THE ORDEAL
(SHARKRIFICE?)

Written by

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EXT. LAGOON - DAY

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

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

CHANTING comes from a SMALL CHURCH a distance behind him.

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)
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 by 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.