting for you.'

Diego's erection reacted to the shock and fell flaccid, shrivelling against his thigh as if ashamed of its existence. As his cock went limp, his sphincter simultaneously tightened, a

hard knot of puckered muscle forming to prevent the expulsion of gas and faecal matter rushing from his bowels. His trembling hands struggled to pull up his trousers as he peered around the shrine.

‘Who’s there?’ he called out, his voice carrying a clear tremor and raising a few octaves as fear engulfed him.

‘Calm down and finish yourself off. You were so close to shooting your load, it’d be a crime to hold it in.’

Looking around, even in the gloom he could see the space was empty. No one was there; he was alone.

‘Carry on; you need to clear the custard,’ the voice urged.

Diego tried to control the panic surging through his body. What was happening? If someone was watching him, where were they? Unless someone was playing a trick on him.

‘César, I know it’s you,’ he called out, resisting the urge to turn and run. He waited for a reply, to hear his friend laughing and mocking him, but instead all he heard was a sigh. It came from the stone altar, the place where the dried-up corn man lay. Not wanting to look up, but afraid not to, Diego focused on the effigy’s face. It was grinning, but didn’t it always look like that, the dried corn cob teeth twisted in a crooked smile? Then it moved, stretching out and sitting up.

‘Don’t mind me,’ the corn man said. ‘Wank yourself silly. Take your time; I’ve got all day. It’s not like I have to be anywhere.’

Shaking with terror, Diego backed away, edging towards the door and the outside world. This wasn’t possible. Maybe he was in a state of shock following the caning.

‘Don’t think about leaving,’ the corn man boomed, his voice carrying enough authority to halt Diego’s movement. ‘I have something to discuss with you; something special.’

‘This can’t be happening,’ Diego muttered, more to himself than to the corn effigy.

‘Oh, it’s happening alright, and all because of you, my

friend. It's a cause for celebration, for rejoicing. Thanks to you, we're one step closer to returning to the old ways.'

Stricken with fear and regret, Diego wanted to run but his legs felt like lead, heavy and immobile. An unpleasant tingling sensation crawled across his skin. After the day he'd had and the beating he'd suffered, the last thing he needed was this nightmare.

'What do you mean, it's all because of me?' he asked, unsure if he wanted to hear the answer.

'I was asleep, in hibernation, outside of this world. You brought me back to life.'

'No, I didn't,' Diego replied, more to convince himself he had nothing to do with the aberration than to argue with the effigy.

'Oh, you did. It was all you, Diego.'

Hearing his name spoken was jarring. The missionaries who ran the school frequently said masturbation would lead to insanity. No one believed them, but maybe their claims weren't a scare tactic. Maybe what they preached was true. How else could a decaying statue made of old corn plants be talking? How else could it know his name? Maybe the hallucination would end if some sanity was injected into the conversation.

'You're just a corn effigy,' Diego said, his voice giving away his uncertainty. 'You can't be alive, and you can't talk.'

Leaping down from his stone altar, the corn man swung his arm, his dried cob fingers delivering a stinging slap to Diego's cheek.

'Did you feel that?' he barked.

Diego nodded as he backed away, terrified.

'Not bad for an effigy who can't be alive, eh?' the corn man sneered.

'Who are you?'

The corn man stepped away, a smile replacing his snarl as he clambered back onto the altar and sat with his corn stalk

legs crossed.

‘Who am I? I have many names. My chosen moniker is the Fornicator, but I’m also known as the Impregnator, Father of Life, the Fertiliser of Wombs, the Faucet of Eternal Sperm, the Sharer of Spunk; there’s a few other names but I can’t be bothered listing them all right now. People call me different things. Take yourself; in your mind you know me as the God of Wanking. Forget about what I’m called. It’s not about me; it’s about you.’

‘I don’t want it to be about me,’ Diego sobbed, a tear rolling down his cheek. ‘I just want to go home. Let me go and I promise I’ll never wank again.’

The Fornicator stopped smiling. His face grew serious; not angry but concerned. He tutted like a father would to a child who’d done something stupid.

‘Don’t think like that, Diego. Wanking is a wonderful thing, a necessary part of the old ways. The future is dependent upon wanking, and right now the only hope we have is you masturbating. You’re the last of the true breed.’

Diego’s terror subsided, partly due to the corn man’s change in attitude.

‘What do you mean?’ he asked, curiosity taking over.

‘Many years ago, when people were free to live according to the old ways, this shrine would be packed with men offering a daily sacrifice. There was a woman, a serpent demon whose tits were filled with tar and who had nipples formed of molten steel. The men would line up and she’d milk them into a golden bucket. Every day it would be filled to the brim.’

‘What do mean, a demon woman?’ Diego asked.

‘She was a demon; so what? The world is awash with demons. We’re everywhere.’

‘Are you a demon too?’

‘Yes, I am, but it’s not relevant.’

Diego struggled to understand what he was being told.

‘Why did she want a bucket of cum?’

‘It was to empower me. It allowed me to impregnate the local women. I intended to build an army of my children, and now I can finish the job thanks to you. You brought me back. You gave me life. It’s all down to you.’

Diego’s terror flooded back. He wanted to scream out, to howl, to somehow drive out the insanity which gripped him. He hadn’t brought the corn effigy back to life. He’d done nothing and didn’t want to be implicated.

‘Please, Mister Fornicator, why do you keep saying I revived you?’

The Fornicator laughed.

‘Because you did. The other night, when you wanked yourself off, some of your spunk splattered on me. It revived me and returned me to this world. For decades I’ve been deprived of the semen I need to enact my plan, but you’ve changed that. Now you must finish what you started.’

Edging towards the door, the need to vomit building in his stomach, Diego said, ‘Sorry, but I need to go. I have to be back before my parents get home and—’

‘Stop,’ the Fornicator commanded. ‘I need you to enter into a pact with me.’

‘I don’t think I can, sorry.’ Diego whimpered.

The Fornicator’s smile returned as he whispered, ‘Diego; if you help me I will offer you the greatest gift a man can have, a gift money cannot buy. What I offer is something men would kill for, a dream to end all dreams.’

Hesitating, unsure whether to run or listen, Diego battled the indecision whirling in his head. The promise of a gift intrigued him, even if it did mean making a deal with a demon.

‘What do you want me to do?’

‘All I ask is you visit the shrine once a day and masturbate. You need to ejaculate into this bowl.’

The Fornicator held up a vessel woven from corn leaves.

‘Is that it?’ Diego asked, somewhat surprised at the simplicity of the task.

‘That’s it, and do you want to know what I’ll give you in return?’

Diego nodded.

‘You can have any woman you want,’ the Fornicator said, a conspiratorial grin breaking across his face. ‘Any woman, and you can do anything you want with them. This I promise.’

‘I’ll get in trouble—’

‘There’ll be no trouble. You’ll have my protection, and the women will not speak out against you. If anything, they’ll defend you. Think about it; any woman you want.’

Was the nightmare turning into a dream, or was the whole episode a hallucination, a madness brought on by frequent masturbation? The deal seemed simple; all he had to do was wank, once a day. He already did that. In return he’d have everything he’d ever dreamed of.

‘Any woman ... and I won’t get in trouble for it.’

‘I promise,’ the Fornicator said with a wink.

‘Okay, I’ll do it,’ Diego replied, feeling awkward but also excited. ‘Can I go home now?’

‘After you’ve put something in the bowl.’

The Fornicator’s tone had changed. He’d gained authority.

‘Can I do it tomorrow?’ Diego asked.

‘Do it now and remember this: you’ve entered into a pact with me, and you can never break it, not unless you’re ready to face the consequences.’

‘What consequences?’

The Fornicator cackled, an echoing hellish laugh of spite.

‘It’s best you don’t know. You need to keep your pecker up.’

## 4: Daily Duty

Diego found himself obsessed, his mind cluttered with a whirlwind of sexual fantasies. Even everyday occurrences saw his thoughts spin into a kaleidoscope of depraved debauchery. Every time he saw a woman, any woman, he dreamed about what he could do with her thanks to the pact.

He imagined performing perverted acts with the ladies in the local shop, acts which would make his mother weep and the clergy condemn him as a sick and twisted monster. He day-dreamed about the outrageous behaviours he'd inflict upon passing girls, the licking and sucking and prodding he'd indulge in. He even harboured lustful thoughts about the dinner ladies at school, all of them at once, their fat naked bodies writhing in puddles of sweat and juices as he pleased them.

The Fornicator hadn't explained how he'd deliver access to the women; the finer details had been omitted when the pact was agreed. It didn't stop Diego from dreaming up an endless list of sins of the flesh he intended to enjoy once the demon came good on his promise.

Keeping the pact secret from César was a struggle. Diego wanted to boast about his good fortune, but he couldn't trust him to keep quiet. His friend's penchant for telling everyone about his excessive self-abuse showed he lacked any shame, and he wouldn't remain silent over something this big. One day he'd be able to reveal his experiences to his friend. César's head would explode when he found out.

While the days were filled with lustful thoughts, the evening visits to the shrine were a struggle. It was becoming increasingly difficult to carry out his daily duty. The Fornicator had changed, watching him like a hawk, chucking out barbed comments. He'd complain about how long Diego took to finish

himself off and whinged about the small amount of semen produced. In the past, when the corn man was just a pile of dried leaves and husks, his inane grinning seemed to encourage masturbation. Since the demon had come to life, he'd displayed a more manipulative air which lent a threatening overtone to the proceedings.

Each day, after school, Diego went to the shrine to perform his duty. Every time it seemed to take longer, the Fornicator becoming increasingly irritated by any delay in the delivery. Wanking had been a pleasure for Diego, but it had become a chore, and his growing resentment increased as the demon's promise remained unfulfilled.

As the days turned into weeks, the process took over Diego's life. During the day, César's constant jokes about jerking off were too close to home. Masturbation no longer held any joy; it wasn't something to snigger about. If anything, it was a burden forced upon him by veiled threats about the consequences to be suffered. As the end of the school day approached, Diego dreaded the impending visit to the shrine. The Fornicator's mood was worsening, his impatience usually spilling over into abuse and foul-mouthed tirades about Diego's lack of volume.

Walking to the shrine, Diego resolved to talk to the Fornicator. If the corn demon eased off on the pressure and stopped his bullying, the process might be simpler. At least if they were friends, he could raise the issue of getting his reward.

As Diego entered the shrine, the Fornicator eyed him with rage, already disappointed with his performance. This would be an uphill battle.

'Hi,' Diego muttered.

The corn demon didn't respond.

'I've been thinking about our pact,' he said as he took off his jacket.

‘What about it?’ the demon asked.

‘What do you use my spunk for?’

The Fornicator scowled at the questioning.

‘You have a duty to perform and would be well advised to focus your attention on that.’

‘I agree,’ Diego replied, ‘but if I knew why you need it, I might be able to come up with a way of giving you more.’

The Fornicator paused for a moment before replying.

‘I use the sperm to fertilise the local women. After I’ve ingested it, I pump into in them, and they give birth to demons.’

‘Ingested it? You mean you eat it?’ Diego asked, shuddering with revulsion at the thought.

‘Eat it, snort it, rub it into open wounds; it matters not how it gets inside me, just as long as it gets inside me. Now, enough talk; you have your duty to perform.’

Desperate to push the Fornicator into a more friendly mood, Diego continued with the conversation.

‘You said there used to be a queue of men filling a golden bucket with semen. If that was the case, then my daily offering can’t be enough to meet your needs.’

The Fornicator sighed with frustration, not with Diego’s question, but with the reality of the situation.

‘You’re right; it isn’t enough, but it’s all I have. When the new army of demons are birthed, they can help in my task, but right now I’m cursed with your meagre dribblings. Unless you increase your output, there’s a limit to what I can do.’

‘Won’t it take years to build an army?’ Diego asked, trying to show an interest in the demon’s plans. ‘First you have to get the women pregnant and wait for them to have their babies, and then the demons need to grow—’

The Fornicator laughed; a pitying cackle inspired by Diego’s ignorance.

‘We’re not like humans. The pregnancies last a few

weeks, and demons grow fast. The only thing slowing me down is your pathetic sperm production, so get jerking.'

'There's another thing the puzzles me,' Diego said, buying some time. 'How do you persuade women to have sex with you? That must be difficult. I can't get girls to take an interest in me, let alone do sex stuff.'

'I impregnate them when they're not expecting it.'

'You rape them?' Diego asked, shocked by the revelation.

'No; not at all. I enchant them. They believe an Adonis has come to them in their dreams. It's smoke and mirrors, yes, deception, most undoubtedly, but certainly not rape.'

Diego's mind whirled out of control with the realisation of what he'd got himself into. If the Fornicator was raping women, he'd be implicated. The police would lock him up for the rest of his life, and the other prisoners would be out to get him. He'd be a sex offender, the lowest of the low. That said, a life of fear behind bars would be preferable to the punishment dished out by the missionaries when they discovered he'd assisted a demon in committing mortal sins. The pact had to end.

'I'm sorry, but I can't do this,' Diego said, picking up his jacket and pulling it back on. 'I've got nothing left to give. To be truthful, I'm struggling to get it up, let alone wank.'

'You'll face the consequences,' the Fornicator roared.

'Hang on one minute,' Diego snapped, his anger fuelled by bravado and resentment at being denied his reward. 'Don't threaten me with consequences. This pact is a sham. You've been lying to me. You promised me any woman I wanted and so far I've had nothing, so fuck you and your threats.'

The Fornicator tensed, his snort of derision filling the air with hot breath tinged with the stench of Hell. His eyes glowed, fiery with rage. Emitting a low snarl, his corn stalk frame seems to grow to that of a muscular beast.

Diego's bravery deserted him. Petrified and on the verge of shitting his pants with fear, he awaited the demon's reaction.

For a moment, the atmosphere in the shrine crackled, but then the Fornicator relaxed and smiled.

‘The worm has turned,’ he giggled. ‘Okay Diego, you’ve got a point. I do owe you, and who knows? Maybe a bit of fun will increase your production. Who do you want? Shall I send the fat girl from your class, Maria, to see you?’

Diego hesitated. If the deal was going to be honoured and he had the choice of any woman, any woman at all, was Maria what he wanted? He’d like to fuck her; in truth he’d like to fuck anyone but choosing her would be a waste of a golden opportunity. She was pretty enough, but she was a girl. He wanted a woman, a dirty woman who’d do unspeakable things with him.

‘I’d prefer the woman in the shop,’ Diego replied. ‘The blonde one, not the dark haired one.’

The Fornicator raised his eyebrows.

‘Isn’t she a bit old for you?’

‘She’s who I want.’

‘Really? She’s a bit ... well, she’s dog rough.’

‘I want her.’

The Fornicator shrugged.

‘Okay, whatever you want; it’s your fantasy I suppose. Go home and wait for her.’

‘Do I need to finish off here?’ Diego asked timidly, nodding towards the bowl of leaves.

‘You’ll need to save your seed for your skanky shop-keeper,’ the Fornicator said with sarcasm, before waving his hand in a dismissive gesture, indicating Diego should leave.

## 5: Baked Liver

Diego ran homewards, a smile etched on his face, the grin so wide his cheeks ached. This was it, the moment he'd dreamed about, the day he'd become a man. The boys at school talked about kissing girls, and a few claimed to have felt them up as well; one boy even boasted how a girl once touched his cock, but this would be different. Diego was going all the way with a woman; a woman, not a girl.

Arriving home, he bolted into the kitchen and came face to face with his mother. She was preparing dinner while his father sat at the kitchen table, reading the newspaper, a finger of grey smoke curling from his pipe.

'You're late,' his mother said, more as an observation than a challenge.

'I was with César.'

Picking up his school bag from where he'd dumped it earlier, he muttered, 'Homework,' and darted past his parents and into the hallway. As he climbed the stairs towards his bedroom, he heard his mother shout, 'Supper in an hour.'

Alone in his room, his limbs tingled in an unpleasant way as nervousness pulsed through his body. He hadn't considered his mother and father being home. In truth, he hadn't thought the situation through at all. If the shopkeeper called and asked to see him, they'd want to know why. His mother wouldn't let a random woman waltz into the house and pop upstairs. She'd insist Diego came down, and both her and his father would sit in the kitchen, along with the shopkeeper, listening to their conversation.

His father didn't like visitors going upstairs, full stop. When César visited, he had to stay downstairs and use the outside toilet. They wouldn't let the shopkeeper inside, let alone up to his bedroom. The whole situation was a bust.

Nothing was working out as it was supposed to. The pact with the corn demon was a curse rather than a blessing, and the stress was sickening. Far from being a debauched journey into hedonism, the whole thing felt more like torture.

Diego crept into the bathroom and pressed his face against the window, peering into the street. If he spotted the shopkeeper approaching, he could run outside and tell her not to call. Watching through the tiny window, a realisation crept into his mind. Was he stupid enough to believe she was going to come? The Fornicator was mocking him, treating him like a child. All the demon wanted was to watch him masturbate and collect his jizz. The agreement was nothing but a con.

Despite his misgivings, Diego crept between his bedroom and the bathroom, peering through the window, wanting to see the shopkeeper but also not wanting to see her. When his mother called him down for supper, his anxiety hit such a peak he wanted to vomit, acidic bile bubbling in his guts.

In the middle of the kitchen table stood a pot of baked liver. Like everything his mother served up, the liver was overcooked and grey, protruding from a slick of over-reduced sauce which was closer to crude oil than gravy.

‘I’m not hungry,’ Diego muttered, but his mother continued to pile the rubbery offal onto his plate, before surrounding the mound of grey liver with stringy cabbage. With the food served, the three sat, their hands clasped together as his father said grace. Eyeing the plate, Diego struggled to feel any gratitude to God for what he was about to receive.

The liver was tough and dry, forming a granular texture in his mouth as he chewed. It sucked the moisture from his cheeks, making it difficult to swallow. He tried to gulp down unchewed lumps of liver but was close to gagging as the pieces of offal stuck in his throat. He needed to eat and get back upstairs as soon as possible; his only chance of evading the inevitable chaos was to spot the shopkeeper before she arrived.

As he battled with the baked liver, every sound from outside spiked his anxiety. Footsteps in the street, random voices and cars slowing down all increased the panic. Struggling to swallow, he fought against the rising waves of nausea as his stomach tried to reject the gulped mouthfuls of rubbery food.

When he thought he'd eaten enough, he pushed the plate away and asked his father for permission to leave the table. Eyeing the remaining food, his father shook his head.

'Your mother has prepared this lovely meal for you. The least you can do is show her respect and eat it.'

'But I have homework, a special project for school, and I need to get it done,' Diego said, smothering the fear-induced tremor in his voice.

'A few more mouthfuls won't stop you doing your homework,' his father said, forking another piece of liver into his mouth as a sign the conversation was over.

Chewing the overcooked offal and fibrous cabbage, Diego fought against the fiery bubbling bile which threatened to erupt from the pit of his stomach. Swallowing hard, he waited until his father nodded permission to leave the table.

Taking the stairs two at a time, he raced into the bathroom. The street was empty, the daylight fading, and most people would be at home for the night. He breathed easier; she wasn't coming. The Fornicator was a liar, a fraud, and that meant the pact was over. The demon had tried to con him, but now it was obvious he couldn't deliver his end of the deal, things had changed. He wouldn't go back to the old shrine, not ever, and the corn effigy could rot waiting for him.

Diego slipped back into his bedroom, closing the door and switching on the light. Stifling a scream of shock, he stood, petrified at what he saw. There, on his bed, wearing nothing but exquisite black lace underwear, was the shopkeeper.

She flicked her blond hair with a toss of her head and

beckoned him over, patting the mattress beside her body, inviting him to join her. Trembling, frozen to the spot, Diego shook his head.

‘Please,’ he whispered, ‘you must leave. My mother and father are downstairs and—’

Shushing him, the shopkeeper sat up and held out her hand. Glancing from her to the bedroom door and back again, Diego didn’t know what to do. He wanted to join her on the bed, but his lust was smothered by the tidal wave of fear erupting inside him. If his parents discovered her presence, he’d be in a whole world of pain.

Her hand gestured, encouraging him to take it, and with reluctance he did. The shopkeeper guided him, so he stood before her. Struggling to breathe, he watched as her fingers reached out, nails painted fiery red, and slowly undid his belt and the button on his trousers. Diego shook his head, a silent no, but he didn’t stop her or pull away. She unzipped him, her elegant fingers pulling down his trousers and underpants.

His cock refused to rise to the occasion, remaining frightened and flaccid between his trembling legs. He felt the burning redness of embarrassment creep up his skin, his cock shamed into hiding, but she took it gently and stroked it until it awoke.

Desperate to remain quiet, Diego couldn’t contain a whimper as his manhood hardened under her touch. His excitement was tempered by the shame of knowing he wouldn’t last long, his peak already approaching.

As if aware of his condition, the shopkeeper smiled and whispered, ‘It’s okay, relax. I prefer it to be over quickly. All women will tell you it’s better if it’s fast. It shows how much you like us.’

She stood, pulled down her knickers and, turning her back to him, bent over. Reaching back between her legs, she took hold of Diego’s throbbing erection and guided it towards

her body. He felt her warm moistness as he slid inside, struggling to hold back, trying not to explode straight away. It was no good. He couldn't control himself.

As he started to ejaculate, her hot, wet womanhood changed. It felt cold, hard, painfully sharp and ragged. She turned her head and looking back at him was the grinning face of the Fornicator.

‘Let it blow, Diego,’ he sniggered. ‘As long as it gets inside me, I don't care how it gets inside me.’

As Diego involuntarily spurted his seed into the Fornicator's backside, his cheeks were streaked with tears, and his stomach pushed the baked liver back up his gullet and out of his mouth, splattering the walls in the evening's gloom.

## 6: Mother Superior Calls

Bishop Malachy relaxed in his chair, a crystal goblet of port in his hand, as Brother Gregory's nimble fingers plucked at the harp strings. Lost in the melody, the bishop tapped on the glass stem in time with the notes. Midway through the recital, the door opened, and Brother Ignatius entered. He scowled at Brother Gregory, showing his disapproval that any man who'd taken holy orders would waste his time playing such a monstrosity of an instrument. The harp was for whimsical dreamers and fantasists, not for men of God.

The bishop, aware of his presence, didn't react, instead nodding to Brother Gregory as a signal he should continue. The bishop remained silent and immobile aside from his tapping fingers until the musical piece ended, and even then he remained still, as if emotionally clinging to the last harmonic hum floating in the air.

He glanced at Ignatius, his look more one of caution to the monk that he should remain silent, and then addressed Brother Gregory.

'That was excellent, Brother Gregory, a true use of the musical talents God has given you. Now, maybe you should head to chapel; I'm sure you're eager to join the others for evening prayer.'

The monk rose, bowed to the bishop, and left the room. With Gregory gone, Ignatius said, 'I don't know why you tolerate that feckless half-wit, your excellency.'

'Come, come, Brother Ignatius; have a little charity in your soul. We all serve God in different ways, and to be fair, Brother Gregory plays the harp very well.'

'He does play well, for a feckless half-wit,' Ignatius grumbled.

'For what purpose must I bear your interruption?'

‘She’s here,’ Ignatius said with scorn. ‘The old bitch from the convent.’

The bishop tutted and wagged his finger as if admonishing a child.

‘Really, Brother Ignatius, there’s no need to be so judgemental towards others. Judge not lest ye be judged, and all that old nonsense. Did she say what she wanted?’

The monk shrugged.

‘I’m buggered if I know; she won’t talk to the likes of me. All she said was she needed to see you as a matter of grave urgency. I told her you were busy, but she insisted you’d make time to hear what she had to say.’

Bishop Malachy sighed. His life was constantly interrupted by a parade of others who felt the need to share their petty problems, expecting him to come up with solutions to matters they could deal with themselves.

‘Show her in,’ he muttered, ‘and if she asks for a glass of port, water it down. I don’t want her getting pissed and sitting here all night telling me about her visions.’

Brother Ignatius disappeared through the doorway, returning a few moments later ushering a small nun before him. Hunchbacked and wizened, she shuffled slowly into the room. Bishop Malachy stood and proffered his hand, allowing her to kiss his ecclesiastical ring. As she struggled into a chair, the bishop sat again.

‘Why ails you, Mother Superior?’

‘Ails me?’ she asked. ‘What makes you think something ails me?’

Suppressing sarcasm, he replied, ‘Well; I don’t think you’ve come out so late in the evening to make a social call. I’m guessing your visit is due to an urgent matter which simply will not wait until the more normal daytime hours most of us reserve for visiting others.’

The nun coughed, emphasising the dryness of her throat

with a hack. Bishop Malachy looked at Brother Ignatius and raised his eyebrows.

‘Would you like some tea, Reverend Mother?’

‘I don’t want to be any trouble,’ the nun wheezed, before pointing to the bishop’s goblet of port. ‘I’ll just have whatever you’re having.’

