

Father Dunne's School for Wayward Boys #4

by Kyle Hemmings

I had discovered him sitting behind a door made of opaque crackle glass. It was two floors below the chapel, dark, chilly, the smell of lingering sandalwood, cobwebs scattered along the border between wall and ceiling. I had gone there to sneak a smoke. At 14 years old, my lungs were still good and with rubbery legs--I could outrun any priest. My theory: the room must have held a string of confession boxes at one time.

Behind glass, I couldn't make out his features, only the shroud of head and shoulders, face staring out. Was he dead? Was it rigor mortis?

And how was I to explain this urge to draw closer, to enter into a union? Perhaps a part of me was dying, had already turned its back on God.

I approached the confessional slowly and entered. His voice was soft and raspy. He said, "Kneel down my son, I've been expecting you."

I asked him how long he had been there. Behind the glass, the head tilted back.

"Forever, " he said.

"Why do you stay down here?" I asked.

He said "I am being punished for falling in love with a young and beautiful nun, for placing her before all duties to God. We corrupted each other's soul. I too was young, unworthy of my faith."

Whenever I could, I'd sneak him bits of cheese and cold cuts from

the cafeteria, whatever I could salvage from our student meals.

One evening, I knelt in the old confessional and said I wanted to confess my sins. As if this could release me from Father Dunn's school for good.

I told him almost everything, the stolen money, the parties I crashed with Justin Bieber wannabes, the fake jewels I stole from my girlfriend's mother.

Each time I confessed to him, the sins were more serious, until I was emptied of everything but original sin.

He said "Those sins were the very ones I once committed in different guises."

I said "Perhaps, Father, we should exchange places. I will grow old for you."

I waited for him to absolve me, give me penance. To laugh. To crack a joke.

He said nothing.

I raised my head, could no longer see his silhouette.

I stood, walked out, opened the door to where the priest sat.

There was no one but me.

I sat down in his place and waited for footsteps.

I waited for a woman to step slowly and quietly towards me, to confess on the other side of glass that she had killed a priest.

