THE ORDEAL (SHARKRIFICE?)

Written by

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EXT. LAGOON - DAY

...a MIDDLE AGED PREACHER, intense, eyes filled with rapture, looks out over the water.

CHANTING comes from a SMALL CHURCH a distance behind him.

Under a volcanic sky...the sun bronzed by apocalyptic ash

The preacher's gaze fixes on a BUOY near the center of the lagoon. A VIOLENT FROTH stirs in the water in front of it.

The froth settles...and a SHARK FIN emerges.

The preacher raises a hand... the chanting in the church stops.

The shark fin submerges.

The preacher climbs into an

OLD SKIFF

Rows toward the buoy

... under the burned sky and ash dimmed sun.

A moment later...

He arrives at the small buoy. Blood stains the water.

He tugs on a CHAIN running from the buoy into the water.

Pulls it into the skiff.

At last reaches the end: a steel clamp is locked onto a WOMAN'S SEVERED LEG between the tibula and fibula...the leg chewed off at the knee...fresh muscle and tattered skin.

PREACHER Daughter, we are grateful for the price you have paid that the rest may live, praise be the Divine Mother.

EXT. SMALL COASTAL TOWN - DAY

Apocalyptic images: homes with broken windows and overgrown lawns...abandoned cars...streets bursting with weeds.

EXT. FORTRESS HOUSE - DAY

A small, flat roofed building converted into a crude fortress. Barricades and a snipers nest on the roof.

A chain link fence encloses the yard. A small crop of unripe vegetables sprouts from the ground.

On the roof, sitting on the barricade and holding a rifle, JONES, 40s, his once strong frame depleted from malnourishment, watches the approach from the church, its steeple visible in the far distance.

MATTHEW, 18, cooks a couple of cans of beans over a fire pit in the yard. Missing one leg, he sits in a wheelchair.

MATTHEW

Supper's about ready, Dad.

Across the yard...

ANGEL, 17, sits against the fence drawing in a little sketch book. As malnourished as the others, her long body displays some of its former athleticism. She has the look of one who has retreated into a shell after calamitous tragedy.

Jones, rifle in hand, emerges from the front door...crouches by his son...eyes Angel skeptically.

JONES Won't make it through the summer... not on what we have. Not all three of us.

MATTHEW We'll have to.

JONES We won't make it, I tell ya.

MATTHEW You'd just send her back out? I won't allow it.

JONES You won't --

MATTHEW I'll leave too!

JONES Son, don't make me out to be a monster. (MORE) JONES (CONT'D) There are terrible decisions that have to be made ...but they have to be made.

She makes her way over to them now.

Sheepishly hands Matthew a drawing.

Examining it, he blushes...a drawing of him.

MATTHEW It's amazing, Angel, simply amazing.

JONES Stop calling her that.

MATTHEW She seems to like it enough.

JONES Girl got a name, lacks the nerve to tell us.

MATTHEW She'll get around to it when she's ready.

Matthew hands a can of beans to his father. Opens the other and spills half of it on a plate and hands it to her.

She tries to push some of the beans off her plate back into his can, but he refuses.

MATTHEW I'm right sick of beans anyhow.

Jones shakes his head. Puts a large spoonful of beans in his son's can. Eyes the drawing while he does.

JONES

It is a good likeness.

A hint of smile on her face. Matthew beams.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Jones walks toward the front door, his hands high in the air.

A RIFLE trains on him from the steeple tower.

The door opens and out comes the preacher.

JONES

May I have a word, Father.

PREACHER

'Preacher' will do fine, ain't no Papists around here. Hell, I doubt there's a Pope on this Earth anymore.

JONES

I've come to see you on the matter of food.

PREACHER So you are ready to join us, then?

JONES That's not what I have in mind.

PREACHER

The Mother has indeed looked after us quite generously.

JONES

You've taken all there is for miles! Every store, every house, every God damned vending machine!