Before the bishop could react, Brother Ignatius took another goblet from the drinks cabinet. He placed it beside the nun, before collecting the bottle of port from the bishop’s side table.

‘Here you are, Reverend Mother,’ he said, feeling the bishop’s rage building behind him. ‘I’ll leave the bottle with you so you can top yourself up.’

With that, he turned to the bishop, his face twisted in mirth, before bowing and leaving the room.

‘So, what is the purpose of your visit, Sister Agnes?’ Bishop Malachy asked, eager to deal with the matter at hand and end the meeting.

‘It’s a very strange situation,’ the nun said, pouring out a full goblet of port. ‘We have noted an increase in pregnancies amongst the local population in recent weeks.’

‘Strange?’ the bishop asked, trying to remain calm despite what was clearly an egregious waste of his time. ‘I see nothing strange about it. Boys will be boys, and judging by the outcome, girls will be girls as well. Young people often struggle with the onset of puberty and as such it’s a matter best addressed through the school. I think you should speak with Brother Ignatius, but it’s not really a situation in which my involvement is required. Shall I call the brother in?’

The nun took a deep slurp of her port.

‘I am afraid you misunderstand, your excellency. I am not talking of teenage pregnancies, although there are some. I am talking of pregnancies in the more mature members of our community.’

‘Procreation is a gift from God,’ the bishop said, ‘and I don’t see why we should be discouraging families from growing their numbers. Now, if there’s nothing else—’

‘By more mature, I mean the elderly.’

‘The elderly?’ the bishop asked, his voice raising an octave in surprise.

‘Yes, your excellency, the elderly. Widows, grandmothers, great grandmothers, spinsters; it’s a puzzling state of affairs.’

The bishop sighed. Sister Agnes had been given to episodes of alcohol-fuelled fantasy in the past. There had been the talking horse and its prophecies of damnation, and the burning goat foretelling the end of mankind. Now it was old woman getting pregnant. It seemed she was due for another spell of rehabilitation.

‘Surely, Reverend Mother, such a thing is a biological impossibility?’

‘It is,’ she muttered, before draining the goblet and refilling it. ‘It appears to be an impossibility on two counts. Many of the women are past the age of fertility, but the majority state they’ve not had ... relations ... for many years.’

‘Let me get this straight,’ the bishop said, his irritation bubbling up. ‘Old women, and I’m talking old old women, are claiming to be pregnant and you believe them, despite their age and the fact they’ve not indulged in sexual intercourse?’

‘Precisely,’ Sister Agnes replied, herself showing impatience at the bishop’s inability to grasp her message.

‘But Sister Agnes, with respect, these women’s ovaries will no longer be producing eggs. Any pregnancy is an impossibility.’

The mother superior nodded agreement before swallowing down the glass of port and refilling it again.

‘That’s what I’ve been saying, your excellency.’

The bishop sighed, frustrated at the struggle he faced to

understand the point being made.

‘Are you suggesting there are cases of ovarian rejuvenation?’ he asked.

‘No!’ Sister Agnes snapped, emphasising her exclamation by pointing at the bishop. ‘It’s not that. It’s evidence.’

‘Evidence?’ the bishop asked. ‘Evidence of what?’

‘I believe,’ Sister Agnes said with a deadpan delivery, ‘that the pregnancies are evidence there are demons at large.’

Bishop Malachy threw his hands up to cover his face, muttering curses into his palms. She must have been drunk before she arrived. This was a new level of madness, even given her predilection for visions and stigmata. The idea demons were tearing around the countryside, impregnating elderly women, was absurd.

Waiting until his rage subsided, he lowered his hands and picked up a small bell from the side table. Ringing it with aggression, he smiled at the nun, holding his tongue until Brother Ignatius entered.

‘Brother Ignatius, the Reverend Mother has brought to my attention a worrying trend,’ the bishop declared. ‘She assures me demons are at large. They are scurrying around the countryside, impregnating the elderly.’

The monk smirked; feeding port to the mother superior had been a better joke than he’d anticipated.

‘Don’t smile, Brother,’ the bishop snarled, a grin spreading across his own face as he served up his revenge. ‘I want you to personally work with the Reverend Mother to investigate these pregnancies.’

The monk stopped smiling.

‘I’m afraid I’ll have to decline the offer, your excellency,’ Ignatius stammered. ‘The school is remarkably busy, and we have examinations coming up—’

‘Nonsense, Brother; this is an important matter. Demons are amongst us and I can think of no man better qualified for

the task. Think of it as an act of reconciliation. I insist you leave no stone unturned. Now, I think it best if you and the Reverend Mother discuss your plans in greater detail, so kindly pass me my port bottle and take the good sister to the parlour.'

## 7: Sodomy and Shame

Diego couldn't sleep. The shame of his sex act with the demon was eating him up inside, his distress added to by a seething undercurrent of anger at his betrayal. The Fornicator had violated their agreement and there was no way the pact could continue. It didn't matter what the corn man threatened or promised; Diego would not contribute another drop of sperm, even if it meant he never wanked again.

The offer of being able to have any woman he desired was nothing but a baseless lie. The Fornicator had been manipulative, tricking him into performing a sinful act which surely damned his soul to hell. The shopkeeper incident had been his last chance, and now there was no way forward.

What could the demon do if he refused to give any more sperm? Killing him would be an extreme act, but at least he'd never have to deal with the corn man again. The Fornicator might tell Diego's family and friends about the bum sex but making what happened public would expose the corn man as a demon. Maybe the best way to end things was simply to stay away from the old shrine.

As soon as the thought entered his head, another came crashing in to tip him back into emotional turmoil. The Fornicator had been in his house, in his bedroom. Diego's skin began to crawl, and he jumped up, throwing the sheets off. He wasn't safe, even in his own bed. There had to be a way to free himself from the attention of the demon.

Brother Ignatius had often lectured the class about the times when the missionaries first arrived and converted the locals to Christianity. The peasants were idolators, he said, and the monks scoured the countryside searching out their shrines. Any they found were set on fire, the effigies burned up. It had driven the demons out and none had returned.

Setting fire to the shrine had to be the answer. The flames wouldn't destroy the stone building, but everything inside would burn: the boards on the windows and doors, the floor, and any other flammable materials. The Fornicator would burn.

It was a solution, but was it too fantastical? Diego questioned whether he'd have the balls to commit arson. The locals wouldn't care about a fire; no one visited the shrine. A handful of children used it as a playground, but since the missionaries delivered their promise of electricity, most neighbourhood kids stayed at home and watched television. There weren't any other buildings next to the shrine, so a fire wasn't going to develop into a serious incident.

If the blaze occurred late at night, suspicion would fall on the teenagers who hung around on street corners, smoking and drinking and disrespecting the elderly. He could sneak into the shrine, start a fire, and be back in bed before anyone noticed the flames.

Now was the time to act, while he was angry and hurt. In a few days, his fear would grow: fear of facing the demon, fear of being caught, fear of failing. There was an old kerosene storm lamp in the outside toilet. If he soaked some rags in the fuel, he could use them to start the blaze.

Pulling on his clothes, he sneaked downstairs. Rooting in the cupboard under the sink, he found a few old dishcloths. Slipping into the back yard, he went to the outside toilet and, opening the lamp's reservoir, splashed kerosene onto the rags. Then he headed for the shrine.

Pushing inside, he found himself in darkness. The moon was obscured by low clouds. As he groped in the dark, he heard the deep voice of the demon.

'Diego, my friend, have you come to burn me up?'

Diego froze. If the demon knew his plan, was there any point in lying? He stayed silent, not knowing what to say.

'I know you're angry at my deception,' the demon said,

‘but I needed to ingest your sperm in the most effective way. It was a trick, and I was wrong to play a trick on a friend. I’m sorry and I want to make it up to you. Next time I go out to impregnate women, you, my good friend, will be coming with me. You’ll be free to take any woman you wish. This is it, Diego; this is what you wanted.’

Hidden by the darkness, Diego bundled the cloths together. Reaching into his pocket, he removed the box of matches.

‘It’s not what I want, not anymore,’ he muttered, struggling to open the box as his hands shook.

‘Of course it’s what you want,’ the demon laughed. ‘I admit what I did was wrong, but you can see it’s all for the best. I wanted to make sure you were able to enjoy the fruits of your labour. I did it for you. I hated seeing you so down. I knew this way I could give you everything you wanted.’

Diego struck a match and held it to the rags, but the flame spluttered and died.

Changing tack, the Fornicator began prancing around, his fists rubbing at his eyes in a motion designed to imply he was wiping away tears.

‘Boo hoo hoo,’ he sneered. ‘Please don’t burn me up, Diego. I only wanted to be your friend, and let’s be honest; I’m a better ride than that old bitch from the shop.’

Unnerved by the mockery, Diego struck another match, but again the flame died before it caught.

‘I have an idea,’ the Fornicator said, reverting to a more friendly tone. ‘Why don’t I hold the rags, and you can use both hands to light the match. If you believe I wanted to hurt you, then burn me up, but if you understand I did it to help you, then we can say goodnight and get some sleep, because tomorrow, we fuck.’

Diego tensed as he felt the corn demon move next to him.

‘Here, give me the rags.’

Holding them out in the black air, he felt the demon take them. His fingers trembled as he took another match from the box. Cupping his hands, he struck the head against the strip. The flame glowed, fluttered, then burned brightly. In the light, he saw the Fornicator's smile. It wasn't manipulative or controlling. It was happy, mischievous, encouraging as it had been in the past.

'Tomorrow, we fuck,' the demon whispered with a giggle.

Diego took a deep breath and touched the match to the rags.

Before the cloths ignited, Diego was knocked across the shrine by an impact like a hammer-blow to his solar plexus. Crashing into the wall, his body bounced off the stone, all air knocked out of his lungs. His head span and a hot burning sensation engulfed him. Waves of nausea pulsed through his guts as he struggled to breathe. Agonies radiated through his body.

Without the strength to rise, he was powerless as the demon loomed over him, wrapping corn cob fingers around his throat.

'Listen to me, you little fucker,' the Fornicator hissed. 'You used kerosene, and that was your mistake. If you wanted me to burn, you should have used gasoline. So, now you've failed, and because of that I'm going to tell you how it's going to be. From now on, you serve me and only me. You'll deliver your semen when and how I tell you. You won't complain or feign illness. You'll meet the terms of the agreement as I stipulate. Your reward? Well, you can forget it. Understand?'

Diego's head was throbbing from the impact. Unable to speak, he nodded as best he could.

'If you renege, do you know what'll happen?'

Diego, in shock and fighting against the urge to vomit, shook his head, the motion sparking dizziness and a surge of pain.

‘First, I’ll visit your house and I’ll take your mother. I’ll fuck her in every hole she has. Then I’ll pull her eyes out and fuck her sockets. Then I’ll make a few more holes in her pathetic body and I’ll fuck those too. I’ll do the same to your father. Fat Maria and your arse-wipe friend César will share the same fate, and you’ll watch me do it to each of them. Then, when I’ve fucked them all to bits, I’ll shove my fist so far up your arse, I’ll tear out your intestines and make you eat them. You’ll die chewing on your own shitty bowels. Do you understand?’

Dazed, unable to move, the buzzing in his head and blurred vision made it feel like he was slipping under water. The only thing clear was the words of the Fornicator.

‘I asked, do you understand?’

Summoning every shred of energy, Diego feebly nodded his head.

‘Good. Now fuck off and be back here tomorrow at sunset, or you’ll have front row seats to the show.’

## 8: Yellow Peril

Brother Gregory drove the bishop's car towards the village. In the back seat, Sister Agnes briefed Brother Ignatius on the woman they were about to visit.

'Mrs Gomez is 87 years old. Her husband died over 20 years ago, and since then she's not remarried or been romantically involved with anyone. She hadn't had relations with her husband for the last 10 years of his life, so that's 30 years without any sexual activity. However, a few weeks back, she visited the doctor with a swollen belly.'

'Probably wind,' Brother Ignatius replied, already bored with the nonsense.

'That's what the doctor suspected, but as each day passed her belly became more swollen, so he carried out tests and discovered she was pregnant.'

The monk bit his tongue; every atom of his being wanted to call out the elderly nun for spouting bullshit. Even with his limited knowledge of the female anatomy, he knew pregnancies were slow to show in the initial months. Nothing in the story made sense, and it was clear the mother superior was losing her grip on reality.

'I went to visit her when I received news of her condition,' Sister Agnes continued. 'I found her in bed, exhausted and dehydrated. She told me the baby had been born and then run away.'

'Sweet Jesus, preserve me from lunatics,' Brother Ignatius muttered.

'What was that?'

'Sorry, Reverend Mother; I was just saying when we arrive it might be best if I speak to Mrs Gomez alone.'

'She trusts me,' the wizened nun said. 'She might not want to speak to you.'

As they journeyed on, Brother Ignatius glared out of the window at the endless cornfields, the tanned peasants toiling in the fields. In his head, he cursed the country and its stupid people. The bishop had sent him on a fool's errand instead of packing Sister Agnes off on retreat to dry out. With his frustration building, he turned on Brother Gregory.

'Hey, Gregory, I know you're a bit slow in the head, but can't you drive a little faster? I'll need a haircut in a few weeks.'

Arriving at the village, Sister Agnes led Brother Ignatius to a small shack. As they entered, the monk recoiled, the acrid odour of rotting food and stale urine assaulting his nostrils. The mother superior laughed at his reaction.

'Fuck me; doesn't the stink bother you?' he asked, trying not to gag.

'I've been here before,' the nun smirked, 'and I've packed my nostrils with dried lavender. Now, please Brother Ignatius, remember who I am and curtail your foul tongue.'

'Apologies, Reverend Mother,' the monk mumbled, trying to not breathe in the foetid air.

In a small bedroom, Mrs Gomez lay on the bed, unmoving, eyes closed, her body covered with a stained sheet.

'Is she dead?' Brother Ignatius asked, hopeful her demise would allow him back outside into the fresh air.

'I doubt it,' Sister Agnes said.

'She looks dead, and something in here smells dead.'

Moving closer, Brother Ignatius poked at the body. She didn't move so he poked harder.

'Stop poking me,' the old crone muttered, her toothless mouth opening to reveal blackened gums. Her breath smelled worse than the decay and urine. Brother Ignatius quickly crossed the room, forcing a window open.

As the mother superior and Mrs Gomez exchanged greetings, Ignatius leaned out of the window, sucking in mouthfuls

of air. Standing by the car, Brother Gregory smiled and waved. He'd pay the price for his smugness later. The immediate aim was to get out of the house as quickly as possible.

'So, Mrs Gomez,' Brother Ignatius proclaimed, turning to face the old women. 'I understand you've had a bellyache. Please, tell me all about it.'

The old woman raised herself up in the bed, the sheet falling away to reveal her skeletal frame and withered tits hanging down to her waist. She showed no sign of a distended stomach, whether from pregnancy or intestinal gas. Shocked at her nakedness, Ignatius spun round and faced out of the window once more. If he got through the morning without vomiting, it would be a miracle.

Behind him, the old woman told her tale.

'I was stricken with a swollen stomach a few weeks ago. At first I thought I'd eaten something bad.'

'Judging by the smell in here, you may well have eaten something unbelievably bad,' the monk muttered. 'Carry on, please, and make it quick.'

'For a few days, my stomach grew and grew, big and bloated, so I went to see the doctor. He told me I had food poisoning, but my belly kept on growing, so the next time I saw him, he did a test and told me I was pregnant.'

'Given your age, you didn't question his prognosis?'

'I did. I told him I hadn't been fucked for decades, so I couldn't be pregnant, but he insisted I was.'

Brother Ignatius turned to face the woman, but immediately regretted his decision. Averting his eyes, he asked, 'And then what happened?'

'Well, my belly grew and grew, and then a few evenings ago, I gave birth.'

'What?' Ignatius roared, his face flushing with rage. 'Are you trying to disrespect us? We've come to see you based on your absurd claims, and you expect us to believe that you, a

woman closer to the end of her life than the beginning and who hasn't had sexual intercourse for many years, fell pregnant and gave birth in a space of a few weeks?"

'Yes,' the old woman said with certainty. 'That is exactly what happened, so help me God.'

The monk glanced around the room which contained nothing but the bed and Mrs Gomez.

'Where's the baby?' Brother Ignatius demanded.

'It ran away.'

'Oh Jesus fucking Christ,' the monk exclaimed, before turning to Sister Agnes and shrugging, trying to mitigate his outburst.

The mother superior took over the conversation.

'What happened to the baby, Mrs Gomez?'

The crone sighed, put out by having to repeat herself.

'As I said, the baby ran away. At first he was the size of a normal baby. Everything was normal, aside from his genitals.'

'What was strange about his genitals?' Brother Ignatius asked.

'His penis and testicles were enormous, nearly as big as he was, and then there was the colour.'

'The colour?'

Brother Ignatius sighed. This was fast becoming unbearable. Keeping a lid on his anger was proving to be a real challenge.

'The baby was yellow,' the crone said.

'The whole baby was yellow, or just his genitals?'

'The whole baby was yellow,' Mrs Gomez replied, her tone indicating she thought the monk was a half-wit.

'Jaundiced?' Brother Ignatius asked.

'No, not jaundiced, but golden yellow all over.'

The monk sobbed, a sound of deep despair at the idiocy he was having to witness.

'And then what happened?' Sister Agnes asked, sensing

the brewing anger of her colleague.

‘I put him to bed, and when I woke the next morning, he was at least three feet tall and was in the kitchen, eating everything he could get his hands on. He ate everything I had: rice, corn, beans, dried meat, vegetables, fruit, everything. Now I have nothing.’

Brother Ignatius clenched his fists so tightly his knuckles were white.

‘So, the yellow baby with the huge cock grew big overnight and ate all your food. Then what happened, for the love of Christ?’

Mrs Gomez looked shocked at the impatience of the monk.

‘I tried to stop him eating all my food, but he became aggressive, and once he’d consumed everything, he ran away.’

Brother Ignatius took a deep breath, relaxed his fists and shook his arms, ridding his body of all the tension, before he spoke.

‘Please, Mrs Gomez, we’re busy and you’ve taken up a lot of our time. Let’s end this nonsense now. I’m sure if you think hard, you’ll be able to admit you might have been mistaken. Yes, you were sick, and maybe a fever or delirium made you think you had a baby. Might that be the case?’

The old crone sat up, her manner exhibiting defiance.

‘I did not imagine it, nor did I dream it. It happened. I know it happened because of this.’

She whipped back the stained bedsheets and opened her legs to give Brother Ignatius a full view.

‘Look at the state of my growler. Do you think any woman would have a mess like this between her legs if she hadn’t given birth?’

‘She’s got a point,’ Sister Agnes said, but Brother Ignatius was leaning out the window, bringing up his breakfast.

## 9: Marigolds and Mini Skirts

School was an unwanted invasion into Diego's introspection. The Fornicator's threat had unnerved him, haunting both his dreams and his every-day thoughts. The corn demon was capable of carrying out the vile acts, and Diego believed he'd be more than willing to do so.

For the sake of his family and friends, he had no choice but to comply with the Fornicator's demands. The rage which pushed him to the shrine to destroy the demon had dissolved, his anger replaced with fear. He was terrified by what the Fornicator might do if he didn't comply.

In class, Diego couldn't concentrate. Everything the teachers said served to increase his dread. During a history lesson, discussing the crusades, he imagined the Fornicator beheading his family with a sword dripping with semen. During geography, as the teacher talked about the pagan rituals of the rain forest tribes, he imagined the demon decapitating loved ones and wearing their shrunken skulls as a codpiece.

At break time, César behaved like a bigger dickhead than usual. His constant references to wanking were wearing thin, and his never-ending suggestions of what he'd do to various girls overwhelmed Diego, reminding him of the atrocities he'd have to witness and endure if he didn't do his daily duty.

César grew more boisterous as the day went on, but Diego slipped deeper into depression. Although his friend rarely left his side, he was utterly alone, carrying his burden in isolation. As the lunch break ended, the two boys headed back to class, César oblivious to the difference in their attitudes. Maria stopped the pair as they approached the classroom.

'Diego, I've been struggling with the multiplication of fractions,' she said. 'Will you sit next to me in maths to give me some help?'

Unsure what to do, Diego agreed. César made a sniggering reference to him and Maria multiplying, but Diego followed Maria to her desk. Once seated, Maria whispered, 'You looked like you could do with a break from him.'

She'd spotted his mood, sensed his isolation. No one else had noticed, not even his so-called best friend, but Maria had seen his inner turmoil and had done something to help. César was so self-absorbed he hadn't noticed the change in Diego, the mounting stress and nervousness which Maria had both recognised and understood. All his friend cared about was making lewd jokes and pushing himself to the fore any time there was an opportunity for innuendo, but Maria cared about him.

Throughout the rest of the maths lesson, she remained silent. Her ability to multiply fractions was solid; she'd put his needs first and few did that. Had he been too fast to think of girls as little more than wanking fodder, missing the fact that Maria was a good friend?

As the bell rang and the pupils put away their books, César came over. Making a fist with one hand, he inserted his index finger into it, pushing it in and out in a sexual gesture while grinning like an idiot.

Unable to face his friend's immaturity, Diego said to Maria, 'I can help you more with fractions if you like. I'm free now.'

She nodded and, picking up her bag, led him away.

They walked from the school to the bend in the road before it headed into the village. Climbing the fence, they continued along the riverbank. Maria didn't speak; she shared an occasional reassuring smile but didn't intrude on his inner thoughts.

'Thanks for ... well, you know,' Diego said after some time.

'No problem. Any time you need to talk to someone, I'm here. You don't have to talk, not unless you want, but if you do

I'm always here.'

He nodded and they continued walking.

After a while, Maria said, 'You can tell me to mind my own business if you like, but if something is bothering you, it's best to share it. If you keep things to yourself, they'll fester and grow.'

What could he say? How would she react if he told her he'd been wanking and had shot his load on a corn effigy, bringing it back to life, and in exchange for being able to commit unspeakable acts with any woman he wanted he'd agree to supply the demon with sperm? He couldn't share the problem, not with her, not with anyone.

'It's nothing,' he muttered. 'I'm just a bit tired and I think the stress of the exams has worn me down.'

'In that case, we need to cheer you up,' she said, her face breaking into a grin. 'Don't you wish our school uniforms were a bit more modern? You can tell the monks decide what we wear. Look at this skirt. It's crap.'

Diego smiled. The girls' skirts were heavy grey flannel, baggy and poorly shaped. Maria's reached halfway between her knees and ankles.

Maria hitched up the waistband and folding the cloth a few times, made the skirt shorter. She put on a theatrical swagger, asking, 'Do you think a mini skirt would suit me?'

Diego paused, watching her as she strutted. Her thighs were a bit chunky, but in general she had good legs. If she toned up a bit and put on some make-up, she could be quite attractive.

'Look at these little flowers,' she squealed, pointing at the ground. 'They're so pretty. Are they Marigolds?'

Bending to pick one, her skirt rode up a little higher, and Diego spotted she wasn't wearing any knickers. In an instant, his cock hardened. With lust pulsing through his groin, he wanted to get behind her, slide in his...

The thought flickered and died, replaced by the disturbing image of him standing, erection in hand, behind the Fornicator. He tried to focus on Maria, but his mind was filled with the memory of his cock inside the demon, weeping and screaming while being forced to ejaculate into the bowels of the beast. Acidic bile bubbled in his stomach and shot up his gullet, a spurt of vomit jetting from his mouth, splattering onto the ground and onto Maria's bare behind.

Ashamed, traumatised, terrified by his predicament, he ran. He ran as fast as he could, away from the river, away from Maria and her exposed sex. He ran until his legs ached, his lungs burned and his head felt light. He ran until he couldn't take another step and then he dropped, trembling, panting, spent, the shame of his situation burning onto his cheeks.

He lay in the grass, his mind whirling into chaos while the sun crept closer to the horizon. Devoid of energy and overwhelmed with depression, he couldn't move and vowed to stay there, prostrate in the grass, all night. He'd wait until someone found him and carried him to the hospital where he would tell them about the Fornicator and ... the Fornicator!

The corn demon had told Diego to be at the shrine for sunset and had made clear what he'd do to his mother and father, to Maria and César, to Diego himself, if he wasn't there.

Exhausted, he got to his feet and staggered towards the village. Maybe the demon would see the state he was in and be lenient. The Fornicator's mood was changeable; he might be in a better humour than last time when Diego had tried to burn him up.

Arriving at the shrine, Diego paused. Taking a deep breath and making the sign of the cross, he clambered through the boards blocking the doorway and entered the gloom. It took a few minutes for his eyes to become used to the darkness, but eventually he made out the shape of the Fornicator. Bent over the stone altar, his buttocks presented, the demon looked over

his shoulder at Diego, his face twisted in a mocking grimace.

‘Saddle up, little man,’ he screamed maniacally, ‘this is going to be a big one!’

