

A COMPLICATED FRIENDSHIP

It's a curse, that place. That town is hell. What kind of town would torture and execute people who are different? If God loved that place, that madness would have ended a long time ago. And I was put into it, forced to choose a side. The way of the town, or the way of love and God.

It was a late summer, 1725. A very calm and peaceful place, at the time. I lived in Dead Man's Square, Kent. It's not well known, but its home. My name is Father Michael. I was the priest of the church. I was the only priest. But the unforgiving Autumn of last year had left many poor and had drained the resources of the church, so food was scarce for The Gala. The Gala was to celebrate that Dead Man's Square had not been attacked for 10 years. As soon as I heaved open the weighty, maroon wooden doors a wave of peace smothered me in a semblance of calm, as it always did when I left or entered, and the morning sun's heat woke me from the tiredness left by a sleepless night.

I went to the market to gather the food. The church is around a mile away from the market so I had some walking to do. As soon as my feet crossed the line from the town and into the market, you could feel the vibration of the people screaming for someone to buy their products. Men drinking and laughing on the right hand side, the women buying food for their families and having nice and lovely conversations with their friends on the left and the children running all over the place. Laughing, chasing each other. It was a glorious sight to see and be part of.

"Morning." Said the shop keeper as I walked into the local shop, Miss Mia's Keep. It had recently been opened and has had a positive review.

"Morning to you too," I replied, "what's in stock today then?"

"Oh Father, I have just the thing for the gala." The shop keeper then pulled out a woollen bag from under the desk and handed it over to me.

"Thank you very much Miss Mia, and may God be with you."

"And to you too, Father." I left as she waved goodbye.

I stepped outside to see many people running towards rather large crowd. Curious, I decided to follow; I still had some spare time left. As I soon went towards the crowd, I felt a shudder of evil and hatred, as if the dark lord of hell, Satan, had risen to the surface and destroyed everything. But, it was something far worse. When I said this place was peaceful and beautiful, I was only talking about this morning.

Dead Man's Square is a cesspool of evil and madness. The rule is that if you are caught with a black person, or a family, you are immediately placed in prison and the black family or person is tortured, butchered in a manner of brutal ruthlessness.

Then, at the end of this agonising period of painful thought, began the execution. It was horror. And what was worse, it was a single mother and a 4-year-old boy. You could hear the hatred, the violence. And then, a word was shouted. Like a bullet from a pistol it shot you in the gut. Death was right in front of me. The sight burned into my mind and eyes. The image of that bloodied woman and young boy will always be with me, until I pass to the other side, and perhaps after that too. May God protect them from fire and blood. Their hanging bodies drooped, dripping with fresh blood that splattered on the floor, forming puddles that flowed like rivers in the square. Gallons of blood. It was the sight of hell its self.

CHAPTER 2

THE EVIL I SEE

You would think that after a while, you would get used to it, the suffering of human life, but the problem is that you don't. Never. This has been the way of Dead Man's square for years. The suffering, the evilness, the torture. As if heaven has given up with this place and has been taken over by the hellish creatures of the world. I don't know about everyone else, but all I could see around me was rain, pure dark clouds that stopped the sun from shining. I could feel my heart bursting into a million. No emotion could describe the way I was feeling. The darkness was consuming me as I ran back to my safe haven. My world. My life. I was deep in thought, had no idea what to do at this point. The world I knew a long time ago was gone, forever. And never to return. But, I had faith. As I went up to the statue of our lord and saviour, I prayed for a sign to give me hope into this place. But then, a sudden bang came out of nowhere, inside the kitchen. I went to the kitchen and shouted "WHO GOES THERE!?" Then, a small black boy came out, raised his hands and pleaded not to be killed. He thought that I was a monster.

"Please sir, I only came here for food and sanctuary. Please, I want to live."

Our eyes met, locked on to each other. I could see into his eyes, as if the eyes were a keyhole to the soul. And all I could see was fear, hatred, confusion and despair. And I felt like he could see into mine.

"I'll go if you want, just don't send me back, I beg you." I couldn't say anything, what was I supposed to do. Knowing that if I gave this child to the town, then his living days are gone, but I would be arrested and ruin my image as a priest. I was drowning in thought. Not knowing what to do. But then I utter the words

"Who....who are you?"

"I don't know, when I was born, they found us straight away. We were lucky enough to be spared and taken to a camp. I thank God for the mercy he has given us. Praise him."

My guilt ran more and more as I learned more about him, if I was to do the 'right' thing, I would be killing a boy of God.

"What is your name, my child?" I said worriedly.

"I don't have one. My mother and father never got the chance to name me."

"Where are your parents now? Are they back at this camp?"

As he answered, I prayed in my mind that they would be safe. For a child to see this darkness of the world, and suffered so much, it made me sick. Like if a rotten egg that had been out for 8 months in the summer sun, and you had eaten it. As I look around this fearful boy, I see the evil around him.

CHAPTER 3

As if he were my own

Our eyes were still locked, each anticipating the movements of the other, not knowing what each would do next. I still hadn't decided what to do. But I had no choice, I knew what to do. To save a helpless boy in need and knowing what God would want. I had to protect this boy.

"Listen my child, I know you have suffered so greatly, and just want food, but you now have a choice. Stay with me and be fed and looked after, or take some food and run all your life" He was still in fear, looking at me with those brown and green eyes.

"Okay, I am trusting you, but just to be clear, I will be gone two days' time. I don't trust white people."