PREACHER

We harvested what the Mother provided.

JONES You tellin' me you can't spare none?

PREACHER

Perhaps if you weren't in the business of taking in wayward young girls your supply would be more sufficient.

Jones stares at the dirt. Struggles for his next words.

JONES

I know what goes on down there in the harbor. I know what you do.

He lifts his gaze to the preacher...who smiles.

PREACHER And so finally we get to the reason for your visit. The Mother does indeed provide.

Jones' shoulders sag. Deflated now with the decision made.

JONES The boy...my son can't know.

The Preacher takes him by the arm and walks him toward the lagoon.

PREACHER We'll be as clever as mice in the kitchen.

EXT. FORTRESS HOUSE - ROOF - NIGHT

Matthew on duty. Pit fires light each corner of the yard.

A FIGURE approaches outside the fence in the firelight, hands in the air.

MATTHEW Just stop right there.

The figure does. It's the preacher.

PREACHER I need to talk to your old man, son.

EXT. FORTRESS HOUSE - LATER

Jones and Matthews, rifles in hand, gather in the yard with the preacher. Angel listens from the door.

JONES What is it you want, Preacher?

PREACHER Why only to share some of our blessed bounty, of course.

MATTHEW You brought food?

PREACHER If I could have I surely would have, son.

MATTHEW It's a trick, Dad, send him on.

Jones remains silent.

PREACHER

My flock is a tightly knit group. That's the way things got to be since the Goddess set things right.

MATTHEW

Set things right?

PREACHER

The Earth had been sinned against, with the fouling of the air and the waters. She did what she had to do, but do not doubt her love for us her children.

MATTHEW

I don't doubt that you are up to something, you son of --

JONES

Hear him out, boy.

PREACHER

As I said, we're a tightly knit bunch. If you was to join our flock you would have all the food you could want. All three of ya. But I'm afraid the members would not take too kindly to giving food outside the church.

JONES

We're not joining your cult, you're wasting your time.

MATTHEW

We only need a little, Preacher, to tide us til the crop is ready. Surely you can spare a little?

PREACHER

I would like to help, I truely would. Perhaps if one of you could join I could persuade my members...

JONES

Forget about it...you best just head on out...

PREACHER

Wouldn't have to attend regularly. In fact, if one of you was to just take baptism I could see to it you get enough food to tide you.

Matthew mulls it over.

MATTHEW

I'll do it.

JONES

Over my dead --

MATTHEW

It's just a baptism. We need the food dad.

JONES I don't want you inside that place.

PREACHER

The baptism will be outside, at the harbor. But I'm not sure if in his condition he can manage it.

MATTHEW

What do you mean?

PREACHER

We require a baptism by ordeal. It's nothing much, but it is our way. You would have to swim to a buoy in the middle of the harbor and return. During that time you will meditate on the goodness of the Mother.

JONES It'll have to be me.

MATTHEW There's no way you could do it, Dad, not with your heart!

JONES It's the only way.

ANGEL

I-I-I...

She struggles to speak. It's been a long time.

ANGEL I-I will do it.

MATTHEW Out of the question. ANGEL

I am...a good swimmer.

PREACHER Well that settles it then.

EXT. FORTRESS HOUSE - DAY

Angel and Jones are ready to leave. Matthew, in his wheelchair and holding his rifle, is agitated.

MATTHEW I don't know about this.

JONES It'll be fine, that water's calm as a bath.

Angel bends over and hugs Matthew, a big step for her...she seems to be coming out of her shell shock.

MATTHEW I think I should go with you.

JONES And leave this place wide open?

Matthew has nothing to say.

EXT. LAGOON - LATER

The Preacher waits by the shore as Jones and Angel arrive. Jones gives an uneasy glance at the church, already filled with chanting.

> PREACHER They have been in communion with the Mother all morning. She is ready to receive.

JONES Just get it over with.

He takes Angel buy the shoulders. She shrinks in terror.

