

## One Last Job

*It was too dark in the confessional...too dark and too close. Christopher felt uncomfortable in the confining space. It was too tight, too small, too much like a cell...or a coffin. There was nowhere to run or even turn to fight, if that became necessary. The space was just big enough that he could bend his elbow and slip a hand inside his winter overcoat. Someone had recently sprayed the booth with air freshener, and the cloying patchouli fragrance was almost overwhelming. There was the soft rustle of movement in the adjacent compartment and Christopher knew Father Damanski had entered. With a faint scraping sound the door across the screen in the wall was drawn back.*

“Good afternoon, my son.”

“Hiya, Father. Damanski, right?”

“Yes, that’s right. You may begin your confession.”

“I’m sorry, Father, but I’m not really here to confess. See, I’m not even Catholic. I just needed to talk to you, needed to get something off my chest.”

“I see. Well, if you’d like to make an appointment to meet...”

“No, Father. It has to be here and now.”

“Hmmm...sounds important.”

“Yeah, it is. But first, I have to know something. Whatever I say here is private, right? I mean, you’re not going to ever breathe a word of it to anyone for all eternity, right?”

“That’s right, my son. As a priest of the Church, I’m forbidden to share what you say to me with anyone.”

“Even after I’m dead? You can’t talk about it after I’m gone?”

“Well, it would depend on the circumstances. If there were sufficient and just reason, I would be allowed to divulge what you’d confessed. But that would be very unusual.”

“Okay...good. ‘Cause I’ve gotta tell someone about what I’ve done...about the men I’ve killed.”

“...killed...my son?”

“Yeah. That’s my job, see? What the movies call a hit man. But I don’t like that term. Sounds like some bozo enforcer who’ll smash your nose in ‘cause you owe some

loan shark money. That's not what I do. I kill people – people who've pissed off somebody with enough jazz to pay my fee. I've killed...lessee...17 people in the past 12 years, I think. Yeah, 17, that's about right."

"Mother Mary...17... How can you do that, just...murder people?"

"Hey, it's work, and I'm really good at it. But you don't gotta make it sound so monstrous. Most of my targets were real scumbags anyway. I mean, they deserved what they got. And the rest – well, I tried to do them easy. Just corner them somewhere and put a .45 hollowpoint into the back of their skull – quick and painless, y'know? – never knew what hit 'em."

"But not all of them were murdered so mercifully, I suppose."

"Aw, fu...sorry, Father. No, most of 'em needed dyin' anyway, y'understand, but even then I tried not to be too cruel. No sense to it, being cruel. Sure, there were some that I had to do special. Like this guy in Sarasota – they called him Mako, like the shark, ya know? – he was head of this buncha Cuban drug dealers that was dealing on my boss' turf. That had to be stopped, but if my boss had just had him killed it woulda only been a little beef for them but a big problem for my boss. So instead I had to go in and kill Mako's woman and son. I hadda dress it up, too – put around some candles, sea shells, beads, paint designs on the walls and floor around the bodies, that kinda thing – made it look like they'd been sacrificed by some Santeria cult. That got Mako mad at the Jamaican posse, thinking they'd done the job. Started a little gang war that killed about two-dozen on each side. Then Mako comes to my boss, asking for help in the war. That was gravy. Put Mako in debt to my boss, while keeping the Jamaicans and the Cubans killing each other instead of dealing in our game. I hated to kill a woman and a 3-year-old kid, but that's business."

"And why have you come to me? Why are you telling me all this if you didn't come for confession and absolution?"

"Well, kinda for two reasons, actually. For one, I'm getting out of the business. I can't do it no more. Been hearing voices at night – sometimes in my dreams, but sometimes just from the darkness while I'm waiting to fall asleep. Voices of the people I've killed. They whisper to me, Father, accusing me, saying they're waiting for me to join 'em. Some of 'em's in Heaven, some's in Hell, so no matter which way I go they'll get me. I don't know if I buy all that afterlife bullsh...stuff, but I know I hear the voices. So I want to get out of the killin' business. Wanna just walk out and not do it no more. But that can't happen. I know too much, see? Tally – that's my boss, Tally – he can't let me go on breathin' if I walk out. I know enough to get him put away forever. And I can't run, because he knows my stuff – knows where my family is. I bail on Tally, he'll strike at me through them.

"That's the first reason. But the one you should know about is that I'm waiting here. You're my cover, see. I'm on duty. I'm here to kill a man. No, don't move. I've

got a pistol pointed at your balls, and these thin walls won't even slow a bullet down. We've got a few minutes yet, and you're gonna let me finish what I have to say.

“See, Tally has me contracted to kill a very powerful man. This guy – let's just call 'im 'Mr. Big' for now – is in a critical position in his organization. If he dies, their whole structure will crumble – take 'em months to rebuild and regain power. In that time, Tally can move in and grab the ball and run – maybe take over the whole works. So Mr. Big needs to be removed. That's my job. But I can't get close to him – he's too well protected. Always has bodyguards around him, travels different routes, in different cars, every day so no sniper can pin him down, has his own chef and food taster so he can't be poisoned, precautions like that. But like I said, I'm good at my job. I did my research really well. Mr. Big's a good little Catholic, and he comes here every other Thursday to Confession, leaving his gunzels outside the church. So I figured I'd wait here for him, get him when he's trapped in a confessional and can't dodge or run or fight. His car should have arrived about five minutes ago...figure a couple minutes for his guards to come in and look around, make sure the place's safe, and he'll be coming in to cleanse his filthy soul.”

“My God...you can't do this...this sacrilege! You mustn't spill blood in a church!”

“I have to, Father. If I run, Tally will murder my mom and sister. If I don't kill Mr. Big, Tally will have me killed. So this is my last job. I expect that when I kill Mr. Big I'll die too – you don't make a hit this big without that sorta risk. Then I'm out of the business; got the job done so my family's safe, and I've gone out with a bang, so...listen...hear that? That's his voice! He's sending his guards back to the car! Now he's going into the other Confessional, just a few feet away, to wait...for you, Father Damanski.”

“For me...you're waiting to kill Bob Langley? Oh, Mother of Christ, you can't...”

“Yeah, Father; good ol' Bob Langley's Mr. Big. Told ya my research was thorough. I know he comes to confess to you because you two grew up in the same neighborhood in Philly and so he believes he can trust you. I bet he's told you so much stuff in confession...all sorta stuff his first lieutenant, Tally, don't want to come out after Langley dies. That's why he hired me to kill Langley ... and to keep you quiet. Can't have you spreading tales after Langley's dead, y'know.”

*Christopher reached inside his coat pocket and grasped the cylindrical plastic switch wired there. He pressed the button, wired to the 25 sticks of TNT taped around his middle....*

© Stephen Thorn 2015