Within weeks, I felt as if I grew closer to this boy. Before we met, he didn't trust the people of Dead Man's Square, no there was only one he trusted as a brother, and a father. He helped around, in secret of course. Fixing the statues, rebuilding the roof and cooking food for both of us. When people came in for service, he hid in my room. He would pray with me, and pray in secret. I named him George, after the English Saint George, and I cherished him as if he were my son. But I know he isn't. I battled with myself, trying to convince myself that all of this was a sign that he is a second chance for my future, but deep down I know that this is someone else's boy. It cuts deep when I allow those thoughts. But we had begun, unreservedly, to trust one another.

"George? George?! Where are you?"

I began to have day dreams. Had he run away again? Did someone catch him? I screamed out into the church, running, searching for any hint. I explored anxiously outside,

"George!? George?! Please come out!"

Then, a tree branch fell. I looked up and saw him sitting, cross-legged and pensive.

"Thank the Lord. George, why didn't you answer when I called?"

He didn't say anything, not even a look. I decided to talk to him; I knew something was on him, like the harsh reality is pulling him to hell.

"Why can't I go outside, Michael? I want friends, somewhere to go. To be free. Instead I am stuck in here, wasting away behind the walls of this God forsaken- "

"Blasphemy!"

"Sorry. But do you understand? And don't lie, I'm old enough now to know the truth"

And I couldn't lie, I promised, and I always keep my promises.

“At the moment George, life in this world is harsh. And I know it feels like God isn’t here, but one day, he will return, and I know when he will return, because that is the day that the earth will have fully merged with hell. And he will be there to protect us, George. I know he will. You just wait.”

He leapt from the branch, with sadness in his eyes, knowing that day may never come.

“Hope, George. Hope is all you need to live” I whispered, praying to God that George’s soul may be spared.

Chapter 4

My Nightmares Become Reality

Two days passed, and George retained a look of uncertainty. But he was fine. And today? Today was a special day. It had been exactly five months since I had taken George in.

“Father Michael, I know today is a special day. I just want you to know...I have come to respect you as one of my family members and...and love you. Thank you for what you have done for me.”

Joy evolved in me, my heart fully restored in its faith in human life.

“George, I feel it too. Thank you.”

He turned back to the statue, praying. And I needed to finish up breakfast.

I went to the church’s kitchen and, suddenly, became overwhelmed by guilt. All this time, he had named me one of own his family members, and I didn’t say anything like that to him. I wasn’t going to end it there. I needed him to know.

I walked towards him, nervously. The way you walk the first time you see a beautiful woman and plan the game that ends with taking her hand. But I was wordless.

As, slowly, I raised my hand to meet with his shoulder, a large bang came from the gate. A knock.

“Hello Father? My son has committed a sin, and needs to confess. Please?”

“Of course, just let me finish up.

- *Go George hide, quick.*”

But the mother and son were impatient, already partway through the entrance to the church. George, with nowhere else to go, hid in the shadow of the confessional.

“Father, my son has committed a horrible sin and must confess. Please.”

“Of course. Come, child. Talk to me.”

“Theodore, meet me at the marketplace when you have admitted what you must.”

“Yes, Mother.”

She left, closing the doors behind her. As we walked towards the confessional, my heart tightened. I couldn't breathe. My thoughts wandered.

"Listen father. It was a minor sin."

"Then tell me. What was your sin?"

"I kissed my love."

"God forgives all love, and will forgive you, too."

"May we head to the confessional?"

"NO!" Flustered, I regained my composure. "No, there is no need. You run along now, child, your mother is waiting."

We stared at each other; he was an astute character. His face betrayed his lack of belief, or lack of trust, or both.

"Okay, see you later, Father."

As the gates closed behind the boy, George emerged, his lips parted as if he were to say something. But before he could speak, with a groan, we heard the gate open.

Theodore was watching us.

Staring at us.

My worst dreams had come true.

CHAPTER 5

I Know What I Must Do

Theodore was just staring at us. I trembled. George winced.

"Father, I understand, I will keep this between us. No need to worry. God forgives love, remember?"

But as he turned, his mother stormed through the church, demanding where why her son was not yet at the market, but upon seeing George ran straight back out.

"George – RUN!"

But the guards were there, and seized him. I could see his face, his fear, hatred and despair. I could feel his pain.

"FATHER!! HELP ME!! FATHER!!"

"GEORGE, DON'T WORRY. I PROMISE YOU, I WILL RETURN!!"

"He is black. He is nothing," a guard hissed.

"HE...HE IS MY SON!!!"

CHAPTER 6

I will see you again

For George's execution, I was invited to leave the cell in which they had imprisoned me. Taking the moment that I knew may be my last, I addressed my people. My parishioners.

"Please, good and worthy people of Dead Man's Square. Deep down in your hearts, you know that this is wrong.

You kill people that you believe are different. But we speak the same. We eat the same. We *bleed* the same. And the fact that you would kill this innocent, righteous boy? This is not right. *God* says this is not right."

"A black kid, who cares?" a jeering crowd member called.

"Perhaps. But still a human being. Please, I beg of you, do not kill my son. I will not allow you to pass. If you intend to murder, you will have to kill me where I stand."

As I survey my audience, the faces of hate and evil fill with sympathy and sadness. I look at the guards, and then I am blind, the sun reflecting from their knives; sharp, clean, yet laced with innocent blood.

My time has come. May God have mercy on my soul.

I love you, George, My Son.