## 10: The Council Meets

Brother Ignatius stood silently while the bishop clutched his sides, the deep belly laughs echoing around the chamber. The monk remained impassive, waiting for the hilarity to recede. His reaction would have been the same had someone retold the tale he'd delivered to Bishop Malachy.

'Wait, I get it,' the bishop giggled. 'This is your weak attempt to repay me for tricking you into spending time with Sister Agnes, suffering her wild theories. Let me tell you, Brother Ignatius, you'd have to get up early in the morning to catch me out. In your case, you'd have to stay up all night. Now, tell me what really happened.'

'With Jesus, Mary, Joseph and all the angels and saints as my witnesses, what I'm telling you is the truth.'

The bishop's smile dissolved into an angry frown.

'I'm all in favour of a joke, Brother Ignatius, but taking it too far is a sign of disrespect.'

Head bowed, the monk replied, 'It is not a joke, your excellency.'

The bishop stood and paced the room, his scowl indicating his anger was building. Turning, he pointed an accusing finger at Ignatius.

'Do you want me to believe an old woman became pregnant without having sexual relations and gave birth after two weeks? Would you further insult my intelligence by expecting me to accept she birthed a bright yellow baby with an oversized penis? You then want to tell me this baby grew to the size of a small man overnight, ate his own body weight in food, and ran away, leaving behind no other signs of his existence than empty cupboards and an old woman with a shredded vagina?'

Brother Ignatius held up his hands in a gesture of pacification.

‘Your excellency, I thought the very same thing when I heard the tale for the first time. It made no sense and seemed impossible. But every woman we spoke to told us the same story. While it’s true Mrs Gomez is past her prime, both physically and mentally, many of the women were intelligent and certainly not delusional. The final woman we saw, a well-respected teacher, had not given birth, but during the short time we spoke I witnessed her belly growing significantly in size.’

‘You should have brought her here,’ the bishop snapped. ‘We could have witnessed the birth.’

‘I thought about it afterwards, but by the time we returned to her house—’

‘Let me guess,’ the bishop barked. ‘She’d given birth and the baby had run away?’

Brother Ignatius’ silence answered the question. The bishop resumed his pacing, wringing his hands as he considered the problem.

‘Should we inform the cardinal?’ the monk asked.

‘Certainly not,’ the bishop replied, his eyes blazing with indignation. ‘What type of idiots do you think he’ll take us for? This is a local matter, and we’ll deal with it. If the authorities think we can’t control the peasants, we’ll be replaced. Do you want to be pushed out of the mission and given a menial role in some slum project? Let me tell you; I don’t. At least here we’re our own men. What we need is a plan to tackle the issue.’

‘Do you think we can battle a spate of demonic emergencies?’

Bishop Malachy stopped pacing and turned, his eyes dark and brooding.

‘Something is afoot, but it’s not demonic. Let me assure you there is nothing demonic at all about this nonsense. These mysterious births are nothing more than conjecture. Persons unknown are spreading lies and stirring things up with the aim of undermining our authority. They want to turn the locals

away from the church by reigniting interest in their pagan past. Rumours of sex demons running amok are the tool they intend to use to create dissent. Someone out there knows more than they're letting on.'

Turning, he paced another circuit of the room before punching his open palm in a dramatic gesture.

'We'll tackle this propaganda with everything in our power. We will drive fear into the hearts of the peasants until they reveal who is behind these sinful falsehoods. This is an absolute priority, a war against the blasphemers. I am going to pray for guidance. You summon the inner council, and we'll meet after lunch.'

Bishop Malachy turned and left his chambers, heading for the chapel. Brother Ignatius rushed in the other direction, ready to summon the representatives of the diocese.

By the time the bishop had prayed and lunched on a selection of roasted game birds, Brother Ignatius had brought together the council members. He'd also sent for Sister Agnes, and both he and the nun waited by the door of the meeting room as they watched Malachy approach. The bishop nodded to the monk and, with a stern voice, addressed the nun.

'Reverend Mother, what is about to take place must remain private, and I stress private. Do you understand?'

'I understand, your excellency,' she replied.

The bishop muttered a quick prayer and made the sign of the cross twice, once on his body and a second time towards the monk and the nun. Then he opened the door and ushered them inside.

Seated in the room, on one side of the table, were four hulking, muscular monks, looking more like prize fighters than men of God. Their heads were covered with rough hessian sacks which had small holes burned for the eyes. The sacks were fastened around their necks with a short length of rope, knotted into a noose. Imposing and not without menace, they

remained still and silent as the others filed in.

‘Hello, I’m Sister Agnes,’ the nun said looking at the four, ‘and who might you be?’

The monks remained silent, and the bishop gestured for Sister Agnes to sit.

‘Reverend Mother, do not be alarmed,’ he said as he took his seat at the head of the table. ‘These men are here to help. They are the Cornerstones.’

‘The Cornerstones?’ the nun asked. ‘It sounds like a folk music combo.’ She giggled at her own joke.

One of the monks rose, his movement aggressive as he leaned towards the nun.

‘Gentlemen, please relax,’ Bishop Malachy said, reaching out an arm to form a feeble barrier between the two parties. ‘Sister Agnes means no harm. She doesn’t understand your role, nor does she appreciate your influence in the diocese.’

Turning to the mother superior, he continued. ‘These men are the Cornerstones of our mission, the enforcers of our parishes, the defenders of the church. If you’d like to explain your problem to them, we’ll see if they can help.’

Sister Agnes explained about the spate of pregnancies and the circumstances surrounding them. As she expounded her theory of demonic intervention, the four monks sat, impassive, showing no reaction. When the story ended, she asked if they had any questions. The Cornerstones did not speak, but one waved his hand, gesturing he had heard enough. Thanking the nun for her testimony, Bishop Malachy took her hand and led her from the room.

As soon as the pair left, the four monks removed their hoods.

‘Is she for fucking real?’ one asked Brother Ignatius.

‘Oh, she’s for real,’ he replied, ‘and to be fair, so is her story. I visited the women in question with her. At first I thought what they were telling us was a crock of horseshit, but

every single one told the same tale without any inconsistencies. If it's a hoax, it's been bloody well-orchestrated. I can't help but feel there's something more going on.'

'Does the bishop agree?' another asked.

'He thinks it's just malicious tittle-tattle,' Ignatius replied, 'so we need to convince him to take it seriously. It could be much more than an attempt to ridicule the mission, but he won't listen—'

Ignatius fell silent as the door opened and Bishop Malachy returned.

'Okay gentlemen, pay attention,' the bishop said, asserting his authority. 'I believe the locals are intent on causing mischief with their lies, and they're showing disrespect to the mission. We need to stamp out the rumours. If the cardinal gets to hear about this, we'll look like arseholes, and I'm not risking that. I refuse to be known as the bishop who got the runaround from a bunch of peasants.'

'You don't grant any credence to the claim of demonic involvement?' one of the Cornerstones asked.

'Do you think a demon is running amok, putting women up the stick?' the bishop asked by way of a reply.

'I understand your scepticism, your excellency, and it underlines your bravery,' the Cornerstone said.

'Bravery? How so?'

'Bishop Malachy, it is clear you know your own mind, but if another asked for my counsel, I'd caution that if they ignore something which turns out to be demonic involvement, the reaction of the cardinals would be less than favourable. It might even be dangerous.'

'How so?' the bishop asked, his eyes showing a modicum of concern.

'Well, some might say not investigating demonic activity is akin to condoning it,' the Cornerstone said.

'It could be viewed as heresy,' the second added.

‘Leading to a trial,’ said a third.

‘And potential excommunication, or a worse punishment,’ the fourth said, making the sign of the cross.

‘I understand your thinking,’ the bishop muttered with a sigh, accepting opinion was against him. ‘The important thing is to root out anyone spreading misinformation about the existence of demons. However, I’ll consider the possibility of demonic involvement, albeit with some caution. What I need is evidence, so find me a woman who might be pregnant due to demonic intervention: an old woman who hasn’t had marital relations in decades, or a virgin. Just make sure it isn’t an attention seeker. Bring her to me and we’ll see if she gives birth to a yellow baby with an oversized penis and a voracious appetite.’

As the four Cornerstones left the room, Bishop Malachy raised his hand, indicating Brother Ignatius should remain. Fixing him with an angry glare, he moved closer until the two were face to face.

‘Brother Ignatius,’ he hissed. ‘I can guess it was you who raised my doubts about demonic involvement in front of the inner council. It is you who has formulated the idea an incubus is at large, so you’d better find proof for me. If you don’t, you’ll find yourself packed off to pastures new, pastures which are not very green at all.’

# 11: The Examination

The mood in the marketplace was unsettled, a crackling tension in the air. The shoppers weaved their way cautiously between the monks who eyed passing women with obvious suspicion. In one corner of the square, a prison carriage stood, its steel bars rusted and door wide open awaiting its occupants. An elderly man dragging a sack of onions approached one of the monks.

‘Is something going on, Brother?’ he asked, eyeing the number of monks meandering between the stalls. ‘Is it a day of devotion I’ve forgotten about?’

The monk waved his hand, gesturing the old man should move on.

‘Is there to be a procession?’ the man asked, ignoring the monk’s gesticulations.

‘It’s nothing to concern you,’ the brother snapped. ‘Now, get along.’

‘There’s a lot of clergymen about this morning,’ the old man said. ‘I’ve counted sixteen of your lot, and that’s just on this side of the marketplace.’

‘Sixteen or sixty, it’s no concern of yours, so piss off before I tell everyone you’re a paedophile.’

‘Why would you do that?’ the old man asked, unbothered by the monk’s growing level of anger. ‘I’ve never fiddled with a child; well, not since I was a child myself, and she initiated things.’

The brother pushed the old man aside and grabbed the arm of a passing lady.

‘Open your coat,’ he snapped.

‘Why?’ she shrieked, alarmed at the monk’s demand.

‘Just open it,’ he ordered.

The woman slowly unbuttoned the coat, her eyes watching the monk with distrust.

‘Hold it open so I can look at your stomach.’

She did as she was told, and monk placed his hand on her swollen belly.

‘What’s this?’ he asked, pressing against her gut.

‘Mostly gas and fluid retention,’ she replied, showing her anger at the intrusion. ‘Now get your hand off me before I call someone to break your fingers.’

‘Are you sure you’re not pregnant?’

The woman laughed, pulling her coat around her.

‘Pregnant? I’m fifty years old and some, and it’s been so long since my husband was able to perform, I’d bet there’d be cobwebs down there. If you’ve finished with your nonsense, I’ve got my shopping to do.’

The brother waved his arm and two more monks approached, one carrying a wooden baton which he waved in a threatening manner. Flanking the woman, they marched her to the prison carriage and pushed her inside.

Following at a safe distance, the old man waited until the monks had locked the door and left to collect another prisoner before sidling up to the wagon.

‘Did he tell you if there’s going to be a procession?’

‘No!’ she spat in anger. ‘All he wanted to do was feel my belly and ask if I was pregnant, and now they’ve locked me up.’

‘The dirty bastards,’ the old man muttered before dragging his sack of onions away.

Similar scenes played out across the market, the monks stopping women to check their bellies. Those with swollen stomachs were led away and pushed into the carriage. As word of the arrests spread, the mood grew ugly, people shouting and gesticulating at the brothers. A few scuffles broke out as husbands demanded the release of their wives. With the carriage full, the driver cracked his whip, and the team of mangy donkeys dragged the cart away.

An angry crowd formed, hurling abuse, along with a deluge of rotten vegetables and fish guts. The monks grouped together, and as the mob surrounded them a few stepped forwards, lashing out at those confronting them with sticks and scourges.

From the huddle of monks, one pushed his way to the front. Standing taller than the others and as broad as an ox, his head was covered with a sack, two holes burned into the rough hessian to enable him to see. The irate villagers instantly quietened.

‘If any of you raises a hand, or a voice, against the brothers, you will be taken away and tried for heresy.’

No one responded. There were no jeers or catcalls. Some at the front of the crowd slinked back into the throng, evading the Cornerstone’s glare.

‘Now, go about your business,’ the monk boomed.

As the crowd thinned out, the brothers turned and followed the carriage towards the abbey.

Once through the gates, the women were unloaded and herded into the courtyard. Stripped of their clothing, they stood shivering, their trembling hands trying to cover their private parts.

Looking out of the window from the bishop’s chambers, Brother Ignatius watched with interest. All the women were in their later years and showed distended bellies. They were an ugly bunch; only a demon would be willing to fuck any of them, Ignatius thought. Then he spotted her, a figure in black moving amongst the naked crowd.

‘Who the bloody hell is that?’

Bishop Malachy moved across to the window and looked down into the courtyard.

‘Who?’ he asked.

‘There,’ Brother Ignatius said, pointing. ‘There’s a bloody nun down there. She’s talking to the women and feeling

their bellies.'

Bishop Malachy emitted a contemptuous sigh and stormed from the room. Ignatius followed. Bursting through the external door, the bishop swept across the courtyard, heading straight for the nun. Spotting him, she broke away from the gaggle of naked women.

The bishop stopped short, gesturing for her to come to him. As she moved within earshot, he hissed, 'What in the name of God do you think you're doing?'

'Your excellency, I am Sister Imelda. Mother Superior, Sister Agnes, has sent me to help.'

'And what makes the Reverend Mother think we need help?'

'I am medically trained,' Sister Imelda replied.

Brother Ignatius joined the pair, slightly out of breath due to the bishop's frantic pace.

'She's here to help,' Bishop Malachy spat. 'She's medically trained, apparently.'

'This medical training of yours; were you a doctor or a nurse before you took your vows?' Ignatius asked.

'I was training as a vet, Brother.'

'A vet?' Brother Ignatius asked, a sneer on his face. 'All that means is you know how to castrate a pig; how can you help us?'

'I was to be a veterinary surgeon,' she replied, unflustered by his mockery. 'This makes it simple for me to differentiate between bloat and pregnancy. Without being rude, it's something you're not too skilled at, judging by the condition of many of these women.'

Ignatius prepared to deliver a response, but Bishop Malachy held up his hand, cautioning him to remain silent.

'Sister Imelda, are you telling me these women are not pregnant?'

The nun shrugged.

‘I doubt it, your excellency. Many are beyond the age of fertility, and those I’ve spoken to haven’t been involved in acts of reproduction with their husbands in recent times.’

The bishop turned away, the grimace on his face hidden from the nun. When he turned back, his countenance once more bore a smile.

‘Sister, for the sake of our investigation, let’s ignore their age, and we’ll also discount any claims they might make. Using your ... medical knowledge ... I need you to check over each woman and assure me of her condition.’

‘But your excellency—’

‘I know you mean well,’ Brother Ignatius interrupted, ‘but if you could examine them instead of drawing conclusions based on non-medical information, we would be grateful. After all, the Reverend Mother sent you here because of your training, not because of your powers of deduction.’

‘Very well,’ the nun said, and turned to the nearest woman.

Beckoning her over, she ran her hands over the swollen belly, prodding and pressing, before taking a Pinard horn from her robe and listening to the woman’s gut.

After a few moments she stood and said to the bishop, ‘This one needs a good dose of castor oil and within a few hours her stomach will be back to normal.’

She gestured to another woman, and as she pressed the sides of her distended stomach the woman emitted a long rumbling fart. The nun stood, wafting her hand under her nose to drive away the faecal stench of putrid decay, and said, ‘This one doesn’t need any castor oil.’

A third woman was diagnosed with the same condition, and fourth was identified as suffering from water retention.

‘Need I go on?’ Sister Imelda asked Bishop Malachy.

The bishop nodded, muttering, ‘Yes, please go on.’

The nun worked her way through the remaining women,

dismissing each with variations of the same ailments: abdominal gas, trapped wind, water retention and general obesity. Checking the final lady, the nun stopped for a moment in thought, and then restarted her tests. Spotting this, the bishop moved closer.

‘What is it, Sister?’

The nun placed the horn against the woman’s belly, listened, and then asked, ‘How old are you?’

‘I’m 62,’ the woman replied.

The nun shook her head and muttered, ‘It can’t be.’

‘It can’t be what?’ the bishop asked, his frustration becoming obvious.

‘When did you last indulge in an act of reproduction?’

The woman thought for a while, and replied, ‘I can’t remember. My hair wasn’t grey, my teeth were my own and my husband was still alive, and he’s been dead so long I can’t even picture his face.’

The nun listened to the woman’s belly again, ignoring the bishop’s repeated questions about what was happening.

‘How long has your belly been swollen?’ the nun asked, confusion etched on her face.

‘Two or three days,’ the woman replied in a matter-of-fact manner.

The nun stood and, stepping away from the woman, gestured that the bishop should move closer.

‘I don’t understand,’ she whispered. ‘If I didn’t know this woman’s age, that she hasn’t had sexual intercourse, and that her belly has only been swollen for a few days, I’d swear she was pregnant. Indeed, I’d swear she was well into her third trimester.’

Bishop Malachy turned to Brother Ignatius.

‘Take her inside; put her in the room we’ve prepared.’

Sister Imelda added, ‘I’ll need some supplies to ensure her treatment is—’

‘No, no,’ Bishop Malachy snapped. ‘We can take it from here, Sister. Give the Reverend Mother our thanks, and God bless you.’

Turning, he followed Brother Ignatius as the monk dragged the woman towards the building.

Once inside, Brother Ignatius handed the woman over to Brother Thomas.

‘Take her away and lock her up,’ he said. ‘Make sure someone keeps an eye on her, night and day. As soon as there is any sign she’s about to give birth, send for me. If you mess this up, you’ll regret it.’

Brother Thomas nodded, and then asked, ‘Where shall I put her?’

‘Do I have to think of everything?’ Ignatius snarled. ‘Put her in a room without any windows.’

As Brother Thomas led the protesting woman away, Ignatius shouted after him.

‘I know; put her in Brother Gregory’s cell. That’ll teach him to be such a bleeding heart.’

## 12: Sick

Walking towards the school gates, Diego trembled, partly with fear but mostly with shame. How would Maria react when she saw him? She'd taken a bold step on the riverbank, exposing her sex to him, and he'd vomited and run away like a little child. She'd have been offended by his behaviour, but would she have told anyone else what happened?

When Juan cried during his first French kiss, Violeta told everyone in class and the boy's life became hell. The other boys taunted and mocked him, a few backing up their cruel words with punches. The situation escalated to such a degree his mother took him out of school. No one had seen him since, but the rumour was he received daily lessons from a hired tutor who made him wear a dress and lipstick during lessons. If Maria told anyone what happened, Diego's life would be a misery.

Every child on the way into school seemed to stare at him as if he was some sort of monster. Were they smirking because of his disgraceful conduct? Were they talking about him, laughing behind his back about how he'd run, shocked at Maria's advances? César wouldn't hold back, mocking him for his childish reaction. From now on, his life would be a living nightmare. He'd be shunned and even the dull kids, the ones excluded from any social interaction, would look down on him.

Was it worth trying to think up an excuse for why he'd acted like an idiot? His head reeled with potential reasons. He could say Maria farted; the smell made him vomit. Maybe he should say she had shit streaks on her buttocks, or even that she'd shat herself in front of him. His shame increased at the thought of telling lies. She didn't deserve it, but if she'd told people about the incident, she wasn't a real friend.

Diego decided the best option was to say he'd been unwell, suffering with a stomach bug or food poisoning. He'd

been quiet in recent days, so some would believe he'd been sick. Would Maria call him a liar in front of the others, or would she accept the explanation?

Concerns over his friends' reactions was not his only source of inner turmoil. The Fornicator's growing preference for being sodomised was also taking its toll, both mentally and physically. The demon's anus was formed of old corn cobs, dry and brittle with numerous sharp edges. As a result, the skin on Diego's penis was cracked and scabby, a persistent itch making it impossible to go for long without scratching himself. Every time he tried to ease the irritation, his cock felt rawer, the skin burning.

Diego edged across the playground, trying not to make eye contact with any of the other children. César broke away from a crowd of sniggering boys and dashed towards him, a mocking grin almost cracking his face in two.

'It's insane,' César yelled. 'It's all anyone is talking about. Where have you been? I've been waiting for you to get here.'

Inside, Diego crumbled. He would be the laughing stock, the figure of fun, reviled and mocked by his peers. He'd have to find another school, maybe even persuade his parents to move to another village, one where no one would know about his shame. The urge to turn, to run, was overwhelming, but César had grabbed his arm and dragged him towards the group.

Pushing into the throng, César shouted, 'Xavier, tell Diego, tell him.'

Xavier grinned, enjoying his moment as the centre of attention.

'My oldest brother works at the abbey,' Xavier explained in a theatrical whisper. 'He does odd jobs for the monks, looking after the gardens and doing repairs.'

'Tell him,' César snapped, his impatience obvious.

'The monks went to the market and arrested a bunch of

women. They took them back to the abbey and made them strip naked in the courtyard.'

A flood of relief washed over Diego. This had nothing to do with Maria or him vomiting when she exposed her sex. That the monks were up to no good with naked women would take precedence over his childish reaction.

'Did they touch the women?' Diego asked, trying to mask his unease.

'It's better than that,' César said with excitement. 'Tell him, Xavier.'

'The women were arrested ... for being pregnant,' Xavier giggled.

'Pregnant?' Diego asked, somewhat underwhelmed by the story. 'Why did they arrest them for being pregnant?'

'Because,' Xavier exclaimed, pausing for dramatic effect, 'they'd been fucked by the Devil.'

The boys burst into laughter, slapping each other on the back. As their laughter died, Diego stood open-mouthed, unsure what Xavier was talking about.

'What do you mean?'

'It's simple, Diego,' César said with a manic grin. 'Are you that slow? They think the Devil is going around, fucking women, and making them pregnant. Xavier's brother overheard the monks talking about it.'

Diego froze with fear, a creeping terror crawling across every inch of his skin. Struggling to suck in breath, his face felt hot, burning up as his vision blurred and a lightheaded sensation washed over him. For the second time in as many days, he vomited.

The boys jeered and laughed as Diego sat on the ground, trembling, his jacket covered with curdled puke. He wanted to weep but knew it would only lead to even harsher mockery and probably a beating. He'd get no sympathy. The cacophony of mockery drew interest from across the playground, and as other

children joined in the hullabaloo, Maria stepped forward and helped Diego to his feet. Steering him away, into the school building and the cloakroom, she helped him clean the sick off his clothes.

‘Are you ill?’ she asked, wiping the vomit off his shirt.

‘I think I’ve got food poisoning,’ he muttered.

‘Good,’ she said, before adding, ‘I don’t mean good that you’re ill. Yesterday I thought you puked up because I revolted you; you should have said if you were feeling unwell.’

‘I’m sorry,’ he muttered, a tremble in his voice. ‘I was embarrassed and ... well, I don’t know why I ran away but ... I’m sorry.’

‘It’s okay,’ she said, her voice soothing as she finished wiping away his vomit.

In class, she guided Diego past the seat César had saved for him, and he settled next to her at the front of the room. As they waited for the arrival of Brother Ignatius and the start of the lesson, Diego felt his heart hammering against his ribs, a ball of tension building in his stomach. He wanted to stay silent, to keep his secret, to hide his involvement from the world, but he knew if he didn’t share the burden it would break him.

‘After school,’ he muttered, his eyes focused on the desk in front of him, ‘I need to talk to you about something.’

‘Okay,’ Maria whispered.

‘It’s important.’

‘Okay.’

‘It’s something that—’

Diego fell silent as Brother Ignatius stomped into the room, slamming the door behind him. Glaring around the room, he looked angrier than usual, almost apoplectic with rage. Someone was going to suffer, and Diego was relieved he wasn’t sitting next to César. The idiot was likely to antagonise the monk.

A palpable unease radiated from the children as the

brother turned to the blackboard and produced a piece of chalk. He wrote a single letter, an I, before spinning around to face the class as if he expected to catch them in some mischievous act. Seeing nothing but a few dozen terrified faces staring back at him, he turned and finished writing the word.

INCUBUS.

He underlined it with a flourish, before once more spinning to face the class and hurling the piece of chalk at César.

‘So help me God,’ he roared, ‘if any one of you little bastards wants to act up, today is not the day to do it. Now, get out your books and write it down in capital letters.’

The children opened their exercise books and did as they were told. Then they looked up at the monk, pencils poised, ready for a clue as to what the mysterious word meant.

‘An incubus,’ the brother declared, ‘is an evil spirit who takes the form of a man and lies with a woman in a sinful sexual act.’

Before he could ask to be excused, Diego vomited for a third time.

## 13: Giving Birth

Brother Ignatius hurried into the Abbey, his breathing heavy and erratic. Running from the school had been more effort than he'd anticipated; why hadn't they sent someone to drive him back? The class had descended into chaos after one of the boys puked his guts up, so the call from Brother Thomas was something of a relief.

Approaching Brother Gregory's cell, he could hear the rumpus inside. The monks wrestled the woman on the bed, struggling to tie her hands and feet to the frame as she wriggled and kicked in an attempt to get free.

