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“The Wretched Hissing Sound”

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“I never really understood the purpose of confessing, Father. It’s not as if god is waiting to listen to my sins. And even if there were a god, he would have already known about them. Otherwise, all this is just an elaborate charade.”

“You confess not for the appeasement of god, but to pacify yourself. I won’t say that a divine intervention summoned you here today. God doesn’t need your confession; you do. That is why you’re here,” said the Father.

“Can I smoke a cigarette?”

“Go ahead,” he replied with a sigh.

“What do you think about death, Father? Is it predestined?” I lighted a cigarette and the wooden walls of the confession chamber were washed with dancing light.

“I believe all of us serve a purpose. We can’t overstay our welcome,” said the Father from the other side of the partition. I could see his silhouette through a small fenestration in the partition wall.

“I killed someone, Father; at least I think I did. Does that change your perception of me?” I said with a feigned indifference. I felt a sense of uneasiness in the air.

“I’m not here to make judgements.” His reply was calm, almost serene, as if such confessions were an ordinary occurrence.

“But I didn’t kill him, *technically*. I can’t know for sure.”

“Tell me what happened,” said the Father.

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I took a long drag of the cigarette and began, “I was walking to my car when I heard the sound of air leaking from somewhere. I went around the trunk of my car and found a man lying in a pool of his blood. His face was bashed in. His throat was punctured. And it was no tire but he who made the eerie sound. Each breath he drew was followed by that sound, that *wretched* sound.

“I was appalled by his state. I was having a bad day already and then I had to deal with him. He was looking at me and breathing and making that sound as if his lungs had fractured. That *khee* sound again and again. ‘Shut up, will you?’ I roared at him.

“I could have helped him, but I did not. I sat in my car and tried to efface his image from my mind. But that wretched hissing sound still pierced inside. I turned the ignition on to kill it and eventually drove away.” I paused to take another drag.

“I thought that I would forget about it. But it still haunts me, Father. I have this paranoia of being watched and I still hear that sound sometimes. But I know that all this is only in my head; gradually, it will fade away. I am not here for that.”

“What are you here for then?” asked the Father.

“An answer. Do you think that I killed him?”

The Father pondered for a while and said, “You didn’t kill him. But you didn’t save him either. Yes, you failed as a human but not in god’s eyes, only in yours. The Bible says that the heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps”.

“Please do not talk to me about providence, Father.”

“What is it that you want from me then?”

“I need reassurance from you. Just tell me that this anguish and this hopelessness will fade away. Tell me that I’m not damned and that there’s still hope for me. It’s not too late, is it? I need you to tell me that it’s not too late.”

“I cannot make judg-”

“I need you to tell me that I’m a good person. I know that I let that man die. What I did was selfish and heartless. But that doesn’t mean that I’m a lost cause, right? I need you to tell me that. Father? Tell me please. Tell me that I’m redeemable.”

I didn’t realize how or when my imploring turned into sobbing. The Father did not say a word after that. The smoke from my cigarette, accompanied by the Father’s silence, turned into nothingness. The eerie silence, however, was accompanied by a sinister sound, merging maliciously with the clamor of the outside world, conspicuous amidst shadows, like that of air leaking through a pipe.