PREACHER Daughter of gaia, do you accept the Divine Mother as the source of all that is, sacred womb of the world?

She looks to Jones, unsure. He nods, then looks away.

She nods to the preacher.

PREACHER Do you see the buoy in the center of the lagoon?

She nods.

PREACHER Through you, our sins are devoured and life is renewed ...through you we are made whole again.

The preacher withdraws a blade. She squeals in horror, looks to Jones for guidance.

He brushes a tear from his eye, but nods.

The preacher makes a slash on her arm.

PREACHER Go now, and deliver us from sin. Go now, and be reborn through the Divine Mother!

He turns her toward the lagoon. She looks to Jones for encouragement, but he is quietly crying.

Blood dripping from the shallow wound on her arm, she climbs into the

LAGOON

... wades into deeper water.

Then swims toward the buoy.

ON THE SHORE

... the chanting grows louder. Rapture in the preacher's eyes.

Jones turns to find Matthew hurrying toward them on crutches. He tries to usher him away.

JONES

Get back to the house!

Matthew pushes past him.

ANGEL

... is half way to the buoy. A SHARK FIN appears in the water.

MATTHEW

Angel!

She doesn't hear him.

MATTHEW Angel! Come back!

Several feet from the buoy she stops to listen.

MATTHEW

Angel look out! Get out of there!

She sees the fin coming right at her. Panic.

She races for the buoy.

MATTHEW

...hops into the water. Beats the surface with a crutch. Jones runs and jumps into the skiff. Shoves off toward Angel. The preacher just smiles, his amusement growing. ANGEL

... reaches the buoy, but the shark comes right for her. Jones paddles furiously.

MATTHEW

...helpless on one leg, beats the water with the crutch. Chanting within the church grows orgasmic.

Jones now beats the water with an oar.

ANGEL

...clinging to the buoy, stares helplessly at the oncoming shark

... which turns at the last moment.

She hyperventilates.

The fin charges toward Jones. He rows parallel to the shore now, fleeing the shark.

Still hyperventilating, Angel makes for the shore.

MATTHEW

No!

The shark noses the skiff from below, tipping it.

Desperate breaths audible over her splashing, Angel races.

The shark pulls Jones under in a spurt of blood.

Matthew covers his face.

Angel stops, out of breath and spent, barely treads water.

The frenzy of eating around Jones subsides. All that remains is the broken skiff in a sea of blood.

MATTHEW Come on, Angel, swim!

She starts again. Labored.

The fin comes straight for her.

MATTHEW

Hurry!

She stops again. Can't lift her arms. The fin submerges. Matthew turns to the preacher.

MATTHEW

Stop this!

Angel tries to swim again...has no strength.

MATTHEW Stop it, I know you can!

The preacher raises his hand. The chanting stops.

MATTHEW

Angel, swim!

Her eyes are glassy with fatigue. Lips blue, face pale.

She meets his eyes. Would give anything to be in his arms.

MATTHEW

Angel!

He hops deeper into the water.

She closes her eyes a moment...starts to go under.

Then swims toward him.

Weak, determined strokes. Pulling herself through the water. Out of strength, she reaches the shallow water. No strength to stand. He pulls her into his arms.

Holds her tight.

Gazes into her eyes. She blinks weakly and smiles.

He feels something wrong. Looks down.

She is missing a leg. Chewed off at the knee.

MATTHEW

Oh, God!

Her blood spilling, he struggles to get her to the shore.

The preacher pulls them up.

MATTHEW Get away from her!

PREACHER She will die without me.

MATTHEW You did this!

PREACHER The Goddess has had her due. And she rewards us with great healing power. Come.

The preacher takes Angel in his arms and carries her toward the church. Matthew hurries on crutches to catch up.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

TITLE: one week later

Arm in arm, Matthew and Angel hobble together up the road, she on her right leg, he on his left, each with a crutch.

The preacher watches like a proud father from the door.

FADE OUT.