'Call yourselves men?' Brother Ignatius roared from the doorway. 'You can't even control an old woman, and a pregnant one at that.'

'Pregnant with the Devil's spawn,' one of the brothers shouted as he tried to cling on to her kicking feet. 'Anyway, it's nice of you to turn up once we're nearly done.'

'Hold on a minute,' Brother Gregory pleaded to the gaggle of monks. 'Take the mattress off before you tie her down. I don't want her bodily fluids splashing where I've got to sleep. In fact, I don't see why you've got to use my bed for this. There must be one that's not in use somewhere else.'

With the ropes knotted, the old crone thrashed around, the bindings straining as she struggled to escape. Brother Ignatius stepped forward and, taking a rag from another monk, stuffed it into the woman's mouth to muffle her screams.

'Let her tire herself out,' he said to the others, who stepped back from the bed and watched as the woman wasted her last reserves of energy. After a while, her thrashing slowed and she stopped fighting, unmoving aside from the rise and fall of her chest as struggled to suck in air.

'Okay Brother Gregory,' Ignatius said. 'Get down there

and pull the bastard out.'

'Why do I have to do it?' Gregory asked, fighting against the hands of his colleagues as they applied pressure to his shoulders, pushing him down to kneel between the old woman's legs.

'There are two reasons why you have to do it,' Brother Ignatius replied with a sneer. 'First, I see midwifery as the sort of role that'd suit you, an ideal task for a simpering namby-pamby fellow such as yourself. Second, if whatever is inside her bites off your fingers, you won't be able to play that fucking harp, and I'm sure our ears will thank us for it.'

Forced into position, Brother Gregory muttered a prayer and opened his eyes. What confronted him looked like a rat that had been squashed by a cartwheel. It bore no resemblance to the trimmed and well-presented vaginas displayed in the magazines he'd confiscated from the altar boys.

Unsure what to do and fighting back the bile rising from his stomach, he reached out a trembling hand, stopping short of the mess of matted hair and sticky ooze.

'Shouldn't we send for Sister Imelda?' he asked, his trembling voice revealing the depths of his panic.

'Not at all,' Brother Ignatius snapped. 'Just push your hand in and drag the fucker out. It's straightforward; I've seen a vet do it. You need to get your arm in, up to your elbow, grab hold of a leg, and pull. Make sure it's slow and steady; don't just yank at the thing.'

'Are you sure? She's a woman, not a cow.'

'Just get on with it.'

Gregory reached out and prodded at the mess to try and find an opening. The woman recommenced her thrashing, evading the monk's invasive fingers. As she did, an acrid stench belched into Brother Gregory's face, forcing him to jump backwards. Gagging, he wafted his hand in front of his face, trying to clear his airways.

‘I’ve just remembered something,’ one of the monks behind him said. ‘I witnessed a birth a few months back, at the hospital, and the nurse gave the mother-to-be an enema. It was in case she farted or, even worse, shat herself when trying to push the baby out.’

With tears streaming from his eyes, Brother Gregory muttered, ‘The stench isn’t coming from her arse.’

The other monks offered up cries of encouragement and support, along with a hefty amount of mockery, as Gregory controlled his shaking hand and inserted his fingertips into the old woman’s vagina. She thrashed harder, her strength far in excess of what he expected from an ageing woman.

Swallowing back the acidic bile burning in his throat, Gregory pushed his whole hand inside. His wrist was slicked with blood and ichor as he felt around, trying to locate an arm or leg. Revulsion and fear exploded in his head and he fought back the urge to get up and flee the room.

‘I can’t do this,’ he sobbed. ‘We need to get Sister Imelda.’

‘Push your hand in a bit further,’ Brother Ignatius snapped. ‘You need to get hold of the bastard to pull it free.’

Brother Gregory pulled his hand out and wiped his fingers on his cassock, the frantic attempts to clean his skin leaving smears of pus and blood on the fabric. The stench was unbearable. Unable to suppress the rising vomit from his guts, he leaned over and hurled up his lunch. As he dry-heaved, his body trying to reject something his stomach no longer contained, the old woman’s vagina gurgled and bubbled like a blocked drain about to dislodge a chunk of shit.

Scrambling from between her legs, Gregory screamed, ‘It’s coming, whatever the fuck it is.’

The sounds became more violent, a liquid slosh accompanying a squirt of green slime and red viscous liquid, a rusty red rather than a bloody crimson.

‘What the fuck?’ Brother Gregory screeched as he crawled away from the spreading puddle.

‘It’s just her waters breaking,’ Brother Ignatius snapped. ‘Get back in there and pull the baby out.’

‘That,’ Gregory said, pointing to the ooze on the floor as he rose to unsteady legs, ‘is not water and it’s not natural either, and whatever is in there most certainly isn’t a baby.’

The old woman’s body bucked as severe contractions hit, and as her vagina dilated, a flash of yellow flesh smeared with gore appeared. One of the brothers stepped forward and flicked a bottle clutched in his hand towards the woman, sending a spray of holy water across her writhing body.

‘Calm down, Brother Thomas,’ Ignatius ordered. ‘You’re not in a fucking horror film. Can we all get a grip, please?’

‘I saw something in there,’ Brother Thomas said by way of an explanation.

For a moment, the woman ceased struggling, panting and trembling before exploding into a frenzied spasm, her moans so loud even the gag couldn’t smother them. As the brothers watched on, her vagina expanded and through the widening gap, a black beady eye set deep in a yellow face surveyed them.

‘Grab the bastard,’ Brother Ignatius yelled, but did not move himself, maintaining his distance from the demonic spawn. Brother Gregory was closest to the woman, and as he reached out the eye disappeared. Hesitating for a moment, he dropped his hands, and in that second the woman’s cunt ripped open, splattering Gregory’s face with blood and mucus as a yellow muscular being tumbled from her body and attempted to sprint across the room, heading for the door.

With its eyes locked on the escape route, the demon baby didn’t see Brother Ignatius pull his foot back, nor did it spot the kick coming, until the monk’s foot connected with the infant’s head and sent it spiralling towards the wall. Crashing into the

brickwork with a sickening thud, it dropped to the floor.

Brother Ignatius glared at the immobile body of the demon baby sprawled on the flagstones. The slight rise and fall of its chest showed it was still alive. On the bed, the old woman was convulsing, in the last stages of her death throes.

Ignatius signalled the other monks to leave the room and they filed out in silence. He remained, watching the yellow baby, ready to attack the demon if it showed any signs of recovery. Once assured it wasn't about to leap back into action, he made his way outside and pushed the door closed.

'That thing is trapped in there,' he said to Brother Gregory. 'Lock the door and don't let anyone in or out. I'm off to fetch Bishop Malachy. I'm warning you; if you let that baby escape, I swear to the Redeemer I'll hang you up by your balls until you turn blue.'

Turning, he hurried off down the corridor towards the bishop's chambers.

## 14: An Itch

Maria walked towards the village. Diego followed a few paces behind her, his shirt caked with dried vomit. Brother Ignatius refused to allow him to get cleaned up after he was sick, stating that learning about the forces of evil and their sinful ways was more important than any stomach bug. Thankfully, the monk had been called away on urgent business and they'd got out of class early. His guts burned, as did his prick, the rash seeping an ooze which, when dried, scabbed to his underpants. When he moved, it tore against the raw skin.

Brooding and lost in a whirl of depression, he lacked energy, as if he were wading through treacle, and only caught up with Maria when she stopped and waited.

'I think you should go home and rest,' she said. 'We can talk another time.'

'No, I want to talk to you; it's important,' Diego replied. He sounded weak, defeated, to such a degree it even shocked him when he heard his own voice. He was in too deep, and unless he confided in someone the situation would overwhelm him.

'You know what Xavier was saying today, about the monks seizing women because they'd been fucked by the Devil?'

'Forget what Xavier said, Diego. He's an idiot and was talking rubbish.'

'And then Brother Ignatius was talking about the incubus?'

'It's just religious mumbo-jumbo, a story to scare us into behaving as the church tells us to. Don't worry about it.'

Maria turned to carry on walking, but Diego grabbed her hand, turning her back to face him.

'What if I told you it was true?'

Maria laughed, not a mocking laugh or one tinged with pity, but a genuine response to what she thought was a joke.

‘It’s true, Maria. There is an incubus in the village, and he’s impregnating women to create an army of demons. I don’t know what he hopes to achieve once he’s got them, but he’s real. I know. I’ve met him.’

Again, she laughed, but as her giggle faded, her expression changed from amused to irritated, then to anger as her eyes widened and her lips tightened into a frown.

‘Diego, either you’ve got a fever and are delirious, or you think I’m an idiot like your stupid friends.’

Her voice lacked the warmth and humour she’d had a few moments before.

‘Do you really expect me to believe you’ve met an incubus? It’s odd you didn’t mention it before the other boys lapped up Xavier’s bullshit, or before today’s lesson. Why have you become like the rest of the morons, only interested in being the centre of attention?’

‘I wanted to tell you; well, to tell someone,’ Diego muttered, letting go of her hand. ‘I wanted to, but I was scared he’d ... it sounds mad, but he’s real. He’s the reason I keep being sick. I’m terrified of him. He made threats—’

Maria turned and walked off, picking up her pace as she strode towards the village. Diego watched her march away, unsure whether to follow her or not.

‘I trusted you,’ she shouted over her shoulder, ‘but you’re just an asshole, like your imbecilic friends.’

Breaking into a run, Diego chased after her.

‘Maria, wait,’ he shouted. ‘He threatened to do unspeakable things to my mother and father.’

She shrugged her shoulders and stomped onward.

‘And he threatened to do things to you.’

She slowed, her pace becoming hesitant.

Diego caught up and, sucking in breath from the exertion,

stood in front of her to stop her from walking. He wasn't sure what to say, what to do, but he needed to explain.

'I know it sounds like horse shit, but the demon is using me. He wanted me to help him, but when I refused he threatened to do awful things to people.'

She trembled, and asked softly, 'Why did he threaten to do things to me? What has any of this got to do with me?'

'I don't think it's personal,' Diego whispered. 'He wants to control me by hurting the people I love.'

As he spoke, he realised what he'd said.

'I mean I love my mother and father, so he threatened to hurt them if I didn't do what he asked.'

'And do you love me?' she asked, a mix of curiosity and trepidation in the question.

'I don't know why he included you.'

For a moment Maria looked away, as if hiding her reaction, before turning back to face Diego.

'What exactly did he say?'

Diego shifted uneasily. How could he explain her involvement? He couldn't tell her he'd been thinking about her when he shot his spunk onto the effigy, bringing it back to life. She wouldn't believe the Fornicator had read his mind and knew about his dirtiest thoughts, including those involving her.

'He said ... I don't want to repeat it.'

'What did he say?'

She was more insistent, more aggressive. It wasn't a request; it was an order.

Shuffling from foot to foot, anxiety creeping through his core, Diego whispered, 'He said he'd fuck you in all your holes, then make some more holes in you and fuck those too.'

Maria was silent, watching Diego as he absentmindedly scratched at himself.

'Are you rubbing your cock while you say that filth to me? Are you getting off on it?'

Her eyes burned, glaring at him with contempt. Looking down, he realising his hand was working at his groin.

‘No, Maria, I’ve got an itch. It’s a rash I got from ... well, it’s a rash. I don’t find the idea of the Devil torturing you arousing. It’s a nightmare I’m trapped in.’

She took a step closer to him, her eyes locked onto his, a confrontation he wanted to escape from but was unable to look away.

‘You were saying?’ she snapped.

‘Saying what?’

The turn in events was disarming, jarring him into a panicked state.

‘You were saying you got the rash from ... what?’

‘I don’t know.’

His answer sounded feeble to him, so she was bound to have the same impression. He’d wanted to share his problem, but the conversation wasn’t going how he’d expected. If anything, it was making things worse.

‘Listen, Diego, you’d better tell me the truth. You claim to have met a demon, an incubus, who threatened to do unspeakable things to me unless you helped him. On top of that, you have a rash on your cock which you don’t want to talk about. I don’t know what makes you think I’m interested in this nonsense, so unless you’re going to be honest, I’m off, and you can forget about being friends. Now, tell me the truth or I’m going home.’

Diego felt tears welling up in his eyes. Despite struggling to hold them back, they broke over his eyelids and tumbled down his cheeks. Trying to speak, nothing came out of his mouth but a pathetic whimper. His emotions were balanced on a knife-edge; he had to tell her, but the burning shame was creeping up his neck and reddening his face.

‘He makes me do a duty ... every day.’

Maria stood, impassive, listening but showing no reaction

on her face. It was obvious she wasn't going to speak or make things easy for him.

'I have to give him something, a donation. If I don't, he says he'll do terrible things to my mother and father, and to you. I don't want to help him. I tried to set him on fire. I thought it would get rid of him but he's too clever to fall for a trick like that. I can't win.'

She remained silent.

'That's the truth; I'm trapped, and I'm terrified of what might happen if I don't do as he asks.'

After another silence, she asked, 'What do you have to give him?'

'Please help me,' Diego whimpered.

'What do you have to give him?'

He struggled to speak, his mouth dry as if filled with ashes. The words were in his mind, circulating, echoing, but he couldn't say them out loud. The early evening air became overly hot, the sunlight flickering as he struggled to catch his breath, dizziness washing over him. He had to force out the words.

'He wants my spunk.'

He didn't see the slap coming, but it stung his cheek like a hornet.

'Fuck you, Diego,' Maria screamed. 'Fuck you and your dirty lies.'

Then she turned and strode away.

## 15: Captured

The monks lounged in the hallway outside Brother Gregory's cell, smoking and talking about the strange yellow baby.

'Did you see the dick on it?' Brother Thomas asked with a puerile grin.

'See it?' another replied. 'It nearly took my eye out.'

Brother Gregory wiped at his face, the gore smeared across his skin.

'I can't get the stench out of my nostrils,' he muttered. 'It's so vile I can taste it at the back of my throat. I don't think I'll ever be free of the interminable odour.'

'Rather you than me,' Brother Thomas said with a smirk.

As the sound of rapid footsteps echoed in the corridor, his face straightened, taking on a more serious air. Around the corner marched Brother Ignatius. Bishop Malachy followed, clutching his crosier more as if wielding an axe than carrying a ceremonial crook. The brothers extinguished their cigarettes and stood to attention, trying to appear as if they'd been diligently guarding the room.

'What's happened?' Brother Ignatius asked. 'Has the beast tried to escape? Has he tried to rip the door off its hinges?'

'Nothing's happened,' Brother Gregory replied. 'It's been quiet in there; maybe too quiet. The thing is probably still unconscious from that drop-kick your landed on its head.'

'It's a good job I got here in time or you shower of eejits would have let it escape,' Ignatius muttered. 'Now, everyone keep alert and remember what we need to do. We've got to overpower the demon spawn and restrain the bastard. It's important he doesn't get away.'

'What's the plan once we've grabbed him?' Brother Thomas asked.

‘I don’t know,’ Ignatius replied. ‘We’ll worry about that once we’ve overpowered him. All that matters is we don’t let him escape. Get ready; he’ll probably make a break for it when we unlock the door.’

The monks gathered round the door, arms outstretched, ready to grab the demon baby if he tried to run. Unsure of what might happen, the bishop took a few steps back, brandishing the crosier as if about to behead someone. Turning the key, Brother Ignatius glanced back at the waiting men and mouthed a count to three before flinging the door open.

The old woman was still tied down, a puddle of slime and gore oozing across the bedsheets and dripping onto the floor. The smell of death and decay hung in the air, a suffocating stench of malaise so thick and heavy it coated the insides of the monks’ noses. Between the old crone’s legs, a tangled mess of guts and tubes and torn flesh spilled from her destroyed vagina. Apart from her lifeless body, the room was empty.

Brother Ignatius strode into the room, gesturing for the others to follow. Once they were inside he barked his orders.

‘Shut the door and bolt it. If the demon’s hiding in here—  
,

‘Where can it hide?’ Bishop Malachy asked, incredulous at the suggestion. ‘There’s nothing in here, just the bed and what’s left of the old woman.’

The monks looked around, slowly nodding their agreement.

‘Let’s not have any pretence about what has happened here,’ the bishop declared. ‘It’s clear you useless bastards have let the demon baby escape ... if he ever existed.’

‘Oh, he existed,’ Brother Ignatius snapped. ‘This cell has no windows and just the one door. It has to be hiding.’

Even as he said the words, he doubted their validity. The room was empty, the bare metal bedframe too skeletal to conceal anything. A slop bucket stood in the corner, and that was

it. The monks looked around, shocked at the absence of the demon child.

‘I swear,’ Brother Gregory said, ‘it didn’t come out. The door was locked, and we were outside all the time you were gone.’

‘Maybe it went invisible,’ another monk muttered. Brother Gregory sighed and shook his head.

As the monks glared at each with accusatory looks, a sound came from the dead woman’s mutilated vagina, a chomping, chewing noise, a disgusting and stomach-wrenching slurping, as if something inside her was swallowing down her flesh and intestines.

Placing his finger to his lips, Brother Ignatius shushed the others before gesticulating with an upwards motion.

‘What?’ one of the monks asked in a whisper, unable to understand the signal.

‘I think it’s gone ... back inside,’ Ignatius hissed, frustrated no one understood his gesturing.

‘Not a chance,’ another monk said. ‘How could it have done that? It wasn’t exactly small.’

‘To be fair, her chuff was pretty messed up,’ Brother Gregory said, ‘but it wasn’t torn wide open like it is now, and there weren’t all those other bits hanging out.’

‘You’re right,’ Brother Ignatius said, pushing Gregory towards the bed. ‘Get in there and see if you can spot the little bastard.’

‘Why me?’ Brother Gregory asked. ‘Why can’t one of you lot have a look.’

‘What are you afraid of?’ Ignatius asked.

‘I just don’t see why it’s always me who has to do the shitty jobs.’

‘Enough squabbling,’ the bishop shouted. ‘Brother Ignatius, show them how it’s done.’

‘What, me?’

‘Yes, you. Show a bit of leadership. Have a look up her ... well, just have a look. Get on with it; I’ve got to ring the Angelus at sunset.’

Brother Ignatius spun around, looking for someone he could delegate the task to, but the others had backed away and were standing against the walls of the monastic cell. Turning back to face the woman’s body, he eyed the sticky mess which had once been her vagina. From inside her abdomen, the sound of chewing and slurping continued. It had to be inside her; there was nowhere else it could be hiding.

The thought of touching the seeping fleshy carnage her between the legs repulsed him, but he had no choice. The others were watching, and Bishop Malachy would make his life hell unless he did as he was told. There was an upside: the bishop refused to believe there was a demon baby but now he’d be forced to eat his words.

Brother Ignatius took a deep breath and examined the woman. Her body was split, a flap of torn flesh hanging over what was once her secret parts. Slowly he lifted it up, bending down and squinting inside the woman’s ripped cunt. All he could see was blood and gore, a mess of tissue and sinew and guts.

‘There’s nothing there,’ he said, surprised at the state of her body. ‘She’s empty; nothing at all—’

The demon baby exploded out of the woman’s ruined body so fast Brother Ignatius didn’t have time to react. Although muscular and bulky, it moved with great speed, amazingly agile given its size. Head down, it barged past the monk like a runaway train, the impact sending Ignatius crashing to the floor. As the yellow creature charged across the room, the other monks scattered. Unable to get away, they collided with each other, screaming like children as the demon ran frantically in circles.

‘Got hold of the bastard,’ Ignatius yelled, still prostrate

and struggling to rise. None of the monks obeyed his command, instead punching and kicking as they tried to get behind each other.

The demon ran faster and faster, becoming a blur as he tore around the tiny room, his huge erect cock standing proud before him. As he tore past, Bishop Malachy swung his crosier with all his might. The crook missed the demon baby's head, instead cracking Brother Thomas in the jaw. The monk went down, howling through split lips, fragments of bloody teeth ricocheting off the floor.

Brother Ignatius struggled to his knees, and as the demon ran towards him, the monk flicked his head, delivering a headbutt straight into its face. The nauseating crack of bone on gristle was followed by the crunch of the demon's nose being obliterated. For a second or two it stood swaying, dazed, a spray of blood jetting from its nose, before it fell to the ground like a sack of wet shit.

'Seize it,' the bishop yelled.

The monks fell on the demon baby, snatching at its limbs, sitting on the yellow entity to ensure it couldn't rise. Brother Gregory quickly untied a length of rope which had secured the old woman to the bed and, with trembling hands, tied up the unconscious yellow abomination.

Brother Ignatius rose, rubbing his head.

'Make sure you tie the fucker up nice and tight, Brother Gregory,' he roared. 'I'd hate to think what might happen if it got loose when I wasn't here.'

As the monks checked the demon was properly bound, Brother Ignatius opened the door and stepped into the corridor. Bishop Malachy followed him outside.

'Brother Ignatius, I must say—'

The monk held up a finger to his lips, indicating the bishop shouldn't speak. Then he leaned in and hissed, 'I knew demons were involved. I fucking told you so.'

## 16: Assembly

As Diego walked into the schoolyard, he spotted Maria talking to a group of her friends. Seeing him, she made her displeasure obvious, dramatically turning her head in the opposite direction to cement the fact she had no intention of speaking to him. However, when César saw him he came galloping over, a salacious grin on his face.

‘There’s an urgent assembly this morning. One of the monks wants to address us. I bet it’s about the naked women at the Abbey.’

‘It won’t be,’ Diego muttered through his depressed gloom. ‘It’ll just be Brother Ignatius giving us another lecture on sin.’

‘Wrong,’ César said, his voice loud and excited. ‘It’s another monk. He hasn’t been here before. He looks a bit of a nonce, so we can run rings around him.’

The pair walked towards the school hall, Diego trudging his unenthusiastic way while César tried to hurry him along.

‘Come on, Diego, we’ve got to get good seats. We need to be close enough to the front to see him squirm when he talks about anything dirty, but not too far forward so the teachers will see us laughing.’

The other children heading into the hall seemed bored, uninterested in the need for an unscheduled assembly. Such events were usually to announce forthcoming religious processions or impending charity collections. Once an urgent assembly had been held to inform the pupils that Pablo had fallen into the river and drowned. It was the only time an urgent assembly had been exciting. Usually, they only resulted in the children being forced to do something dull.

At the door of the hall, Xavier stood, surrounded by his cronies. He winked at César.

‘Xavier,’ César whispered. ‘Is this about the women at Abbey?’

Xavier nodded, and César delivered a friendly punch to Diego’s shoulder.

‘I told you; this is going to be good.’

The hum of chatter in the hall died down as the headmaster stepped forward to the podium.

‘Quiet children; calm down,’ he said, waiting until a hush descended across the hall. ‘Today we have a visitor to the school. Brother Gregory would like to talk to you about a serious ecclesiastical matter. I expect you all to listen and to refrain from talking or fidgeting while he speaks.’

Stepping back, the headmaster made room for the monk. Brother Gregory didn’t carry the threat which seemed to envelope Brother Ignatius. He was more relaxed, almost friendly, and his voice and mannerisms were tinged with femininity.

‘He’s one for the boys,’ César whispered before sniggering.

‘Good morning, children,’ Brother Gregory said, pausing to allow the pupils to echo back the greeting. ‘Today I want to talk to you about an important matter, about the importance of maintaining your guard against sinful ways.’

‘He means wanking,’ César whispered with a grin.

‘When we read about the Devil in the bible and scriptures, it is easy to believe he is a theological conceit, an allegory meant to represent the darker side of the turmoil associated with good and evil; that ongoing conscience-driven battle which exists in man’s free will.’

The headmaster stepped forward and said, ‘Brother, remember they’re children; keep it simple or they won’t have a clue what you’re talking about.’

‘Sorry,’ the monk said. ‘What I mean is the Devil isn’t just a make-believe character in Bible stories. He is real, and at times he walks among us.’

The children stared at the monk, uninterested in his speech. They'd heard it so many times before. Sensing he was losing their attention, Gregory increased his volume, taking on a more theatrical tone.

'Even today, in this modern world of ours, the Devil is manifest. He is out there, organising his armies of demons to deliver you unto temptation and sin.'

César's arm shot up. Spotting it, Brother Gregory was thankful someone was taking an interest.

'Yes? Do you have a question?'

'I do, Brother,' César replied. 'What sort of temptation and sin should we be aware of?'

'Every type of sin.'

'But is there a special one which the Devil is focusing on? If we knew what sort of sin to guard against, we'd be better equipped.'

Brother Gregory paused, his mouth dry. He hadn't wanted to give the speech, but Bishop Malachy insisted he did it. Brother Ignatius was usually involved in things at the school, but his help was needed creating a plan of action.

'Lust,' Brother Gregory croaked.

César's hand shot up again.

'Is there any kind of lust the Devil is specifically focused on?'

'All kinds of lust.'

César nodded his thanks to the brother for his clarity.

