

JESSICA'S CONFESSION

The priest had thought he'd heard it all before...

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For My Girls

*“Short stories are tiny windows into other worlds
and other minds and other dreams. They are
journeys you can make to the far side of the
universe and still be back in time for dinner.”*

— Neil Gaiman

JESSICA'S CONFESSION

TEARS welled in Jessica Prowling's eyes as she sat in the confessional box. Sniffing, she dabbed them with the white handkerchief she had been clutching in her lap. She glanced at it: a white hanky to surrender with. The priest sat silently opposite, separated only by a thin wooden partition. It was now or never.

"Forgive me Father, for I have sinned."

She heard him take a deep sigh before he answered. "Carry on my child. What is it you wish to confess?" His voice was soft and calm but Jessica detected a trace of irritability.

Unsure as to where to start, she sniffed and wiped her nose. Her heart beat loudly in her ears, magnified by the silence that had descended upon their little Lancashire church.

A lump in her throat prevented Jessica from replying. She swallowed twice before the words emerged. "I, I don't know where to begin," she said. The words now gained rapid momentum. "It's all too much. I can't go on like this, it's driving me insane." She placed her head in her hands and began to cry.

"Now, now," the priest said. "Begin when you are ready to talk."

It was a minute before Jessica regained her composure and ceased her crying. It was going to be difficult, but she would try.

“I guess it all started soon after I got married to my Peter nearly five years ago. Do you remember Father? You married us in this church on the day that the old oak tree was hit by lightning. It was an omen, everyone at the reception knew that it didn’t bode well for Peter and me, but they all said nothing. I can see the glum faces now as I speak, nobody dared look me in the eye, and even my mother said nothing. I made a silent oath that day as I sat at the wedding table with my new husband: we weren’t going to let any superstitious rubbish ruin our marriage. But it was true, it was a bad omen, and now I’m left to pay for it all.”

The priest remained silent as she began to cry once again. “You know,” she continued, “the funny thing about it all is that I got everything I wanted, a lovely little baby girl, a house and a loving husband, and I’m still not happy. You remember my little girl, Charlotte, don’t you Father? You christened her here last month.”

The priest said that he remembered the occasion very well, and bid her to continue.

“We tried so hard to have a child in the first couple of years,

but when Peter had that test to see if he could have kids... well, you can understand how devastating it is when the doctors say that we would never have children. I must have cried myself to sleep for over a month after that, and Peter just hit the bottle. He blamed himself for everything, no matter how much I tried to make him feel better. All he kept on saying was that he wasn't a real man, and why would I want to stay married to a husband that wasn't even a man? There was a stage when he would come home drunk every night for six months. That was a very lonely six months. Do you remember those times Father? Peter even came around to the church to talk about it with you."

The priest cleared his throat. "He was a very confused and depressed young man, but God was listening to our prayers. Wasn't He, Jessica?"

"Yes Father, He was. Peter's a new man with his daughter. I never thought I'd see the day when he would be so happy. Having a daughter made him a man again. He's a different, better, person than the man I married. It's as if he's been reborn. I thank God for His mercy."

Jessica heard the priest shuffle in his seat, as if what she had said had made him feel uncomfortable. "He's come a long way from those dark times," she said, "but at the time I thought our marriage was all but over. I was so lonely. I felt so unloved

I even thought about running away and staying with a friend of mine in Glasgow for a short while.”

“What stopped you?”

“Well, I met a stranger one day, here in this church when I had come to pray for help. He was tall and dark, handsome like a movie star. It was as if he was an angel, heaven sent, and he made me realize what I had. It was a special friendship, I never told Peter though. Peter would have gone crazy with jealousy if he ever found out I was meeting a man in church to talk about my problems to. But this man began to make me feel like a woman again. I found myself coming to church every day, and not only to pray.”

The priest again shuffled in his seat. “I’m sorry Father, I didn’t mean to embarrass you,” Jessica said, “but it wasn’t anything untoward, nothing illicit, just friends.”

Jessica hesitated. She had got carried away and almost told everything, and now she was caught between telling the truth and lying. Her emotions were in turmoil. Could she lie to a man of God? Unsure as if she wanted to go on with the confession, something inside told her that this man could be trusted.

She took a deep breath and went on. “That was about the same time last year, near Christmas, when we came to you for

marriage counseling, do you remember? We only came once or twice because things began to work out a little better for us, especially when I told him that I was pregnant and we were going to have a baby after all. He changed almost over night, he stopped drinking, he went to work on time, and he began smiling again. Oh, Father, you don't know how good it was to see him smile again. I would do anything not to take his happiness away. You must believe me."

The priest agreed and Jessica hesitated once more. She had reached the crossroads. One more step and he would know her darkest secret. Would he tell Peter? Would he tell her mother? Suddenly the urge to get up and run out of the church overwhelmed her. Sweat began to form on her brow, her heart quickened once more, and her throat dried almost painfully. She dabbed at her forehead with the little white handkerchief. Her hands, she noticed, were shaking uncontrollably. The heat was just unbearable. Jessica glanced at the priest through the partition and made her decision.

"Do you remember the Christmas Eve mass we had last year, the one when you gave the sermon on family values?" she said. "We all went to your apartment afterwards for a few Christmas drinks, there were about thirty of us in all, if I remember correctly. Well, the dark stranger that had become my friend was there too, and he endeared himself to everyone, even Peter and my mother. Do you remember him Father?"

He was coy in his reply. "It was a long time ago, my dear. I am new and don't remember all of my flock as yet."

"Peter drove my mother home early as she didn't have any transport. He said that he was going to go to the Old Vic on his way back and so I was not to expect him for another hour or two. I didn't mind, there were still lots of people to talk to, and I was feeling slightly tipsy with all the wine and champagne. People started to leave as the night went on, and I continued to wait for my husband to collect me. It was four hours since Peter had left and I began to feel that he had forgotten me. It wasn't the first time he had done something like this; he was still drinking heavily last Christmas, and I knew that I would have to find my own way home. But there was nobody else left at the party except for the stranger, and I accepted his offer of a lift. Except," and Jessica couldn't finish. She was almost hysterical.

"What is it?" asked the priest. "What happened?"

"You know damned well what happened!" she hissed through the open partition. "You seduced me in your bedroom. You were the stranger that I didn't know. You promised to take me home, but instead took advantage of my drunkenness and insecurities, and you abused your position of trust. You are the stranger that married me to Peter and then you gave false marriage guidance in the hope of destroying that marriage.

You sired my child who you baptized knowing fully well that Peter could never have been the father.”

“Calm down Jessica,” he said, growling. “Be careful of what you say in here.” Then he calmed and leaned closer to the partition so that his lips were almost touching the screen. She could feel his hot breath caressing her ear. “Why don’t you come around later tonight and we’ll talk about it, okay?”

Jessica smiled and tucked the little handkerchief into her handbag. *Why not?* She thought. It might just turn out better than expected. Who knows, perhaps a brother for Charlotte? Peter would love a son.

Now *that*, she confessed, would really make him feel like a man.

~ THE END ~

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr. Scott Zarcinas is a father, husband, son, brother, writer, doctor, public-speaker, house dad, taxi driver, freelance marketer, and very average soccer player.

He is the founder of Unlocking Your Life seminars, established in 2008 to help others achieve their personal-development goals through the philosophy of Empowered Living.

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He has written several books, including *Samantha Honeycomb*, *Your Natural State of Being*, *Ananda (Thanksgiving Day)*, *The Golden Chalice*, *DeVille's Contract* and many short stories.

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