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Deliverance

by Marion Umney

She watched him from the back of the church. He was lying prostrate in repentance before the altar. He knew they were coming for him.

Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.
Psalm 50 verse 15.

‘I have delivered him,’ she thought, ‘delivered him into the hands of justice, but I doubt he will glorify me,’ and she smiled grimly to herself.

It had been ridiculously easy. She had missed a couple of confirmation classes and he had called her over as she was taking off her Alb after mass. She had made sure her T shirt slipped as she lifted the robe over her head, so he could get a good view of the curve of her breasts, and the short skirt she was wearing, naturally rose to her crotch as she lifted her arms. She watched him; the lust and fear in his eyes, and she felt a frisson of fear herself, or maybe excitement.

“Anne-Marie, you weren’t at class last week.”

“Sorry Father, I had to go somewhere.”

“Well I hope you’re serious about your confirmation. It would be a pity for you not to do it.”

She watched him struggle to decide, then, as she reached up to hang the robe on the hook and her skirt rose again, she heard his voice thicken.

“I suggest you come round this evening and we can go over what you’ve missed. Six o’clock sharp.”

Waiting for him to answer the door, she shivered for a moment in the warm sunshine. Then the door opened, and she set her face in a smile.

“Come in, come in.”

He was wearing a dressing gown and Anne-Marie guessed there was nothing underneath. She knew he was alone. His housekeeper went home at 5 every day. She followed him into the library.

Afterwards he made her confess. She had sinned. She was a wicked lascivious girl. He gave her absolution, but she must not speak of this to anyone.

She went straight to the police. She was 15 and it was statutory rape. His DNA was all over her. They told her she was brave.

‘You don’t know the half of it,’ she thought. Finally, justice for Catherine. She had been 15 too, but she was slow witted, always had been. Her darling sister. She hadn’t associated what he did to her with the baby that came. She swore she hadn’t been with any of the lads, and she hadn’t. She hadn’t understood any of it. She believed she was blessed – an immaculate conception. They had taken the baby away and put her away too, and their mother’s grief and incomprehension were too much to bear. Anne-Marie had lost her sister, her mother and her innocence and she had sworn to make him pay.

As she watched him, she felt no pity for the ravages of pain on his face, his inner turmoil and self-disgust. Years later she would come to understand the complexities of human frailty and repentance, his and hers, but for now she was satisfied.