'As I was saying,' Gregory continued, 'we have identified the presence of ... well ... there are demons abroad who might be trying to find victims, and you all need to be aware, to be guarded, and ensure you don't fall under their spell.'

Some of the children shifted uneasily, and one girl near the back of the hall sobbed. The headmaster stepped forward.

'Brother Gregory, I think the children might have misun-

derstood what you're saying. Clearly there aren't demons running around the countryside, trying to lure the children into sin. It's more a case of guarding against immoral thinking, is it not?

Brother Gregory shook his head.

'I'm afraid not; I am talking about demons, real demons, physical manifestations of Hell's denizens, out there on the streets today. They're coming for you, children, make no mistake about that.'

A few more children started to cry, the mood of unease growing. As the babble of panicked conversation rose, the headmaster moved Brother Gregory away from the microphone.

'I will be reporting this matter to Bishop Malachy. I don't think he will be impressed.'

'It was the bishop who told me to come here and warn the children,' Brother Gregory replied. 'He has seen a demon, as have I, and there is no mistake the community is under threat.'

'Brother Ignatius should be here soon; he'll put you straight.'

'Brother Ignatius is with the bishop, planning how to deal with the situation,' Gregory replied.

'We'll see,' the headmaster snapped.

Irritated by the teacher's arrogance, Brother Gregory forced himself to adopt a more authoritative attitude.

'It gives me no pleasure to tell you this,' he said trying to remain calm, 'but the bishop did say if I received any resistance, I should remind you it is the mission which appoints teaching staff. Unless the guidance of the clergy is adhered to, it might be time for us to reconsider your position.'

The headmaster stood, stunned by the threat, and Brother Gregory returned to the microphone.

'Children, it is imperative if you see anything which raises suspicions, if you hear anyone talking of demons, if you

suspect anyone of being involved in any demonic activity, you must tell someone. Tell a member of the clergy, a teacher, a parent. To not speak out is a sin which will damn you to Hell. Even if it is a friend or family member, you must speak out or be ready to burn for all eternity.

Turning from the podium, the monk approached the headmaster.

‘I shall inform Bishop Malachy you have grave doubts about his decision to inform the children of the situation. I’m sure he’ll be in touch.’

He then marched down the steps from the stage and headed through the crowd of distressed children towards the door.

‘He said the sin was lust,’ César giggled. ‘I knew it’d be dirty. It must be true the Devil fucked those women.’

Diego, stunned, ignored his friend’s comment. What should he do? If he reported the presence of the Fornicator, would the corn demon carry out his threat? If he didn’t tell anyone, what would happen? With his head reeling, he didn’t see Maria appear next to him. Taking his arm, she steered him through the crowd and out into the morning air.

‘I need to talk to you about ... well, about the incubus,’ she said. Her words were partly a challenge, but also an olive branch.

‘I know you don’t believe me, but something strange is happening,’ Diego said, unable to make eye contact with her. ‘Maybe it’s not what I think it is; maybe it’s all in my head. I’m terrified. If I tell anyone, he might kill my family ... and you. If I don’t tell anyone, I’ve got to try and find a way to stop him myself and I don’t know how to do that. I tried setting him on fire and that didn’t end well.’

Her expression changed, her frown softening; maybe she could sense his vulnerability, his fear. Glancing around, Diego made sure he wouldn’t be overheard.

‘Maria, I value you as a friend, I truly do, but I have to deal with all this shit by myself. I know you won’t understand, nobody will, but I think the answer lies in the old ways. I have a feeling, and it’s just a feeling, that what’s happening now is somehow linked to what happened back then.’

She stood, unspeaking, staring into his eyes. She was judging him, not for what he was saying, but for his sincerity. Diego remained silent, his mind pleading with her to believe him.

‘Okay,’ Maria said with a sigh, ‘meet me after school, by the river.’

For the rest of the day, Maria avoided him. As the final class ended, César dragged him to one side.

‘Xavier and I am going up to the Abbey. They might arrest more women and make them undress in the courtyard.’

‘I can’t; I’ve got to get home,’ Diego replied.

‘Come on,’ César urged. ‘You’ve been a right dull bastard recently. Let’s go and peek at the nude women.’

‘I can’t; my mother is expecting me.’

‘Well, fuck off then, Mummy’s boy.’

César turned and walked away.

Diego headed out the school gates, followed the road towards the village, and when he reached the fence, he climbed over and took the path alongside the riverbank. Checking to make sure no one was following, he hurried towards the arranged meeting point, his hand constantly working to try and relieve the itching sensation in his groin.

‘Come on,’ Maria urged as he arrived, taking his hand and leading him towards the village.

‘Where are we going?’ he asked, anxiety spiking through his body. Was she about to insist on meeting the Fornicator? A wave of nausea pulsed through him. The corn demon wouldn’t be happy he’d told anyone about his existence. He’d punish them both. Diego slowed but Maria tugged his hand.

‘Come on; there’s someone I want you to meet, and please do me a favour and don’t scratch your cock when we get there.’

## 17: Great Uncle Hector

Cutting down a side street, Maria led Diego towards the poorer side of the village. His mother had warned him not to play in what she called the slum streets, but he followed his friend without comment. Most of the houses looked abandoned. At the end of the road, in a puddle of wet mud and what smelled like human excrement, a scabby white dog licked the weeping sores on its legs. As they approached, it looked up but didn't rise.

'Hello Jonah,' Maria said to the dog, before turning up a pathway towards a seemingly derelict house. The front door was open, and Maria went inside without any hesitation.

'Hector?' she called out. 'Are you home?'

A raspy cough rattled from a back room, its sound the epitome of failing health. Maria followed it, pulling Diego with her.

The house smelled of damp and decay, the odour of rot melding with a sharper stench. He'd smelled it before, when one of the street cats had moved into the outside toilet. The smell was so ripe Diego spat, worried swallowing his tainted saliva would contaminate his guts.

Maria frowned.

'Don't do that. Would you like it if someone spat in your home?'

'Sorry,' he muttered, but he was more shocked that she'd referred to the stinking shithole as someone's home.

As they entered the back room, the smell intensified to such a degree Diego's eyes smarted. Spotting a figure slumped in a chair by the window, Diego couldn't tell who, or what, it was. The face was skeletal with mottled skin, and dark veins traced complex patterns over the bald head. The eyes were dark and sunken, the lips thin and cracked, and the few teeth on

show protruded at varying angles.

Diego fought back the urge to run, but Maria smiled at the thing.

‘Hello Hector, are you well?’

Hector nodded, then erupted into a coughing fit.

‘Hector, this is Diego. I go to school with him. Diego, this is my great uncle Hector.’

The dead sunken eyes swivelled in his direction. Diego tried to say hello, but the words caught in his throat.

‘Hector, I ... we ... wanted to talk to you,’ Maria said.

‘We’re doing a project at school about the old ways; you know, the local rituals before the missionaries came.’

‘The monks are teaching you about those times?’ the old man asked, his voice rough and croaking. ‘I thought it was forbidden.’

‘It’s history,’ Maria replied. Turning to Diego, she added, ‘Hector is the oldest man in the village. He was here before the missionaries arrived. If there’s anything you need to know about those times, he’s the man to ask.’

Hector turned to Diego and smiled, a skull-like grin which was more chilling than reassuring. He might have looked like a corpse, but as he talked of his childhood, his sunken eyes sparkled.

‘We lived off the land. If there was a need for something, we made it. Those who didn’t farm did something else: they wove or baked or made pots. It was hard, but we were happy. After the harvest, we’d have a carnival, and everyone would dress up as the things which were important to them. Farmers dressed as the sun, bakers as fire, weavers as cotton plants; it was all a bit of fun. There was dancing and drinking and merriment. The missionaries didn’t care for it, but it was just a big party.’

‘Where did the shrines come from?’ Diego asked.

‘Again, it was a bit of fun. People made little shrines dedicated to whatever was important to them and left offerings: food or cups of wine.’

‘So that was your religion?’ Diego asked.

‘No, not at all,’ Hector replied, his voice shaking with mirth as he chuckled at the idea. ‘It wasn’t religion; it was superstition. We didn’t worship the sun or fire; we weren’t fools. The offerings were for luck, a bit like turning around three times if a goat blocks your path or spitting on the head of a cross-eyed child.’

‘So why did people put effigies in the shrines?’ Diego asked.

‘During the carnival, some people would dress scarecrows to match their own costumes and decorated the streets with them. When the party was over, we’d burn them. One year, it rained all summer. Someone suggested it was because we’d burned the scarecrows. After that, we put them in the shrines when the parties were over.’

‘Is that when you started worshipping them?’ Maria asked.

‘We didn’t worship them,’ Hector said, his voice giving away a creeping level of frustration. ‘Out of superstition, we stopped burning the scarecrows. The next summer was good, and so it became the thing to do, to put the effigies in shrines. When the missionaries came, they accused us of worshipping idols. They burned the shrines and told us if we promised not to build any more, we could have schools, shops, plumbing, electricity and all the other fine things we enjoy today.’

Diego was uncomfortable asking his next question.

‘When they burned the shrines, did any of the ... demons ... survive?’

‘Demons?’ Hector asked with contempt. ‘What makes you think there were demons?’

‘That’s what the monks told us at school,’ Maria quickly

replied, throwing a glance towards Diego to warn him against using such terms.

‘The missionaries never understood our ways,’ Hector said, his passivity returning. ‘They didn’t want to listen, and all we wanted was plumbing and electricity and televisions. We weren’t giving up much; just silly superstitions.’

‘Were there other things the people made effigies for?’

‘Such as?’ Hector’s eyes widened, as if he already knew what Diego was asking.

Diego felt awkward, unsure of how to answer.

‘Sex,’ Maria said, saving him embarrassment.

Hector laughed, and then sat smiling for a few seconds.

‘The young men made effigies for all manner of things: wine, playing cards, cock fighting and yes, sex too. It was our way of having fun. The missionaries thought we were involved in debauched orgies, so they promised us more luxuries if we converted to Christianity. In a way, the scarecrows helped us get a better life.’

Hector shifted in his chair.

‘Maria, darling, will you make me some coffee?’

She nodded and rose, leaving the room. Hector turned to face Diego, his eyes glowing. However, they glowed with anger rather than nostalgia for a lost youth.

‘Let me ask you something, Diego. Do you take me for a fool?’

Awkwardness flooded through Diego’s body, a prickling feeling of unease crawling across his skin.

‘I don’t understand’ he replied.

‘You come in here with some cock-and-bull story about a school project, asking about the old ways. You’re up to something. Tell me the truth, and who knows? I might be able to help you.’

Diego took a deep breath, trying to prevent the fearful tremble in his voice.

‘I was in one of the shrines and there was a corn effigy. He says I brought him back to life, and now he’s making me perform a daily duty. If I don’t obey, he’ll hurt my parents and he’ll hurt Maria too. I don’t know what to do.’

As he heard the words come out of his mouth, he realised how insane it sounded. He was babbling like a child, and no doubt Hector would be further enraged by the inanities he’d spouted.

Hector settled back in his chair and seemed to relax. Stretching out a withered and bony hand, he pointed at Diego.

‘If you fear something, you give it life. There are no ghosts, but if I fear them haunting my house, they will do so. The rain is pleasant, but if I fear it is corrosive, it will burn my skin. If I fear a corn effigy is a demon demanding sperm, he will do so.’

Diego struggled to breath, a freezing tension spreading across his chest. He hadn’t mentioned what his duty was, but Hector had guessed accurately.

‘Many years ago, there was talk of a demon harvesting sperm,’ Hector continued. ‘A serpent woman collected the semen for him. In exchange for their discharges, the local men were promised the ability to have any woman they desired. The villagers condemned them, because instead of working, they spent their time smoking caco-caco and jerking off.

‘Most of those men are dead now, but the one who remains will tell you not to allow the demon to take control of your life. Stand up to it, fight back, do what feels right. Be honest to yourself, and no demon can defeat you. Remember, if any harm comes to your or to your family, or to Maria, it is because you allowed it to happen.’

‘Are you the one who remains?’ Diego asked.

‘Don’t worry about who I am; worry about who, or what, you may become. I’ve seen you scratching at yourself while you’ve been here. If you dance to that tune, you’ll never be the

same again.'

Hector slumped back, suddenly appearing tired and weak.

'Tell Maria it's too late for coffee. You'd better go, and make sure she gets home safely.'

Diego went to the kitchen. Taking Maria's hand, he led her out into the street. It was dark, the moon up in the sky.

'It's later than I thought, and we need to get home,' Diego said with panic. 'My parents will be angry I've missed supper, and I've got to...'

He stopped himself from saying he needed to do the daily duty. Maria squeezed his hand and the two walked quickly through the village. On reaching his street, Diego paused.

'Thanks Maria.'

'I hope it helped,' she whispered.

Diego watched as she walked away before going into his house.

In the kitchen, his mother sat at the table. She didn't rise as he came in, nor did she berate him for being late. She had a vague look on her face, wistful, close to a smile.

'Hello Diego,' she said, as if unaware of the time, lost in a daydream.

'Is there any supper?' Diego asked.

'I'll fetch it for you.'

His mother stood, and as she turned he noticed her belly. It was swollen.

## 18: The God King

Diego watched his mother as she moved around the kitchen. While she appeared to be calm, almost too calm, he struggled to hold back the bubbling bile in his stomach. It was obvious what had happened.

‘Are you okay, Mama?’ he asked, fighting to suppress the emotion in his voice.

She gazed at him, a vague smile on her face.

‘I’m fine; why would you ask?’

‘You seem a bit ... like you’re not with us.’

Diego was careful with his words; his mother wouldn’t tolerate any rudeness.

‘I must have been dozing,’ she said, and then her smile broadened as her hand stroked her swollen belly.

‘Did someone come to the house? Were you attacked?’ As he spoke, his fingernails dug into the palms of his hands in attempt to keep his emotions in check.

Oblivious to his inner turmoil, his mother giggled to herself as she fetched the pans to make supper.

‘Diego, you’re so silly at times. What makes you ask such strange questions?’

An icy chill washed over him. This wasn’t how his mother behaved. She was organised, alert, and not given to frivolous conversation, but now she was acting like a love-struck teenager.

‘I don’t know,’ he replied. ‘You just seem a bit, well, wistful.’

Her smile spread.

‘I had a nice dream; that’s all.’

Diego shuddered. The Fornicator had said he impregnated his victims while they were sleeping, while he enchanted them.

‘What sort of dream?’ Diego asked.

‘It was nothing,’ his mother replied, but she blushed, her cheeks flushing a rosy hue.

Diego swallowed back the questions he wanted to ask and went upstairs. As he was about to go into his bedroom, he heard a sound, a muffled moan, from his parent’s bedroom. Moving across the hall he listened against the door. It was silent.

‘Is that you, Papa?’ he said quietly.

There was no reply, but the silence felt unnatural. Gently taking hold of the handle, he turned it, so slowly, careful not to make a sound. Once the latch was unfastened, he let the door swing open.

His father was on the bed, naked. Laid on his back and trussed like a Christmas turkey, his knees were tied to his shoulders with loops of rope, exposing his genitals and anus. His eyes flicked towards Diego, showing a mix of fear for his own predicament and panic for his son’s wellbeing. He tried to cry out, but the large red apple jammed in his mouth meant all he could do was emit a muffled moan.

Diego stepped into the room, uncertain what to do, and too late realised the Fornicator stood on the other side of the bed, grinning at him.

‘What are you doing?’ Diego demanded.

‘You had a duty, and you were late.’

The Fornicator’s tone was dismissive.

‘What did you do to my mother?’

‘Open your fucking ears; you were late.’

‘Let my father go, right now,’ Diego bellowed.

‘My oh my,’ the corn demon giggled. ‘The little boy thinks he’s a man. How you delude yourself, Diego.’

Remembering Hector’s words, Diego roared, ‘I am not afraid of you.’

‘Yes you are,’ the Fornicator replied.

‘No, I am not afraid.’

‘Then why have you pissed your pants?’

Reaching out his dried cob fingers, the corn demon pointed to the growing damp patch on Diego’s trousers.

‘Let my father go,’ Diego repeated, his voice trembling as he struggled to hold back his tears. The Fornicator grinned, his eyes blazing, not with anger or rage, but with something akin to a conspiratorial moment shared between the two of them.

‘I’ve got an idea,’ the corn demon said with a wink. ‘I was going to punish you for being late, but maybe instead I should give you a reward; something grand to cement our future relationship. You should be revered by people, allowed indulgences that ordinary men are denied. I could make you a god king if you like.’

‘I don’t want to be a king,’ Diego snapped.

‘You’re right, trust me on that. Being a king isn’t all it’s cracked up to be, but a god king is better; so much better. Kings come and kings go; they’re assassinated, overthrown, ignored, belittled. Kings are always clinging on to their power, but a god king rules supreme, and you have the right credentials to become a god king.

‘Think about it, Diego. Your mother is pregnant and your sperm fertilised her. The demon child she spawns will grow so fast he’ll be ... well, he’ll be your new father once we’ve killed this pathetic specimen. You’ll have fertilized your mother and the fruit of your loins will be your own father. Call me old fashioned, but that’s about as god king as things get. What do you say?’

Diego was shaking, the shock of the situation washing through his body, every sinew and muscle burning as he realised what the demon was proposing.

‘You can’t kill him, please.’

‘If I don’t kill him, what will happen? Every time you

look at him, you won't see your father. You'll see a trussed-up bitch-man being fucked in the arse. That's all you'll remember. You'll despise him for his weakness; you'll be contemptuous of his inability to protect you; you'll regret him not dying this very night.'

On the bed, Diego's father struggled against the ropes binding his limbs. Bubbles of spittle appeared around the edges of the apple, but his cries for mercy were too muffled to be decipherable.

'Please let him go,' Diego sobbed.

'What?' the Fornicator asked, his voice louder and more aggressive. 'Would you rather a disgraced and humiliated husk of a man be your father than ascend to your rightful place as a god king? What nonsense are the priests and nuns filling your head with? There was a time when god kings ruled the world, and those times will return, but you'd rather have a pathetic streak of piss as a father than join their ranks. I don't believe it.'

'Believe it,' Diego muttered. He wanted to be brave, to show no fear, but inside he was crumbling.

'If I don't kill him, if we don't kill him, you'll have to stand there and watch while I pierce his anus. You're going witness me cleaving his asshole asunder.'

'You can't force me to watch,' Diego muttered, regretting the words as they left his mouth.

'I can and I will,' the Fornicator said, a humiliating tone to his response. 'Even if I have to peel off your eyelids and weld your head to the bed frame, you'll watch. Even if I decapitate you and stick your fucking head on a spike, you'll watch every moment of it. You'll watch me bugger him or I'll kill him and your cunt of a mother, and everyone and anyone who's near and dear to you.'

Diego's father twisted and bucked, the ropes cutting into his body as he increased his struggle. Glancing at his eyes, it

was hard to see if he was pleading for Diego to preserve himself and watch the assault, or to fight off the demon and save him.

The Fornicator shrugged and reached between his legs. Jerking his hand, he glared at the bound man on the bed and whistled.

‘Let’s do this,’ he sneered.

As he advanced on Diego’s father, his cock stood proud. Despite his body being dried corn husks and brittle cobs, his penis was a swollen yellow corn cob, fresh and juicy. As he lined it up for entry, Diego looked away.

‘Remember what I said,’ the Fornicator snapped. ‘You know what’ll happen if you don’t watch.’

Diego watched as the corn demon entered his father. He watched as the ghoul humiliated the man who’d always been there for him. He watched as he saw his father’s pride being torn away, his masculinity destroyed, his stoicism eroded as the apple muffled his frantic screams. He watched the pain, the violation, the destruction of a man’s entire life.

The Fornicator was increasing the speed and force of his thrusts. With a jerk, he leaned forward. In his hand was a maize knife, the long blade used to hack the cobs from the plants hovering over his father’s throat.

‘No,’ Diego screamed. ‘Please don’t kill him.’

The corn demon turned to Diego and laughed, a long cackling laugh of mockery.

‘I won’t kill him,’ he giggled. ‘I just wanted him to tighten his sphincter.’

Diego wanted to vomit, to expel the burning bile churning in his guts, but he struggled to hold it in. The Fornicator was laughing as he once more increased the intensity of his thrusts, his assault on the bound man becoming ever more violent.

As the corn man emitted an orgasmic howl, he raised the

knife and plunged the blade downwards, into the neck of Diego's father. Pulses of blood spurted over the Fornicator, whose celebratory whoops and jeers built into an ear-splitting crescendo as he fucked the life out of the man.

For a moment, time slowed down, the noise fading into silence. Feeling light-headed and unable to stop the room from spinning, Diego slumped to the floor.

## 19: Preparing for Battle

‘In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti.’

Bishop Malachy made the sign of the cross, blessing those gathered around the table.

‘Amen,’ they echoed and sat.

One side of the table was occupied by the four Cornerstones, their heads covered with the obligatory sacks, malevolent eyes peering out from the burn holes. Opposite them sat Brother Ignatius and Brother Thomas, alongside two aged priests. At the far end of the table, Brother Gregory was hunched over a large ledger, pen in hand.

‘Brother Gregory,’ the bishop said, ‘in your role as secretary I would ask that our initial conversations are not noted down in the minutes, as they may be somewhat exploratory in nature.’

Gregory nodded and put down the pen.

‘Gentlemen,’ the bishop continued, ‘I would like to introduce you to our two guests. Given the nature of the situation we find ourselves in, I feel it prudent they have an involvement in any decision-making. Canon Barnabas is the commander-in-chief of the church militia. Because of the scale of our current challenges, I have requested the support of his forces during the coming days. The militia will remain under his command, but he will be guided by the inner council.’

Canon Barnabas nodded to others.

‘Next to him is Monsignor Isaac, who heads up the department of inquisitions for the diocese. He will lead an investigative team which will be located here in the Abbey. It will handle the gathering of intelligence during the ongoing crisis. If you identify any persons of interest, you must bring them here and pass them over to the Monsignor. He will coordinate all interrogations.’

The monsignor smiled after his introduction. Brother Ignatius shuddered. At first glance, the man looked old, tired, maybe even fragile, but his eyes revealed a depth of inner cruelty. There was no doubt he'd be happy to inflict the most horrific tortures if he needed to obtain a confession.

Bishop Malachy continued.

'We have established the presence of demons in our midst and managed to capture one. There will be others; how many, we cannot accurately say. Their intention seems to be to breed and produce more of their kind. Thankfully, they are bright yellow and have unfeasibly large sexual organs, so they'll struggle to conceal themselves amongst the locals. Our task is to hunt them down, every last one of them, and destroy them.

'There will, no doubt, be a number of heathens and rabble-rousers out there who'll try to hide them from us. These miscreants are as much a risk to our authority as the demons themselves, so we need to weed them out. The best approach might be to put them on trial for heresy. If the peasants see a few hangings, they'll quickly fall into line.'

'Do we know how to destroy these demons?' Canon Barnabas asked.

The bishop nodded to Brother Ignatius.

'We ... well, I ... managed to capture a demon,' Ignatius said, fighting to conceal his pride. The canon and monsignor might outrank him, but he'd wrestled with a physical manifestation of Hell and won. 'After his apprehension, I carried out a series of experiments to see what might kill him. Running him through with a sword had no effect and chopping off his head only resulted in the body running around in circles while the head screamed and tried to bite me. Hacking off his limbs stopped him from running around, but the arms and legs still wriggled. Fire, it seems, is the only thing which killed the beast.'

The canon nodded, mulling over the information.

‘Have you considered the use of bait?’ one of the Cornerstones asked.

‘Bait?’ the bishop replied, confused by the question.

‘Bait, as in young women to lure in the demons. If birthing more devils is their goal, they’re going to be seeking out women to impregnate.’

‘They seem to prefer older woman as their vessels,’ Brother Ignatius replied. ‘The demon babies are quite some size; I doubt a younger woman would have the flexibility downstairs to birth one.’

‘Is that statement based purely on conjecture?’ Monsignor Isaac asked, a sickening grin dancing along his lips.

‘No; a few of us here saw the woman who birthed the demon we captured, and the state of her clacker was atrocious. The spawn of Satan needs some stretch in the undercarriage of their mothers to evacuate the womb. I doubt they’d get out unless the vagina had plenty of slack’

‘Enough,’ Bishop Malachy muttered, tiring of the discussion. ‘Let’s not allow Brother Ignatius’ observations on the female reproductive organs bog us down. We need to seek out the yellow bastards and destroy them, without mercy. Every house, every farm, every woman with a swollen belly will be under suspicion. We will not relent until we have rid the countryside of the demons and those who seek to offer them shelter and support.’

The four Cornerstones nodded, accepting the plan. Canon Barnabas blessed himself to signify his acceptance. Monsignor Isaac grinned his macabre grin and Brother Thomas bowed towards the bishop.

‘Shall I note down your instructions in the minutes?’ Brother Gregory asked.

The bishop nodded his consent.

‘Wait, Brother Gregory; don’t write anything yet,’

Brother Ignatius said, frustration evident in his exclamation. ‘I think you’ve all missed something. Think back to how this all started. Mother Superior didn’t ask us to investigate the birth of yellow babies who grew at an accelerated rate. We were looking into demonic pregnancies. The yellow devils do not cause the pregnancies, as far as we are aware. They are the result of ... something unknown ... impregnating the women. This something unknown has the power to make barren women pregnant, seemingly without having intercourse with them, or without them realising it’s had intercourse with them. Not one woman was aware of having sexual relations, and certainly not with a yellow demon sporting a monstrous penis.

‘The easy part of our task is rounding up the demon babies, but the real challenge is finding and neutralising the cause of the pregnancies, the something unknown. Unless we destroy their maker, we’ll never win.’

Bishop Malachy sighed, his head dropping forward. Brother Ignatius was developing a habit of making him look stupid in front of the inner council. Despite having numerous opportunities to discuss the situation, he preferred to raise his objections in the company of others. It was time for payback.

‘Good thinking, Brother Ignatius,’ he muttered through gritted teeth. ‘I want you to take charge of the search for the, as you put it, something unknown. As such, I am seconding you to the church militia until this matter is resolved. Canon Barnabas, Ignatius will be wholly under your command and I insist you use him on the front line in your battle against the demonic forces.’

‘But your excellency,’ Brother Ignatius croaked, ‘my duties at the school are critical in this time of religious uncertainty—’

‘No, no, no,’ Malachy said with a fake smile, ‘Brother Thomas will step into the breach at the school. It is only right that a man like yourself with such expertise in demonology is

in the thick of the fight. Maybe the militia will benefit from your insightful observations. You seem all too willing to share your knowledge with me, so I'm sure the soldiers of our faith will be eternally grateful for your guidance.'

The room fell silent. Bishop Malachy pointed at Brother Gregory and gestured he should pick up the pen. Once the monk was ready, the bishop made his declaration.

'It has been decreed by the inner council that the general clergy, under the guidance of the Cornerstones, shall investigate any and all links with idolatry, devil worship or demonic rituals amongst the general populace. Anyone suspected of involvement in such acts, or who has knowledge of others involved, shall be arrested by the church militia and passed to Monsignor Isaac and his team for further investigations.

'The church militia, under the direct command of Canon Barnabas, will also seek out the source of the impregnations. Involved in this team will be Brother Ignatius, who will risk life and limb to bring the matter to a swift conclusion. During his absence, Brother Thomas will take over his duties at the school.

'This is the decree of the inner council, guided by the will of God, and shall not be changed by any mortal. Amen.'

'Amen,' echoed the others around the table, all except for Brother Ignatius.

## 20: In Chains

Diego's limbs felt heavy. He blinked awake, his eyes struggling to focus. At the back of his throat the bitter, acidic taste of puke burned as a reminder of what he'd witnessed. As the room swam into focus, he realised he was in the gloom of the shrine. The air was cold and damp, but his skin was clammy with sweat.

Struggling to mentally piece together how he'd arrived here, a spike of anxiety shot through him as the memories resurfaced. His mother had been in a strange mood, distracted, and her belly was swollen. He'd gone upstairs and heard moaning. His father was trussed up and naked, and the Fornicator had ... killed him?

It couldn't have happened. It had to be a trick, a cruel mockery instigated by the demon. The Fornicator had transmogrified into the woman from the shop, so he could pull off a deception like this. Surely the slaughter of his father was a ruse, designed to bully him into delivering more semen. Even so, Diego dry heaved at the thought of his father's demise. Nothing came up; he'd vomited his stomach dry.

The pains in his arms increased, but as he shifted position, he realised he was chained to a pillar. A mixture of panic and rage welled up inside him.

'Let me go!' he shouted.

His howl echoed in the shrine.

'I said, let me go!'

'Ssshhh, you'll wake the dead.'

The Fornicator was beside him, whispering in his ear. As his emotions erupted, Diego tried to jump on the demon, to rip him apart with his bare hands, but the chains held him back. The energy he threw into the attempted attack was wasted.

'Let me go,' he repeated, trying to suppress his fear and

inject a touch of authority into his tone.

‘I’ve chained you up for your own good, Diego,’ the Fornicator said. ‘You’ll thank me later; that much I promise.’

‘Don’t lie. This isn’t for my own good. You know I’ll report you to the clergy. They’ll come after you.’

‘I know you’ll report me; that’s why I’ve chained you up. Like I said, it’s for your own good.’

‘That’s horseshit and you know it,’ Diego spat.

‘Think about it. Use your head and not your cock for once. You’ll go running to the clergy and take them to your house. What will they find? Your mother, pregnant with a demon. She’ll swear on the bible you and your father were the only other people in the house. She’ll tell them you went upstairs, and what will they find when they go looking? Your father, bollock-naked and trussed up with his throat cut. They’ll also find your semen dripping out of his back entrance.’

The Fornicator settled down, sitting on the ground next to Diego as he continued.

‘You’ll protest your innocence, telling them it wasn’t you who sodomised your father. You’ll tell them the Devil did it, and they’ll put you in a padded cell. Meanwhile, your mother will be torn asunder when she births my spawn, and she’ll bleed out, all alone, on the kitchen floor. As I said, chaining you up is for your own good.’

‘They know about you,’ Diego said, his threat tinged with desperation. ‘You should let me go and find somewhere else to hide. They’re coming and they’re going to destroy you. A brother came to the school and told us they’re on your trail.’

The Fornicator pushed his face close to Diego. Screwing up his eyes and wobbling his lips, the corn demon pretended to cry.

‘Oh, woe is me. They’re coming ... for me? They’re going to destroy little old me?’ His voice trembled with fake emotion. ‘I’m so frightened ... oh no, what shall I do? A bunch of

frock-wearing bible-bashers are going to get me. Boo hoo hoo. I'm so afraid. I hope they don't pray for my immortal soul or ask me to touch their tinkles.'

Standing, the demon disappeared into the gloom, reappearing a few seconds later. He tossed the bowl of woven corn leaves onto the floor next to Diego.

'Don't forget your duty,' he said, his voice cold and emotionless. 'I don't think you'd want me to punish anyone else because of your tardiness.'

'I can't,' Diego muttered, despair washing over him.

'You better had. Think of your poor mother, all alone. Once she gives birth to her demon, I daresay the little bastard will fuck her to pieces. If you're not there to help her, it'll be your fault when she gets banged into the next life. Now, do you duty.'

'How can I?'

'There's enough slack in the chains for what you need to do.'

Chained up in the dark and damp, Diego struggled to gain an erection, let alone masturbate. Losing sense of time, it seemed the Fornicator was pushing him to perform the duty every few hours. The skin on his cock was raw, and although he couldn't see clearly enough to examine it, it felt rough and scabby.

The amount of semen he produced got smaller with each ejaculation, and the Fornicator's anger increased.

'What's this?' he howled, shoving the bowl under Diego's nose. 'What do you suggest I do with this? I'm warning you; your mother's belly is getting bigger, and soon she'll be at the mercy of her own baby demon. Do you want her to die on the end of his cock? Unless you give me more, you can forget about going home.'

'People will miss me,' Diego muttered, in hope the demon might reconsider his plight.

‘Who’ll miss you?’ the demon sneered. ‘Your dead father? Your knocked-up mother? Your stupid friends at school? If you want to see the outside world again, fill the bowl.’

In between wanking, Diego drifted into a daze, sobbing himself into a half-sleep which was haunted by terrifying dreams. All too soon, the Fornicator would wake him, demanding he did his duty again.

The process was increasingly painful. His cock burned, the skin dry and flaking; Diego was sure it was infected. He could picture the skin, red and cracked, with yellow pus oozing through the cuts and lesions. While the jerking was agonising, the ejaculations were worse. A searing pain in his testicles spiked up into his groin, a fiery spasm hitting him in the pit of his guts as a solitary bead of semen appeared at the eye of his penis.

Wracked with cramps, Diego drifted, not so much into sleep as a delirious state. He prayed he wouldn’t wake but instead continue to drift into the darkness, into the solitude which represented a peace from which no one could wake him. The aches and pains receded, a soothing tiredness washing over him. If this was the end...

A sharp crack around his face snapped him back into the gloom. The Fornicator leaned over him, the bowl hanging between his fingers.

‘Time to do your duty.’

‘I can’t,’ Diego sobbed.

‘Fine,’ the Fornicator said with a shrug. ‘If you want to sleep, then sleep. I’ll amuse myself tearing the demon spawn from your mother’s rancid cunt and shoving it up her anus.’

Diego took the bowl with trembling hands.

His shaft burned as he gripped it in his fist, an itching as if an army of fire ants were burying themselves in his septic flesh. Despite the agony, he worked at his cock, trying to dredge up any sexual mental images to get the job done. His

fantasies had become so depraved he often lost any sense of arousal as self-disgust enveloped his thoughts, but despite the depths to which he'd sunk, he pushed on through the pain.

Getting close to the end, willing on the ejaculation, he prepared for the electric shock of pain which exploded in his groin as he shot his dribble of seed. The agony was searing, a hammer blow of unspeakable intensity which made the bile rise in his throat as he shuddered to a conclusion.

Diego glanced into the bowl. It was empty. Nothing, not a drop, had been expelled. Reaching out a shaking hand, he gently touched the eye of his penis. There was something there, something wet and warm. Had he cum? Raising his hand, he peered at his fingertips. They were stained with blood.

## 21: The Confessional Box

The church militia moved the prison carts into position before dawn, the rusted metal cages on the backs of the wagons awaiting their inevitable human cargo. The square was empty, even the most eager merchants yet to arrive for market. As the clip-clop of horses' hooves echoed in the early morning air, Canon Barnabas gathered his men together. Brother Ignatius stood on the edge of the group, his scowl signalling contempt for his new role.

'Today you need to act without hesitation,' the canon declared. 'If you see any women with swollen bellies, put them in the cart on the left. Don't accept any excuses; we are not here to debate the degree of heresy they've committed. If anyone tries to stop you detaining the women, put them in the cart to the right. Any questions?'

The men stood in silence, shaking their heads.

As dawn broke and the traders arrived, the militia moved through the market, checking women's stomachs. A few of the men stopped unloading their wagons and setting up stalls to watch the proceedings, but the surly attitude of the militia prevented them from voicing any disapproval.

Brother Ignatius found a spot at the edge of the square and, seated on a barrel, watched the locals come and go.

The first customers arrived to stock up on supplies, and the militia men watched them like predators, seeking out any women who they suspected of concealing their guts. A few with swollen bellies were added to the appropriate cart, and a handful of husbands were pushed into the other after arguing the case for their wives. Ignatius kept his eye on those who were locked up, especially the men, but they were nothing more than locals angry at the treatment of their spouses. Most cared more about the having to cook their own lunch than the

fact their loved ones had been incarcerated.

More shoppers arrived and Brother Ignatius spotted a face he recognised. A chubby girl appeared in the square; it took a few moments for him to realise it was Maria, a girl from the school. She wasn't one of the troublesome brats, but it wasn't her presence which interested him. She was with an old man, his face weather-beaten, his frame frail. Ignatius had seen him before.

Living out on the edge of the village amongst the dilapidated houses earmarked for demolition, he never showed his face at mass. Many claimed he was the oldest man in the village, predating the arrival of the first missionaries. In his day he had a reputation for being something of a firebrand, a crusader for the rights of the locals.

Maria carried the old man's bags as he moved between the stalls, selecting fruit and vegetables. Every trader paused for a moment to chat with him, and all refused his money. He commanded a level of respect from the locals that even Bishop Malachy did not receive. If anyone knew what was going on, he did.

Brother Ignatius rose and meandered through the crowd, working his way closer to Maria and the old man. Glancing around, he realised there weren't any members of the militia close by. It was typical of the lazy bastards, missing when needed. Ignatius picked up his pace, turning through the maze of stalls until he found himself walking towards the pair. He'd have to deal with this on his own.

As they were about to pass each other, Brother Ignatius stepped in front of the girl.

'It's Maria, isn't it?'

The girl froze, obviously uncomfortable with the confrontation, but the old man didn't react.

'Yes, it is. Hello Brother Ignatius.'

She turned to the old man.

‘Brother Ignatius teaches theology at school.’

Completing the introduction, she said to the monk, ‘This is my Great Uncle Hector.’

Brother Ignatius reached out his hand.

‘That’s right; you’re Hector. I recognised you, but I couldn’t recall your name.’

Hector took the monk’s hand and shook it, but Ignatius didn’t let go when the greeting was complete.

‘I don’t think we’ve met,’ Hector said, his voice as frail as he looked.

‘No, we haven’t met, but I know all about you. I know a lot more about you than you’d think. I need a moment of your time.’

‘Why?’ Hector asked, his face wrinkled into a confused grimace.

‘Trust me, Hector; it doesn’t matter why I want a moment with you. I’ve asked, and you don’t want to refuse, not if you know what’s good for you.’

Brother Ignatius led Hector towards the prison carts. Maria followed behind, too afraid to speak out against the intrusion into their shopping trip. Spotting a member of the militia, Ignatius called him over.

‘Put this man in the cart.’

‘For what reason?’ the guard asked, irritated at having to take orders from a monk.

Brother Ignatius drew himself up, bristling with indignation.

‘Because I have told you to put him in the cart. Do not forget I am here because of a direct instruction from Bishop Malachy; an instruction to personally assist Canon Barnabas. Do you want me to fetch them to discuss your insubordination?’

The guard shook his head.

‘Then put him in the fucking cart,’ Ignatius snapped.

‘Why are you doing this?’ Maria shouted. ‘He didn’t do anything; it’s not fair.’

‘It’s okay, Maria,’ Hector said, his voice calm and soothing. ‘It’s a mistake, a misunderstanding. Let them do what they need to do, and once it’s all sorted out I can go home.’

While more people were added to the carts, Brother Ignatius stood in silence, staring through the bars at Hector. Maria loitered nearby, tears dribbling down her cheeks; not tears of sorrow or regret, but tears of rage. Despite her obvious indignation, Ignatius could not shake the feeling Hector knew something. He had to know what was happening.

Once the cart was filled, Brother Ignatius scrambled up and sat next to the driver. Maria stood and watched as it headed out of the square.

With the Abbey’s gates closed and locked, the occupants of the carts were brought out. The women were herded towards a chapel, its doors flanked by nuns clutching Pinard horns. The men were lined up against the wall. Brother Ignatius pulled Hector from the line and marched him towards the crypt where Monsignor Isaac had located his team.

‘Where are you going?’ one of the militia demanded.

‘Special orders from Bishop Malachy,’ Ignatius replied, leading the old man down the steps.

As they entered the gloomy crypt, several monks were at work, wiping down tables and cleaning instruments and strange mechanical devices. All wore white aprons which bore deep red and brown streaks, a mixture of blood, excrement and bodily fluids. The whole place stank like an abandoned abattoir.

Monsignor Isaac looked up from where he sat, scribbling notes into a large leather-bound ledger.

‘We’re just getting set up for the mid-morning session,’ he muttered. ‘Take him back outside and wait until you’re called in.’

Brother Ignatius pushed Hector forwards, a determined

look on his face as he approached the desk.

‘Monsignor Isaac, I’m sure you’re aware Bishop Malachy tasked me with a specific and critical role. This man here is someone of significant interest, and he requires your special attention. It is vital to the success of our mission.’

The monsignor sighed, his eyes blazing with contempt at Ignatius pulling rank on him.

‘Very well,’ he said, putting down his pen. ‘Secure him in the confessional box.’

Brother Ignatius looked around; there weren’t any confessionals in the crypt.

‘Do you mean the confessionals in the Abbey, Monsignor?’

‘No, you idiot. I mean ... I forgot you’re new to this. Get one of my men to do it. I need to get ready, and so should you if you intend to be present during the inquisition. I suggest you don an apron or you’ll be scrubbing your cassock until kingdom come.’

Ignatius handed Hector over to one of the inquisitors, who led the old man away. The monsignor disappeared into a side room, so Ignatius found a clean apron and put it on. Once the monsignor emerged from the room, Ignatius followed him.

They headed into the gloom at the end of the crypt. Turning a corner, they came to the confessional box, a large wooden structure illuminated by ornate votive candle racks on each side. In the flickering light, Ignatius saw Hector strapped to a cross. He’d been stripped naked, and between his legs was a contraption made up of a frame containing a set of geared cogs, a cranking handle, and a large wooden spike. The tip of the spike was stained with patches of dark red and smears of what looked like shit.

‘Jesus Christ,’ Brother Ignatius muttered.

Hearing his exclamation, Monsignor Isaac turned to face the monk. Ignatius then saw his face was painted white; his

mouth daubed into a garish red grin reminiscent of a perverse clown. Black circles around his eyes made them seem even more sunken than they normally were.

‘Holy Mary, Mother of God,’ he muttered.

‘Do you have a problem, Brother?’ the monsignor asked, scathing at the monk’s exclamations.

‘No, not at all,’ Ignatius replied, choking back his shock.

What sort of freak inquisition was the monsignor running? He’d expected some degree of pomp and ritual, but this was more akin to a backstreet theatre’s rendition of some macabre farce.

The monsignor moved closer and dragged the contraption into position. As he cranked the handle, the wooden spike rose upward. Adjusting it until the point was against Hector’s anus, he turned to face Brother Ignatius.

‘Ask what you need to know,’ he said through his bizarre make-up.

Ignatius cleared his throat and with as much authority as he could muster, asked, ‘What do you know about the recent demonic births?’

‘I don’t know what you’re talking about,’ Hector replied, shaking his head.

Monsignor Isaac produced a pair of rusting metal pliers from his cassock and stepped forward, grabbing Hector by the nose. Pinching the airway shut, he waited until the old man opened his mouth to breathe. When he did, the inquisitor clown gripped a front tooth with the pliers and yanked it out.

For a moment, Hector’s face was screwed up with pain, but as it subsided he spat out a glob of blood.

‘Pull them all out,’ he said with defiance. ‘As I get older I eat more soup anyway, so you’ll be saving me on dentistry bills.’

‘The demonic births?’ Ignatius repeated.

‘What are you talking about?’ Hector asked, the epitome

of a confused old man.

Monsignor Isaac approached with the pliers raised. Hector opened his bloodied mouth, inviting the inquisitor to pull another tooth, but Isaac instead pushed the claws of the plier up Hector's nostrils and clamped the tool shut on his septum. The old man winced, before letting out a bellow as the monsignor pulled down with a hard and sharp jerk, tearing away the skin and a chunk of cartilage.

As a steady stream of blood splattered onto Hector's chin and neck, Brother Ignatius roared, 'Enough of your nonsense. Tell me about the demonic births or you'll really suffer.'

'Don't know,' Hector bubbled through the blood washing over his mouth.

Monsignor Isaac dropped the pliers and took hold of the crank handle on the device. Giving it a swift turn, he grinned as Hector's scream echoed off the walls, his chilling cry reaching a crescendo as the wooden spike jerked upwards into his arsehole. A shower of dark blood and liquid shit splattered his inner thighs and trickled down his legs.

'Talk to me, Hector; tell me what's happening,' Brother Ignatius roared.

'I don't know anything—' the old man muttered between gasps of pain.

'Monsignor Isaac,' Brother Ignatius barked, irritated by Hector's attitude. 'This is pointless. He'll let you stick that whole spike up his backside and still won't speak. We're wasting time. Send one of your men to get the girl.'

Hector fell silent.

'What girl?' the monsignor asked.

'Her name is Maria; she's Hector's great niece. I'm sure you could have some fun with her on your contraption.'

'Leave the girl out of this,' Hector sobbed. 'She's just a child.'

'How old is she?' Monsignor Isaac asked, his clown face

emphasising the twisted nature of his interests.

‘She’s young, young and plump, but you’ll enjoy her all the same,’ Ignatius said with a wink. ‘She’ll be a distraction for you while Hector tries to remember what we need to know.’

‘Fetch her right away,’ Isaac said with a giggle.

‘Please wait,’ Hector said, a sob cutting through the words. ‘I don’t know about any births, but Maria came to see me the other night. She brought someone who wanted to know about the old times and the demons.’

‘Who was he?’

‘A boy; a boy from her school.’

Brother Ignatius held up his hand in a gesture demanding silence.

‘A boy from the school? Which boy?’

Hector shook his head, an act of shame at being broken so easily.

‘A friend of hers,’ he muttered. ‘His name is Diego.’

## 22: A Problem Shared

Brother Thomas sat in front of the class, looking over the names on the register. Bishop Malachy had sent a message before he'd set off to the school. He was to pay special attention to two students: Diego Castillo and Maria Gonzales. His instruction was to befriend them, establish himself as a confidant, and find out if they knew anything about the demonic activity. Fishing a pencil out of his pocket, he prepared to check off the pupils.

Glancing up, a sea of innocent faces stared back at him. While the bishop insisted he follow up every possible line of enquiry, could any of these children be involved? If he so much as barked at them, they'd probably crap in their pants. The thought they were involved in dalliances with the Dark One was laughable.

As he read the names out, the children chimed back their answers.

'Here, Brother Thomas.'

He arrived at the first name of interest.

'Diego Castillo?'

The classroom was silent.

'Diego?' he repeated, looking up. The children gazed back, no emotion on their faces.

'Does anyone know where Diego is?'

'He hasn't been in school for a few days,' César said. 'He's sick.'

'Are you sure he's sick?' Brother Thomas asked.

'I don't know, Brother,' César replied. 'He did keep on puking up in lessons.'

A few of the children sniggered.

'Has his mother sent a note?'

‘I don’t know; I’m his best friend and no one has said anything, but it’s not like him to miss school.’

Brother Thomas tapped the pencil on his teeth as he thought.

‘Do you think he might be playing truant?’

‘I doubt it,’ César said with a mischievous grin. ‘He’s too chicken to wag school.’

Brother Thomas pencilled a question mark next to Diego’s name and carried on down the list of names. The confirmations of their presence were recited back, and he arrived at the second name of interest.

‘Maria Gonzales?’

‘Here, Brother Thomas.’

The reply surprised him. If both Diego and Maria had been missing from class, there might have been something of a suspicion against the pair. However, she was in class, and the boy had recently been unwell. Had the bishop had sent him on a fool’s errand?

With the register complete, Brother Thomas looked at the children, who looked back at him, awaiting instruction.

‘Do you have bibles?’

‘Yes, Brother Thomas,’ the class replied in unison.

‘Take them out and read them.’

Some children lifted desk lids, others dug in their school bags, and soon all had a bible in their hands.

One boy with crossed eyes put up his hand.

‘Yes? What is it?’

‘Which part should we read?’

‘All of it,’ Brother Thomas replied. ‘Start at the beginning.’

The time dragged. Every time Thomas glanced at the clock, only a few minutes had passed. The children had their heads down, concentrating on the books in front of them. A few moved their fingers across the pages, silently mouthing words

as they read.

Bored, Thomas rose and moved towards the door.

‘Keep reading and remember that God is watching you and he’ll tell me if you play the fool,’ he said as he slipped outside.

In the playground, he lit a cigarette. How did Brother Ignatius cope with the monotony? He was at the school every day. Admittedly, he lectured the children and disciplined them, but providing a formal education wasn’t high on the agenda for Thomas. He thought being at the school would be an easy ride, but the tedium was overwhelming. Maybe Ignatius had the better deal, running around the countryside looking for a demon who was fucking old women.

Stubbing out the dog-end, he stood and gazed into the distance. If he hadn’t seen the baby demon with his own eyes, it would be hard to believe what was going on. Somewhere out there, in the sun-drenched countryside, the physical manifestations of evil were running amok. Women were being impregnated, and the offspring were ripping their way out their bodies and running off to do who knew what.

‘Brother Thomas?’

The child’s voice made him jump. Turning, he saw the chubby girl.

‘It’s Maria, isn’t it?’

‘Yes Brother.’

‘What do you want?’

‘It’s break time, Brother. Can we go outside?’

Thomas was about to tell her yes, it was fine, but he hesitated.

Squatting down, he took her hand.

‘Are you alright, Maria? You look upset.’

‘I’m okay,’ she replied awkwardly.

‘Maria, I’m your friend,’ Brother Thomas said, feigning concern. ‘I can see something is troubling you, and I want you

to know you can trust me. Don't think of me as your teacher or as a member of the clergy. I'm here to help you.'

'It's nothing.'

'It's something; I can see you're upset. Maybe I can help. What's wrong?'

'Yesterday, my great uncle...'

She looked away, ashamed.

'Your great uncle; did he touch you?' Thomas asked, taking an interest in her story.

'No,' she said, somewhat abruptly. 'My great uncle was taken away by the monks. I'm worried about him.'

Thomas sighed. A sordid tale of incest would have brightened the otherwise dull morning. Now he'd have to placate the girl instead of listening to her talking dirty.

'I'm sure he'll be fine. The clergy are speaking to a lot of people. We live in strange times, and it's critical we understand what's happening. He'll be home before you know it.'

'Can we go?'

'Go where?'

'Outside ... for our break?'

'Sure,' Thomas said, rising. 'But wait; one more thing. You're a friend of Diego, aren't you?'

Maria nodded.

'Is Diego alright? Is he okay?'

'Like César said, he's been unwell.'

'Is it just your uncle you're worried about, or is it Diego too?'

Her eyes glistened as she fought back her tears.

'Tell me about Diego,' Thomas whispered.

'It's nothing. He thinks ... it's nothing.'

'What does Diego think?'

The first tear broke free, tumbling down her cheek.

'Maria,' Brother Thomas said, his voice comforting. 'This isn't fair. You're only a child and yet you have all the

problems of the world on your shoulders. Trust me; a problem shared is a problem halved. Tell me about Diego.'

'Diego thinks ... well, he says he's met a demon who makes him do a daily duty. He doesn't want to do it, but he's too scared to refuse. He said the demon will hurt his family if he doesn't do what he's told.'

'What daily duty does he perform?' Brother Thomas asked, a surge of adrenaline pulsing through his body as he listened to Maria.

'I can't say,' she muttered, the tears cascading down her face.

'Why not?'

'It's a sin,' she sobbed. 'A terrible sin.'

'It's okay, Maria; just tell me what duty Diego performs.'

Maria took a deep breath, her body trembling as she struggled to find the words.

'Forgive me, Brother, for what I am about to say, but Diego has to ... he has to ... wank off into a pot.'

Brother Thomas' mouth dropped open. He hadn't expected her to say what she'd said. Unsure what he'd expected to hear, he struggled to process the information.

'Maria, go and tell the class they can go outside now. I have to visit the headmaster. Whatever you do, don't mention this conversation to anyone. Understand?'

Maria nodded and dried her eyes before heading back to the classroom.

In the headmaster's office, Brother Thomas made a telephone call to the Abbey. Brother Gregory answered.

'Gregory, it's Thomas. I haven't got time to explain, but you need to find Canon Barnabas and tell him to gather the militia and visit the Castillo house in the village. They should arrest anyone who's there. I'm coming back to the Abbey and I'll explain more when I get there.'

There was a moment of silence, before Brother Gregory

spoke.

‘You’re a bit late.’

‘What do you mean, a bit late?’

‘Brother Ignatius left a while back, with Canon Barnabas and a squad of militia men. They were going to the Castillo house; they’ll probably be there by now.’

Brother Thomas replaced the receiver without saying anything else.

In the village, the prison cart stopped outside the Castillo residence. The canon and Brother Ignatius pounded on the door.

‘Open up, in the name of the Lord,’ the canon barked.

There was no answer, so the canon rattled the woodwork with his fist.

Brother Ignatius bowed to the canon and, reaching out, tried the door. It was unlocked. Inside the house, a sickly smell of decay hung in the humid air. Mrs Castillo sat at the table, a sheen of sweat on her face. Her hands rested on her swollen belly.

The canon gestured to a couple of militia men standing in the doorway.

‘Put her in the cart.’

‘Check the other rooms,’ Brother Ignatius muttered. ‘I’ll look upstairs.’

As he climbed the staircase, the stench of putrefied meat grew stronger. On the landing, he paused, listening to a background buzzing. What was causing the sound? Identifying the room it emanated from, he turned the handle and threw open the door.

A black cloud of fat flies flew out, peppering his face as they bounced off his skin. The stink was overwhelming, so strong and vile his mouth tasted like dirt. A bubble of acidic puke rose up his gullet.

Wafting his hands to disperse the flies, he peered into the

room. On the bed was a naked man, trussed up, anus and genitals exposed. His throat had been cut, the black scabbed wound alive with a wriggling mass of maggots.

## 23: Home Alone

The Fornicator towered over Diego, a grin flickering across his face. His eyes grew wider in a moment of pride.

‘It’s all good,’ he cackled. ‘I’d go so far to say it’s a huge improvement. Now you’re a proper man.’

Diego sobbed, gazing down at his penis.

‘I thought it was rotting. I prayed it would eventually drop off, and at least that gave me some hope this would end, but now things are worse.’

The Fornicator hunkered down next to Diego, his voice changing to a friendlier tone.

‘You don’t want this to end, surely? This is only just the beginning, and now you’re changing, you can really start to enjoy the benefits of what I’m offering. What woman wouldn’t want to pleasure you now?’

‘My cock is a fucking corn cob,’ Diego spat.

‘Yes, it is, and a very handsome one at that. Imagine squeezing a ripe corn cob while it’s still on the stalk. All that luscious milk oozing out. Your cock will be a fountain of milky spermy goodness and the ladies will come from miles around to lap it up.’

‘I don’t want a corn cob between my legs; I want my penis back.’

The Fornicator tutted, his gaze conveying a degree of pity, not due to Diego’s circumstance but because of his ignorance of the gift which had been bestowed on him.

‘You haven’t got a corn cob instead of a cock. It is your cock. Touch it; go on, it feels the same. If anything, it’s bigger and fleshier. You’ll be spraying your jizz all over the village and the ladies are going to love it.’

Emitting a woeful moan, Diego slumped against the stone pillar. He no longer had the strength to fight or to argue.

Tired, confused, bereft of hope, he'd been waiting for death, hoping the gangrenous decay of his member would lead to his demise and an escape from the torment of the corn demon. Now his only hope of escape had vanished. The only upside was the fiery itching in his prick had also disappeared.

'Okay,' the Fornicator said, standing. 'I need you beside me, out in the world, so let's go over things one more time. I need to be sure you've got the story straight.'

Diego sighed. This was another torture he was made to suffer: the pretence the Fornicator would free him. At first he'd believed the demon, but the repetition of the cover story had gone on and on with no end in sight.

'Where is your father?' the Fornicator asked, his voice rich with fake authority.

'I don't know,' Diego replied, a monotone bumble being all he could manage. 'My mother suspected he was seeing another woman, and then one night he came home, packed a suitcase, and left.'

'Did he say where he was going?'

'No; he didn't speak at all that night. I asked where he was going, my mother pleaded for an answer, but he said nothing.'

'And where is your mother?'

'She became poorly after he left and took to her bed. She won't see anyone and wants to be left alone. She'll be fine in a few weeks, but she needs to get over the shock and the shame of being abandoned by her husband.'

'And where have you been?'

'I've been looking after Mama, every day and night.'

'Finally,' the Fornicator announced, 'is there anything we can do to help?'

'Please, leave us in peace. We need time to heal.'

The Fornicator laughed and clapped his hands like an over-enthusiastic primary school teacher.

‘You’ve done well, Diego. Stick to the story and the clergy will be no wiser.’

‘They won’t believe me; they’re not stupid.’

‘Yes, they are. This is the sort of sob story bullshit the Christians lap up. Now, get off home and ensure you keep your mother indoors until she has birthed. Once she has, the two of you need to clean yourselves up and go back to normal life. Just remember the answers we’ve rehearsed, and it’ll all be fine.’

The Fornicator released Diego from his chains and stood back. As Diego rose and staggered towards the door, the demon called out he should not forget he still had a duty to perform. Diego was tense as he clambered through the boards at the entrance, expecting the demon to grab him and pull him back, to laugh and mock and sneer as he snuffed out any spark of hope. But he didn’t.

Diego stood in the afternoon light, blinking as the sunshine dazzled him. He was in the back alley which led to his home, a familiar place but it felt alien. As he walked, he glanced back over his shoulder, expecting the demon to be following, but there was no sign of him. Passing through his back gate and into the yard, the demon didn’t appear to stop him. As he opened the back door, he expected to be grabbed, yanked back away from his home, but nothing happened.

The house was silent; unnaturally so. Even when he was at home on his own, it never had been so quiet.

‘Mama?’ Diego called out, his voice wavering. The silence was smothering. It was obvious she wouldn’t answer, but he called out again, hearing his voice drift in the empty dwelling.

The kitchen looked like it was a typical working day. The pots were out to make supper, a pile of vegetables on the side ready to be peeled, but the atmosphere signalled a finality, an end to all things normal. Diego moved into the hallway and

glanced into the sitting room. Its emptiness, although not unusual, seemed to scream of an inevitable cessation.

Diego moved towards the stairs, dreading what he might find in his parents' bedroom. It was the last place he'd been before regaining consciousness in the shrine. It was the last place he'd seen his father, trussed up and being sinfully abused by the corn demon. Shuddering, a boiling revulsion erupted in his guts as he remembered the blade plunging down into his father's throat.

With each step he took, his pulse quickened, the knots of tension in his stomach growing in intensity, transforming into cramps. He had to continue, to keep going up the staircase, despite every sense telling him to turn around, to run, to go somewhere, anywhere, rather than the bedroom. Struggling to suck in air, his chest tightened. A hot prickle spread across his skin.

Reaching the top of the staircase, he paused, trying to regain control of his emotions. The door to the room was closed. He had to open it, but what would be on the other side? Would the corpse of his father be there, trussed up, his mutilated throat an accusation of Diego's part in the killing? He might not have been the one who plunged the blade into his father's neck, but his nocturnal wanking had instigated the whole chain of events. Maybe the Fornicator would be there, laughing, mocking, this whole terrifying ordeal being just another part of the demon's cruel abuse.

With a trembling hand, he turned the knob and let the door swing open.

The bedroom was bright with sun streaming in the window. The bed was made with laundered sheets, crisp and pressed like his mother always did them after wash day. There was no sign of the horror which had taken place, no evidence of the brutality and spite which had ended so cataclysmically with the slaughter of his father.

Diego staggered into the room and sat on the edge of the

bed. How many days had passed since it happened? It was impossible to know how long he'd been held captive. As he glanced around the room, there was nothing to indicate any of it had taken place. Was the Fornicator misleading him? When the shopkeeper had called, or when Diego thought she'd called, the demon had deceived him. This could be another trick, a ruse to mess with his head.

Muffling a sob, Diego felt tears running down his cheeks. Was all this a hoax, a string of falsehoods to make him lose his mind? Would his mother return home from market, his father from work, and they'd all sit around the table in the kitchen as normal?

Diego stood and walked out of the room, pulling the door closed behind him. He needed to rest, to sleep. Maybe once he'd recovered, things might start to make sense.

Opening his bedroom door, the room was dark, the curtains still closed. Hesitating, the feeling something was amiss welled up inside of him, a tsunami of panic tearing through his body.

Before he could react, hands grabbed him and pulled him inside. A force slammed him against the wall, knocking the air out of his lungs. In the gloom, a face appeared, a familiar face.

'Got you, you little cunt,' Brother Ignatius sneered.

## 24: An Unlikely Ally

Brother Ignatius pushed Diego into the chair. He was flanked by a gaggle of monks, blood-stained aprons pulled over their cassocks, all showing an unhealthy interest in him. Most concerning was Monsignor Isaac; his face was painted like a demented sideshow freak, a maniacal grin drawn around his mouth.

‘What have you got to say for yourself, boy?’ the monsignor demanded, a predatory inflection in his voice.

‘What is it you want to know?’ Diego muttered.

‘You know what I want to know, and if you don’t tell me, I’ll cut off your appendages, one by one,’ Isaac replied, the glee in his voice almost daring Diego to refuse so he could instigate the torture.

Diego’s resignation to his fate surprised him; he’d almost accepted freedom was unattainable. He’d expected the Fornicator to be the one who tricked him back into imprisonment, but the clergy had beaten the demon to it. At first Diego thought the monks might be a better option as they were less likely to force him into performing depraved sexual acts, but looking at the monsignor, he wasn’t too sure.

‘We’ve been searching for you, high and low’ Monsignor Isaac said. ‘Where have you been hiding?’

‘I wasn’t hiding; I was at home. My mother was ... unwell,’ Diego said, repeating the story the Fornicator had made him learn. ‘I had to look after her.’

‘And your father?’

Diego stopped himself from telling the arranged story. His father running off with a mysterious other woman didn’t seem believable.

‘He was unwell too.’

The monsignor crept closer.

‘I don’t believe you,’ he hissed.

‘I’m telling the truth,’ Diego whimpered. ‘I don’t gain anything from dragging this out. You can trust me’

‘Really?’ Monsignor Isaac snarled with contempt. ‘I can trust you? You say your father is unwell. If that is so, why is his body here in the Abbey? We found him trussed up, ready for some pagan ritual. Someone had cut his throat. Your mother is in also here, in custody, about to give birth to a demon baby. Only yesterday, your friend Maria’s great uncle Hector was spilling his guts, telling us all about the time you visited him, asking questions about the old times and sex demons. You’ve been missing for days, no doubt off performing sinful acts, and you want me to trust you?’

Diego stayed silent.

‘Where are they?’ the monsignor barked.

‘Where’s who?’

‘Don’t play the innocent with me,’ Isaac snapped, lunging forward and delivering a forceful punch to Diego’s ribs. ‘Start talking or you’ll face the confessional box.’

Sucking in air, trying to fill his lungs, Diego spluttered, ‘If you tell me what you’re talking about, I can answer you. I want to help.’

‘What do you know about the demons?’

Diego paused, the monsignor’s question echoing in his head.

‘You said demons; is there more than one?’

Isaac grabbed Diego by the hair, jerking his head upwards so he was looking straight into the monsignor’s snarling face.

‘There’s an army of the bastards running around the countryside, with women giving birth to more every day. You know there’s more than one.’

‘Please don’t hurt me,’ Diego pleaded. ‘I want to help, but I don’t know anything about other demons. I’ve only seen

one. He told me his plan was to impregnate the local women.'

Brother Ignatius stepped forward and placed his hand on the monsignor's shoulder.

'Monsignor Isaac, with respect, the demon this boy refers to might be the something unknown, the source of the diabolical births.'

Isaac spun around, his eyes blazing with contempt.

'Don't interrupt me when I'm working,' he snapped, spittle spraying the monk's face. 'Who the fuck are you anyway? Just a jumped-up fat bastard. The bishop only sent you to work with us because he wanted you out from under his feet, so don't get in my way or you'll regret it.'

Brother Ignatius took a step back, his face a picture of regret. Then he paused for a moment and stepped back to confront the monsignor.

'Monsignor Isaac, I know this boy, and I think his involvement in this matter will not be by choice. He doesn't have the stomach to collude with demons, or to lie to us.'

'He already has lied,' Isaac snapped. 'His mother and father have been unwell? We know that to be a falsehood. Not only is a proven liar, but I believe he has also colluded with demons.'

Ignatius took a deep breath, uncertain of how to progress. As he struggled to decide his next move, Monsignor Isaac maintained eye contact, his disgust at being questioned evident.

'Monsignor Isaac,' Ignatius said softly, trying to deescalate the confrontation, 'I believe I can discover the location of our quarry without any need for torture. Let's not forget that every moment we spend here interrogating the boy is time afforded to the demons, allowing them to enact their Hellish plan.'

'You have no authority over me.'

'I don't,' Ignatius said, 'but Bishop Malachy does, and if he discovers an opportunity to defeat the forces of evil has

been missed—’

‘Don’t threaten me,’ Isaac spat.

After a moment’s pause, he nodded to Ignatius.

‘Very well; have your way, but be warned. If you don’t discover the whereabouts of the main demon, I can only presume you are in cahoots with the prisoner, and you shall face the most punitive of inquisitions.’

As Brother Ignatius stepped forward, Diego hoped the monk would be less aggressive, but it wasn’t the case. Grabbing him by the throat, the monk pushed him back in the chair.

‘Okay, you gobshite, who’s this demon you claim to have met?’

‘He’s called the Fornicator,’ Diego said, his voice rough as the monk’s hand squeezed his neck.

‘The Fornicator? Do you think this is a joke?’

‘He has many names, but that’s the one he uses most often,’ Diego croaked.

‘How did you meet him?’ the monk growled. Diego choked, trying to gesture he couldn’t breathe, and Brother Ignatius loosened his grip.

‘I met him by accident,’ Diego spluttered, opting to not mention how his masturbatory activities had brought the demon back to life. ‘I was playing in the ruins behind my house, and he tricked me into making a pact with him. Then he threatened to do terrible things to my family if I told anyone about him.’

‘Do you know where he is?’

‘Yes, he’s still in the ruins.’ Spotting an opportunity to get himself freed, Diego added, ‘I can show you where he is if it helps.’

Brother Ignatius shook his head.

‘Just tell me where he is.’

‘It’s hard to explain. It’s best if I take you there. If he hears you coming, you won’t have any element of surprise. I tried to destroy him once, but he knew what I intended to do.

You'll need to sneak up on him, to get at him when he doesn't expect it.'

Brother Ignatius took a deep breath, puffing out his chest as he stood up as tall as he could.

'You're a little boy, Diego, but I'm a man. I have no fear of demonic creatures. I captured a demon myself.'

'A baby one,' Monsignor Isaac muttered, eager to belittle the monk's boasts.

The mockery pushed Ignatius into acting.

'Release the boy immediately,' he said with authority.

'You'll do no such thing,' Isaac snapped, throwing challenging looks at his henchmen who, under the spiteful gaze of their boss, remained rooted to the spot.

Ignatius stepped closer to the monsignor. Fear gripped his intestines with an icy hand, but he knew he had to seize control of the situation.

'Trust me, Monsignor Isaac. I doubt Bishop Malachy will overlook your indiscretions if the demon escapes because of your ineptitude. You may think your approach is justified, but the Bishop is a different kettle of fish. He is guided by rules and regulations, by scriptures and Papal Bulls. If he decides to distance himself from your methods, he'll find you a new role. You might find yourself wiping the shitty arses of old and infirm clergymen in some back street hospice.'

Isaac spat on the ground and snarled, 'Take the little fucker; I've finished with him anyway.'

Brother Ignatius released Diego's bonds and dragged the boy out of the chair. Marching him up the stairs of the crypt and into the courtyard, the monk snarled, 'You'd better not fuck me around, boy, or I swear on the holy bible I'll string you up by your bollocks and kick your head clean off your shoulders.'

## 25: Locking Horns

After the sun had set, Diego led Brother Ignatius along the alleyway, the pair moving like shadows in the night. Despite their subterfuge, Diego was sure the Fornicator was aware of their presence and would be waiting for them. Approaching the old shrine, they slowed, and Diego gestured to the monk they'd arrived.

Lifting the boards and holding them, he helped the monk climb inside, before following. Waiting in the entrance, the pair blinked until their eyes were accustomed to the gloom. Looking around, Ignatius turned to Diego and shrugged.

'There's no one here. Is this some merry dance you're leading me on?'

'He's here,' Diego whispered, the cold shiver creeping across his skin letting him know the Fornicator was close.

Ignatius strode to the middle of the shrine and slowly turned to face Diego, his arms outspread in a gesture to illustrate the place was empty. Before he could voice his anger, a loud voice boomed out, echoing off the walls.

'Put down your arms, Brother Ignatius, unless you want me to crucify you.'

From the darkness, the Fornicator stepped forwards, a disturbing grin on his face.

'What have we here?' he asked with a chuckle, peering at Ignatius. 'They've sent a monk; a fat one at that. What sort of a joke is this?'

Glancing at Diego, the corn man sneered, 'So, you sold me out to the clergy, and they put so much faith in your story all they could spare was a fucking fat friar. All I can say is I hope they paid you well.'

Diego fixed his gaze on the floor, avoiding any eye contact with the demon.

The Fornicator took a step closer to Brother Ignatius, his grin turning to a frown.

‘Could your superiors be any more disrespectful? They should have sent a bishop at the very least, or an archbishop. In truth, given my power and stature in the circles of Hell, I deserve a cardinal or the fucking pope himself. Instead I get a washed-up halfwit monk who gets his rocks off by preaching to little children about sin.’

Glancing back at Diego, the demon quipped, ‘I bet he tells you not to wank, but every night in his cell he’ll be knocking the top off it, thinking about the children he’s caned that day. They’re all the same, these tonsured cunts; hypocrites to a man.’

Throughout the mockery, Brother Ignatius stood glaring at the corn demon, his hands joined before him in prayer. He allowed the abuse to wash over him without a reaction as he waited for the Fornicator to lapse into silence.

‘Isn’t gluttony a sin, fatty, or did your belly grow so big after all those hours spent sucking your bishop’s arsehole?’

Brother Ignatius maintained eye contact but did not respond.

‘Haven’t you got anything to say for yourself?’ the demon demanded.

‘By the power of Jesus Christ—’

Brother Ignatius only got a few words out before the Fornicator burst into a mocking cackle, his laughter echoing in the shrine.

‘For fuck’s sake, Padre, can’t you do any better than that? I don’t know what they teach you in the seminary, but you’re going to need a whole lot more than that old power of Christ schtick if you want to defeat me.’

Brother Ignatius produced a crucifix from his cassock and held it up to the demon. The Fornicator reached out and slapped it out of his hand with such force the metal cross flew

across the shrine and embedded in the stone wall. Diego groaned, despair overwhelming him as he realised Brother Ignatius was ill-prepared to face the demon.

‘Don’t come in here waving your little cross around and commanding me to do things by the power of Christ,’ the Fornicator snarled. ‘You need to bring something more than that to the party, something insane like thunderbolts or fiery rain or swords of writhing serpents. Times have changed and you need to get with the program.’

‘I have faith,’ Brother Ignatius declared.

The Fornicator whistled.

‘You have faith? Well, fuck me, why didn’t you say? If I’d have known, there’d be no need for this confrontation. I would have just slinked off with my metaphorical tail between my legs.’

‘I have faith,’ the monk boomed, his voice increasing in volume, ‘and the power of the Lord God Almighty.’

The Fornicator glanced towards Diego.

‘Tell him to fuck off, will you?’

Diego stood, unmoving and silent. Brother Ignatius clearly didn’t have a plan of attack and was dependent upon nothing more than a statement of his belief in God. The monk might be a force to be reckoned with in the classroom, but in front of a demon he was impotent. Bringing him to the shrine was a mistake, and now they’d both have to pay for it, probably with their lives.

‘Diego, don’t just stand there like an imbecile,’ the demon snapped. ‘Tell him.’

‘Erm, I’m sorry Brother Ignatius,’ Diego muttered, ‘but he said you should fuck off.’

The monk spun around to face the boy, rage blazing in his eyes.

‘Don’t ever speak to me in that way,’ he snarled.

Before he could turn back, the Fornicator lunged, grabbing Ignatius by the throat. With no discernible effort, he lifted the monk off the floor. The brother gasped for breath; his windpipe constricted by the demon's grip. With arms flailing and feet scrabbling in air, his attempts to escape were futile.

'How's that faith working out for you right now?' the Fornicator asked, a mocking grin spreading across his face. 'How's your belief in the big man in the sky? Do you think he might have deserted you in your hour of need?'

'By the power invested in me by Jesus Christ—' Brother Ignatius wheezed, the pressure on his throat making it difficult to speak.

'What's that?' the Fornicator asked, tightening his grasp. 'I can't hear you.'

The monk tried to repeat himself, but his guttural gagging swallowed up the words.

The Fornicator began to turn, at first slowly, rotating in the middle of the shrine with Ignatius held out at arm's length. Speeding up, the motion kicked up plumes of dust. Diego put his hands up to protect his eyes from the debris as the Fornicator whirled faster and faster. Brother Ignatius' feet began to rise as the centrifugal force increased, until he was horizontal to the floor, a blur as the wind around the Fornicator increased until it formed a small tornado.

Diego dropped to the floor, arms over his head, for fear the structure of the shrine might collapse. The noise was intense, a rushing sound of whistling air as the monk spun at a frenetic pace.

Then it was silent.

Diego glanced up, and the Fornicator still held Ignatius aloft. Staring into his eyes, a maniacal grin on his face, the demon said, 'Brother, you'll soon be meeting my master. When you do, please tell him you came to challenge me with nothing but your faith and the word of God. He'll enjoy that. He'll like

a laugh before he hurls you into the fiery pit.'

With one hand holding the monk aloft by his throat, the other punched into Ignatius' chest. The monk stiffened, a dribble of almost black blood bubbling from his lips. The Fornicator withdrew his hand. Clutched between his corn cob fingers was Brother Ignatius' heart, attached to arteries and veins, and still beating.

Lifting it up in front of the monk's face, the Fornicator began to squeeze, to crush the organ with his fingers. It distended in places and then burst, a spray of gore and blood and ichor splattering onto Ignatius' face.

Dropping the monk's lifeless body to the ground, the Fornicator turned and strode to where Diego cowered.

'Get up,' he ordered.

Diego rose, his legs shaking, tears and snot streaking his face. The Fornicator reached out and wiped his hand, smearing the brother's blood across Diego's face.

'Don't think I've forgotten you sold me out,' he whispered, a sinister edge to his voice, 'but right now you've got your duty to perform.'

Struggling to move, his limbs trembling so violently he thought he'd collapse, Diego made his way across the shrine and picked up the bowl of corn leaves.

'Oh no; put the bowl away,' the Fornicator chuckled. 'After what you've done, after breaking our pact and handing me over to the clergy, I think it's only fair you give me your best shot.'

Turning, the corn demon presented his hind quarters to Diego.

'Get on there and make it a big one; I've got a lot of work to do to put right the wrongs you've committed, so I think you'll be riding me until dawn.'

## 26: A Fiery End

From behind the Abbey walls, black plumes of smoke belched into the sky. Spreading out like poisonous fingers above the village, the ash and stench drove the locals indoors. As the marketplace emptied, an old man with a barrow of fish stopped by a militia member standing guard.

‘What are they burning in there?’ he asked, his eyes watering from the wind-borne dust.

‘Never you mind,’ the guard replied, disinterested in starting a conversation.

‘It smells like the arsehole of Hell itself,’ the old man muttered.

‘If you don’t mind your own fucking business, you’ll find out what Hell smells like,’ the guard muttered. ‘Now piss off before I arrest you.’

‘What would you arrest me for?’

‘Being a cunt. Now get gone.’

As the peasants hurried homewards, the rumours spread like wildfire. Some said the smoke was from those who’d been arrested in the past days. They were being burned at the stake for heresy. Others suspected the women with swollen stomachs had been infected with a plague, and their bloated cadavers were being thrown on a pyre to stop the spread of disease. A few suggested the clergy were burning cattle plundered from the fields to punish the locals for disrespecting the church militia. No one guessed at the truth.

Inside the Abbey courtyard, the monks dragged out the demon children who’d been birthed that day. Members of Canon Barnabas’ forces decapitated the yellow beasts, before hacking off their limbs. After being doused with holy water, the twitching body parts were then tossed into the flames, where they sizzled until the flesh ignited. The stench was reminiscent

of decaying flesh, burning hair and cat shit.

Watching the spectacle in the courtyard from the safety of his quarters, Bishop Malachy leaned his forehead on the cold glass window trying to soothe his thundering headache. Behind him, Brother Gregory gently coughed to get his attention.

‘Your excellency, the church militia is concluding the extermination of the demons birthed here in the Abbey. The forces will shortly join those deployed in the countryside to help hunt down any of the yellow monsters who might remain at large. We are approaching the final chapter of our plan.’

‘And you’re sure all the demons will be destroyed?’

The bishop’s question hung in the air, the silence which followed underlining the uncertainty of his colleague.

‘Are you sure all the demons will be gone?’ he repeated.

‘As sure as we can be.’

The bishop turned, struggling to process the answer. Despite the progression of the plan, the lack of surety was troubling. Brother Gregory was a mere pen-pusher, and Brother Thomas lacked the aggressive thinking needed in a conflict. Despite his frustrations, maybe he’d sent Ignatius away in haste.

After a moment’s thought, he asked, ‘Where is Brother Ignatius?’

‘I have been told he received information about the whereabouts of the ... well, I suppose we’d call him the king of the demons. Brother Ignatius has gone to—’

‘Don’t give the Devil grand titles,’ Malachy roared. ‘He’s not a king; he’s a Satanic vessel of evil. Go now, but let me know as soon as the patrol gets back. I need to see Brother Ignatius as a matter of urgency.’

Brother Gregory shifted uneasily, uncertain whether to tell the bishop the truth about the situation. Spotting his distress, Malachy seized the initiative.

‘What is it, Brother Gregory? What idiocy has taken place?’

‘My understanding is that Brother Ignatius went off alone. Well, he took one of the prisoners, a schoolboy who claimed to know the whereabouts of the ... Satanic vessel of evil.’

Incredulous at the news, the bishop yelled, ‘So Brother Ignatius has run off with a schoolboy to find a sex demon? Who allowed such a clusterfuck to take place?’

‘In truth, your excellency, it was you who decided—’

‘Enough! Get out of my sight.’

As the door to his quarters closed, the bishop returned to the window. Looking beyond the courtyard and the village rooftops, he saw snaking trails of black smoke rising from the fields and forests. The church militia were succeeding in tracking down and destroying the demon offspring, but without their leader eliminated, it was only a matter of time until new births occurred.

In the village, the streets were mostly empty. The locals were staying indoors, either because of the black smoke and stench of burning flesh, or due to fear of the church militia. A few people scuttled around: beggars looking for anything of value which had been discarded by the fleeing crowds, people ensuring they had enough food for a siege, and a plump school-girl, sneaking down the alleyway towards Diego’s house.

Maria crept into the back yard and gently knocked on the door. There was no response, so she tried the handle. The door was unlocked. Letting herself in, she walked into the kitchen. It looked as if someone was in the middle of preparing a meal, but the chill in the air signalled abandonment.

Moving quietly into the sitting room, Maria was again surprised by the lack of signs of life. Had Diego’s family upped sticks and moved on to get away from the village and all the strange happenings? Unsure what to do, Maria tried to think

where Diego might be.

As she mused, a faint sobbing echoed from upstairs.

‘Diego, is that you?’ she called. The sobbing stopped immediately, the silence an indication he was hiding.

Running up the stairs, Maria checked the rooms, finding him laid out on his bed. Face streaked with tears, crusts of snot around his nostrils and dried spittle on his lips, he looked desolate.

‘Are you alright?’ she asked, sitting on the edge of the bed.

‘How can I be alright?’ he sobbed. ‘The Fornicator killed my father. He tied him up, buggered him in front of me, and then cut his throat. My mother has been arrested by the militia; they say she’s pregnant with a demon. I told the clergy where the Fornicator was. I took Brother Ignatius to the shrine, and he killed him.’

‘Brother Ignatius killed the demon?’ she asked, unsure of what Diego was saying.

‘No; the Fornicator killed Brother Ignatius. He pulled out his heart and crushed it. Then he made me ... what does it matter? He’s going to kill me next; I know it.’

‘Not if you kill him first,’ Maria said with confidence.

‘I tried that before, but I fucked it up. He knew what I was up to. I can’t do it again. He’d definitely kill me if I tried.’

‘Listen; I think fire will destroy him. I saw the monks and the militia out in the fields. They captured a demon and chopped him up, but the pieces were still wriggling. When they burned the body parts, the thing died. Hector said when the missionaries first arrived, they set all the effigies alight. They didn’t find your one in the old shrine, which is how he survived. If you burn him up—’

‘I tried to burn him,’ Diego cried, struggling to hold himself together. ‘I tried to burn him and failed. He knew what I was doing. He can read my mind.’

‘I’ve been thinking this through, and there’s a solution,’ Maria said, her voice still brimming with confidence. ‘You need to focus your mind on whatever it is you think about when you masturbate. If he reads your mind and it’s focused on dirty sex things, all he’ll see are your impure thoughts. When you’re doing your duty—’

‘It won’t work,’ Diego sobbed, cutting across her. ‘He doesn’t make me wank anymore. I have to ... well, I have to do something else.’

‘What?’

Her puzzled look showed she didn’t understand.

‘I have to stick my cock ... up his bum,’ Diego muttered, shame etched on his face.

‘Okay,’ Maria said, thinking hard. ‘When you ... do what you do, make sure to think about a sexy woman, and only a sexy woman. Concentrate on her and nothing else. If he reads your mind, that’s all he’ll see, so he’ll be unaware of your intentions.’

‘How does that help me?’ Diego asked.

‘If you fixed a squeezey bottle filled with gasoline between your legs, just as you’re about to ... well, you know, push your thighs together and it’ll jet the fuel up his backside. Then light a match and run.’

‘I can’t do it,’ Diego said, his head dropping.

It was easy for Maria to come up with a stupid plan. She wouldn’t be the one the Fornicator ripped from limb to limb. He’d threatened to tear Diego’s bowels out and feed them to him. If anything went wrong, that would be his fate.

‘No; I definitely can’t do it,’ Diego repeated.

Maria fixed him with an uncompromising stare.

‘I don’t see you have much of a choice.’

## 27: Piss Sex

‘I’ll get some things together so we can head off into the countryside as soon as you’ve finished him off,’ Maria said.

‘Why?’ Diego asked, unsure of the reason they’d need to run. ‘If I make it back, the Fornicator will be burned up, so we can stay here. If I don’t come back, well, you can go home and forget about me.’

‘You need to trust me, Diego. Even if you destroy the Fornicator, we need to get away from here. There could be other demons, or the church militia might come after you. I’ll get some bits together and we can hide out until we’re sure everything’s back to normal.’

As Diego listened, her confidence inspired him. She wasn’t even entertaining the idea of failure. Her plan was well thought out, and she believed in it despite the huge obstacles which stood in their way. If he could summon up a fraction of her bravery, he’d have a better chance of achieving his goal.

‘You’ll need this,’ she said, placing a plastic squeezey detergent bottle on the bed, along with a roll of adhesive tape. ‘Once it’s filled and in place, make sure you keep the top on it until you’re ready to spray him.’

Diego picked up the bottle and examined it.

‘Do you get naked when you’re ... doing the duty?’

‘No; why?’

‘Maybe you should take your trousers off,’ Maria giggled. ‘If you dribble gasoline on your pants, they might ignite when you strike the match.’

Diego struggled to suppress the doubt which overwhelmed him. Could he do this? Could he really kill a demon, one which had defeated Brother Ignatius with ease? Maria believed in him, and that meant something. Of all his friends, César included, she was the only one who’d stood by him.

‘Do you need help taping the bottle to your undercarriage?’

‘No, I’m fine,’ Diego blurted, feeling the red flush of embarrassment creeping up his neck and onto his cheeks. ‘I’m going to have a practice with water before I put the gasoline in, just in case.’

‘Okay,’ she said with a smile. ‘I’ll go downstairs and pack some essentials.’

Diego went into the bathroom and filled the bottle. Placing it between his thighs, he adjusted it until it felt comfortable resting against his perineum. Tensing his legs and increasing the pressure on the bottle, he watched as a spurt of water shot into the bathtub. Maybe Maria was on to something. The idea might just work.

The bottle was obvious no matter how he adjusted it. It was critical the Fornicator kept his back to him during the duty, otherwise the trick would be discovered. Once more, doubts washed into his mind, eroding the confidence Maria had inspired.

Nipping downstairs, he filled the bottle with gasoline, taking care not to spill any, before going back to his bedroom and taping it in place. This was it; there was no turning back. The Fornicator would come for him if he failed. This was a do or die situation, one he couldn’t avoid.

Dressed and ready, Diego went downstairs. Maria had a bag packed.

‘I think I’ve got everything we’ll need; well, enough to survive for a few days. Just concentrate on sexy women. He’ll think you need the fantasies to get through the ordeal. Don’t think about burning him up. Let it happen naturally.’

Diego shifted, uneasy with the deception.

‘What about when he feels the gasoline on his buttocks?’ he asked. ‘He’s going to know something’s going on.’

‘Before you let it go, think about piss sex,’ she replied.

‘Piss what?’

‘Piss sex. It’s when people piss on each other.’

Diego looked shocked.

‘Is that a thing?’

‘Yes; my brother told me he saw a film when he was in the city. A man did a piss on a woman’s cunthole before fucking her. Think about doing that and the Fornicator won’t realise what you’re up to.’

‘Are you making it up, this piss sex thing?’

‘Honestly, Diego, people do it. It’s what gave me the idea in the first place.’

Glancing towards the door, Diego realised he couldn’t put off his task any longer. Maria was confident and brave, but inside he was petrified. He prayed she’d say he didn’t have to go through with it, but she put her arms out and hugged him close. He trembled in her embrace.

‘You’re shaking,’ she said.

‘I’m shitting myself,’ he mumbled, fighting back tears.

‘You’ll be fine,’ she whispered, her warm breath on his cheek like a feather, tickling his skin. Then she kissed him, her lips glancing against his. They hovered for a moment, before her tongue touched his, a momentary glance setting off a spark inside him.

Turning away, he left the house and strode towards the shrine, the squeezey bottle snug in his crotch. He would do it. He’d do it for himself and he’d do it for Maria. Fuck the clergy and the villagers; he didn’t care if demons shagged them bandy. This was for the two of them, for their future.

Diego climbed carefully through the boards at the entrance, careful not to knock the bottle taped between his legs. Pausing to catch his breath, he pictured Maria laid on his bed, naked. Her plump backside was raised in expectation, and he was about to take her. With the image firmly in his head, he shuffled into the gloom.

The Fornicator sat on one side of the shrine.

‘The fat girl?’ he asked with a chuckle.

‘What?’

‘You’re thinking about the fat girl, the one from school. Don’t deny it, you dirty bastard.’

Anxious any distraction might cause him to think about the plan, Diego shrugged.

‘Can we get on with it; I’ve got things to do.’

The Fornicator laughed, his guffaws mocking and mean.

‘You want to do it to her, you want to fuck the fat little piggy, so why are you here?’

‘I have my duty to perform,’ Diego snapped, concentrating on the mental image of Maria’s buttocks.

‘You have all night to do your duty,’ the Fornicator chuckled. ‘Go home and fuck her.’

‘What?’ Diego snapped. ‘Be late for my duty and have you kill another member of my family?’

‘Oh, for fuck’s sake,’ the Fornicator sighed. ‘I did you a favour killing that useless cunt of a father. I don’t know; I kill one parent and you never shut up about it. Don’t the monks teach forgiveness at school? I thought their whole dogma was based on forgiveness, serenity and turning the other cheek.’

‘I just want to get it over with,’ Diego muttered, struggling to keep a mental focus on Maria in a state of undress.

‘Whatever,’ the corn demon muttered as he turned and braced himself against the wall, his buttocks pushed out and legs apart.

Diego opened his trousers with trembling hands, his fingers struggling to undo the buttons on his fly. Letting the pants fall to the ground, he touched his corn cob cock as he thought of Maria, pulling her thighs apart to reveal her cunt and anus. It responded, rising, giving clear access to the bottle.

Flicking the lid off, he imagined himself standing over

Maria, peeing onto her. The urine hit her sphincter and dribbled down her buttocks. Squeezing his thighs, he focused on the stream of urine falling onto her sex.

‘Diego, you dirty fucker,’ the Fornicator howled. ‘I didn’t realise how perverted you’ve become. I only need your spunk, but if this increases the load you’ll be shooting into me, then piss away, my boy; piss away!’

Fumbling in his shirt pocket, Diego found the book of matches. He didn’t think; he just let it happen. In his mind, the piss had stopped flowing and he was pressing the tip of his corn cob cock against Maria’s sex, but in the shrine he stood motionless.

The Fornicator stopped laughing and whooping.

‘Stick it in me,’ he shouted, enraged by the hesitation. ‘What’s the delay?’

Diego’s mind went into a spin. The images of Maria blurred into a chaotic montage of fire and pain. He saw his father trussed up, his mother rubbing her swollen belly, he saw himself in chains in the shrine, wanking until he’d ejaculated blood. It all cascaded through his mind as the Fornicator rose to his full height and turned.

‘Diego; what the fuck are you thinking of doing—’

With trembling fingers, Diego struck the match.

The ignition was instant, the force of the explosion knocking Diego backwards. As he fell, his head cracked off the wall and the gloom turned to a blanket of rapidly encroaching darkness.

## 28: Peace in the Valley

Maria paced up and down the alleyway, anxiously glancing towards the old shrine. She'd seen the brightness of a blazing fire, the light flickering as the flames danced up the stone walls. After some time, an uncomfortably long time, Diego staggered out, coughing and gasping for air. His face was blackened with soot, his hair, eyebrows and eyelashes singed. He didn't speak or show any emotion; he was dazed and lost in his own trauma. She took his hand and led him away from the village, following the river. As they walked towards the forest, the night's drizzle turned into rain, sheets of cold water falling from the starless sky.

In silence, they carried on, guided only by the sound of the swirling water. Reaching the edge of the forest and concealed by the trees, Maria lit a kerosene lamp and led the silent Diego on until she found a small copse where they could rest for the night.

Unpacking the bag, Maria handed Diego a bottle of water, which he sipped while she cut up bread and cheese. As he ate, she set about searching for dry sticks and built a small fire.

'You need to get out of those wet clothes,' she said, laying out some blankets. 'Hang them by the fire and get into bed. You need to rest. Tomorrow we can plan what to do, but right now all that matters is you're safe. Nothing can happen to you now.'

Diego sat shivering, gazing into the flames.

'Let me help you get undressed,' she said, her voice soothing and calm.

As she unbuttoned Diego's shirt, he pushed her away; not a violent shove, but with enough force to make the point he didn't need any help. Backing away, she tended to the fire while he undressed. By the time she'd built it up for the night,

he was wrapped in the blankets, his wet clothes in a pile. Without speaking, she draped them over branches close to the fire so they would dry. Then she undressed, did the same with her clothes, and joined Diego under the blankets.

The two lay side by side, untouching, observing the distance between their naked bodies. She could feel Diego shaking, a tremble from either the cold or shock following his encounter. Unable to ignore it, she rolled onto her side and wrapped her arms around him. At first he tensed, a momentary twitch, but then he relaxed into the embrace. Pulling each other closer, their limbs entwined.

Maria's lips danced on Diego's, a fleeting and delicate touch. He responded, allowing the pleasure to wash over him, easing his pains, comforting his tension, relaxing his spirit. Their bodies melded into one, and for the first time Diego understood the sensuality of a woman, the thrill of mutual longing, the bliss of unity.

After the act of love, the two remained in each other's arms, sleeping until the first light of dawn cast long shadows through the trees. Maria awoke, but stayed where she was, listening to Diego's rhythmic breathing. It was the first time in weeks he seemed at peace, relaxed, untroubled by demons and threats and horror. He had survived; they had survived, and today was a new beginning.

It was vital to remain on guard, to ensure complacency didn't creep in. There were still many risks to face, many threats to escape. Maria prayed the Fornicator had been destroyed. Diego had said nothing after emerging from the shrine, but everything pointed to the demon being burned up.

They had to keep their wits about them; there might still be other demons evading the church militia, so they needed to be vigilant. It also wasn't beyond the bounds of possibility that the clergy would be looking for Diego. After the death of Brother Ignatius, they might be seeking him for his part in the

demonic activity.

A shiver passed through her at the realisation of what had happened. Demons had come to their village; real demons with malicious intentions, not the fairy tale devils the monks talked about to make the children behave. They'd entrapped Diego and made him perform unspeakable, sinful acts. They'd tried to destroy him, to damn his soul to hell, but now he was free.

Maria pulled back the blankets and sat up. The fire was down to smouldering embers. Her first task was to collect more wood, prepare something to eat, and find out what was happening in the village.

As she rose, she glanced at Diego. A cold terror passed through her, the breath catching in her throat. As he lay sleeping, naked, she saw his penis, or what his penis had become: a swollen, yellow cob of corn.

Pulling the blanket to cover him, she hurried to the fire. Collecting her clothes, she quickly crept away towards the riverbank. Tears brimmed in her eyes and she struggled to swallow back the scream building in her lungs. What did it mean? Was he changing into a demon? Would his body return to normal now the Fornicator was dead? Surely the clergy would burn him to death for demonic activities if they discovered what he'd become.

The water was ice cold as she washed herself, but even the biting chill did not slow the chaotic jumble of thoughts in her head. Diego was her friend, her best friend. She'd done everything she could to help him. She'd have tackled the Fornicator on her own if he'd asked. She'd die for him because ... she loved him.

Was this something they could hide, a disfigurement they could ignore? He wasn't to blame. If anything, he was the victim in all of this, an innocent victim tricked and betrayed by the dark forces. He'd risked his life to free the world of a demonic entity.

Once dressed, Maria knelt by the side of the river and prayed. She prayed for guidance, for strength, for the wisdom to know what to do. When there were no more prayers to be said, she rose. Moving along the bank, she found a boulder, smooth and round. It was heavy, but not too heavy to carry.

Back by the fire, Diego still slept, curled up in the blankets. Maria sat and watched him for a while, tears streaming down her cheeks. She had no doubts, no regrets. She knew what had to be done and understood why it was better she did it than anyone else. Better a loved one than a raging mob.

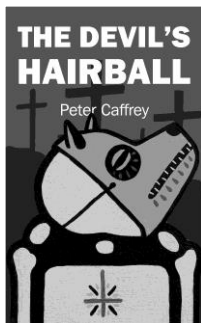
Maria raised the boulder above her head.

‘Goodbye,’ she muttered, before bringing the rock down with as much force as she could muster.

There was a sound like a coconut being opened with a machete, a dull muffled crack and a slop of wetness. Closing her eyes, she lifted the rock and brought it down once more. With each subsequent rise and fall, her hands became wetter, stickier, and her tears flowed more freely. She kept up the rhythm of the blows until her arms, weak and shaking, could no longer lift the boulder.

Turning away, she looked through the trees. The morning sun filtered between the boughs like fingers of gold, picking out the dazzling colours of wild flowers. Two tiny birds flew side by side, twisting and turning in unison, as if joined by some invisible bond. It was the most beautiful morning ever.

Maria leaned back, a smile creeping onto her face, as her hand gently stroked her swollen belly.



## The Devil's Hairball

When Victor Holycross commits an act of heinous sacrilege at the Festival of the Blessed Virgin, he unwittingly instigates a curse which transforms his wife and daughter into the Devil's hairballs. To seek absolution for his sin and to lift the hairy plague from his family, a penance is given: the recovery of stolen religious relics. Under pressure from a less-than-Godly Cardinal and his malicious henchman, Victor has little choice but to accept his fate.

With a time frame of 40 days and 40 nights and a decrepit bicycle as his sole form of transport, he finds himself helped (and more often than not hindered) by a one-legged whore, a talking dog with strange sexual proclivities and an attack-nun.

As Victor is thrust into a maelstrom of demonic confrontations, unholy alliances and duplicitous relationships, he soon discovers that the world is a far darker place than he ever anticipated.



“If Dante’s Inferno, The Wizard of Oz, and Monty Python’s Life of Brian had a sacrilegious threesome it may look quite a bit like The Devil’s Hairball. It’s wonderfully absurd, a bit whimsical, and completely bizarre.”

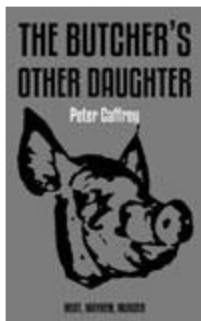
**Biblioculus.com**

“One of the most bizarre story ideas I have come across in recent years.”

**Jim Mcleod – Gingernuts of Horror**

“Improper. That’s how to sum up Peter Caffrey’s raucous horror/comedy *The Devil’s Hairball* ... dirty humour drips from every page.”

**Kendall Reviews**



# The Butcher's Other Daughter

Jacques Dupont is a pork butcher in the small town of Sainte-Marie-sur-Ariège. On the surface, he appears to be an unremarkable man, but Jacques has a secret, a previous life he is desperate to ensure remains forgotten.

When his two worlds collide, the outcome is cataclysmic, throwing his life into a maelstrom of violence and rage which threatens to overwhelm everything he holds dear.

If you like your splatterpunk laced with a smattering of charcuterie, then Sainte-Marie-sur-Ariège may be the town for you!

The Butcher's Other Daughter is a tale of meat, mayhem and murder.



# Whores Versus Sex Robots (and Other Sordid Tales of Erotic Autom- atons)

When the introduction of brothels manned by AI-powered sex robots threaten the profitability of the world's oldest profession, the street girls decide it's time to fight for their future and bring the punters back where they belong: between their legs.

Hatching a drastic plan to ensure the Johns turn against erotic automatons, the whores take on the brave new world but inadvertently unleash a battle for survival as technology's finest refuse to take the challenge lying down.

Whores versus Sex Robots is a seedy, science fiction, splatterpunk, tongue-in-cheek novella. The book also includes a selection of other stories addressing the rise of the sex robots.



**WARNING:** Despite the title, this book is NOT erotica, and is totally unsuitable for masturbatory purposes – unless, of course, you like to knock yourself out while reading about the violence and pain of modern society, the frailty of the human condition, the abandonment of hope, the depths of selfishness to which mankind can (and often will) sink, and some other shit which mocks humanity but is a bit funny (if you have a twisted mind). If that's the case, then buy this book and wank yourself silly. Otherwise, please do not interfere with your sexual apparatus while reading these stories.

If you have enjoyed **The God of Wanking**, please consider leaving a review at [Godless.com](http://Godless.com) and Goodreads.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Peter Caffrey is a writer of fiction with an absurdist leaning.

His work has appeared in a number of publications including Underbelly, Infernal Ink, Horror Sleaze Trash, Danse Macabre, Close to the Bone, Frontier Tales, Terror House and Idle Ink. He has also appeared in a number of anthologies including the Bumper Book of British Bizarro, Santa Claws is Coming to Deathlehem, 666 Dark Drables, Prose in Poor Taste Vol 2 and Tales of the Weird West Vol 9.

His novels include The Devil's Hairball, The Butcher's Other Daughter, The God of Wanking and Whores Versus Sex Robots (and Other Sordid Tales of Erotic Automaton).

He drinks too much, exercises too little and is unlikely to change.

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