

# The Sins of the Father

by

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1 FADE IN:

1

2 INT. ATTIC - NIGHT

2

A simple room. A makeshift bed of a blanket and haversack nestles in the corner. A wooden table and chairs sit in the middle. A battered bible rests on the table, illuminated only by the moonlight through the single window.

A shadow falls over the bible as its owner stands at the window, nursing a scotch and listening to the distant rumble of artillery. This is FATHER JACK, mid-30s, though his tired eyes and weary face age him. The moonlight shines on his dog collar and his army-issue tunic.

There's a knock at the door, and a young Jamaican soldier, Private ISAAC KING, early-20s, gingerly pokes his head in. Father Jack clocks him, and drains his glass.

FATHER JACK

Your lot not have their own padre?

ISAAC

Not anymore. I'm sorry, Father,  
it's late. I --

FATHER JACK

Sit down.

Nervously, Isaac sits. As he does, a distant shell explodes.

ISAAC

I'm scared, Father.

Father Jack sets down his glass, not responding, not interested as he lights a cigarette.

ISAAC

We go up tomorrow, and all I can  
think of is if --

FATHER JACK

Not if. Dangerous word, 'if'.

Isaac stares at the padre, bewildered.

FATHER JACK

Clinging to 'ifs' won't change the  
inevitable.

ISAAC

But with God's guidance, there's --

FATHER JACK

Don't.

He steps away and pours out two drinks. Meanwhile, Isaac reaches for the bible and flicks through. He stops when he notices scribblings around the passages.

ISAAC  
 (reading)  
 If God is the shepherd, what  
 shepherd slaughters his lambs  
 before it is right to do so?

Isaac stands to distance himself from Father Jack's advance.

ISAAC  
 (reading)  
 How can He love when love does not  
 spare the innocent?

Father Jack grabs Isaac by the scruff of the collar.

FATHER JACK  
 Even the negro knows not to steal.

Scared, Isaac hands over the bible.

ISAAC  
 What kind of priest questions God?

Father Jack stows the bible, and slams Isaac's glass down.

FATHER JACK  
 What soldier admits his fear?

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

3 EXT. COUNTRY PATH - DAY

3

A fresh faced Father Jack strides towards a distant farmhouse, passing soldiers who snort and tut contemptuously at his pristine khakis and dog collar.

FATHER JACK (V.O.)  
 We're all the same at first. We  
 think we matter. That we're needed.

4 EXT. FARMYARD - DAY

4

He arrives to see soldiers lazing in the yard. He stands awkwardly among them, unsure what to do.

GOUGH (O.S.)  
 What the bloody hell we have here?

Father Jack turns to see a Sergeant, GOUGH, 30s, beefy, moustached, sidling up to him, sizing him up, unimpressed.

GOUGH  
 What did I say, lads? I said we was  
 buggered. Now they've sent proof!

FATHER JACK  
 Sergeant, if I may --

GOUGH

You may not. I'll make it easy for  
yer. We have a job to do, and we  
don't need some devil dodger  
telling us why we're doing it.

FATHER JACK

Isn't that for the men to decide?

GOUGH

Why? So they know God's on their  
side? They've got me, and when  
Fritz's love tokens start coming  
over tomorrow, they'll be much more  
glad about that, believe you me.

Gough marches off, leaving Father Jack to stand, stunned.

END FLASHBACK.

5 INT. ATTIC - NIGHT

5

Same as before.

ISAAC

But God is on our side.

FATHER JACK

How many boys arrive thinking the  
same? Us and Fritz, who's right?

ISAAC

They started this. It's our moral  
duty to win, and with God's help --

Isaac stops as Father Jack stands, turning his back as if he  
can't listen to this a moment longer.

FATHER JACK

First thing I learned about war...

He searches his haversack, returning with a battered cross.

FATHER JACK

When fighting for moral causes, the  
first thing man loses is his  
morality.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

6 INT. CHAPEL RUINS - DAY

6

Shells burst around the ruins. Father Jack hits the deck and  
crawls towards the rubble around the altar.

FATHER JACK (V.O.)

Thou shalt not steal.

Lying low, he sees a mangled hand trapped in the debris. Firmly in its grip is a gold cross. Father Jack hesitates.

FATHER JACK (V.O.)  
Sometimes, such principles must be  
abandoned. How, then, can one serve  
God by first betraying Him?

He can't bear to look as he breaks the fingers and slowly prises the cross away. A shell lands close. He curls up, cowering, unable to stop staring at the disfigured hand.

END FLASHBACK.

7 INT. ATTIC - NIGHT

7

Same as before.

FATHER JACK  
So much for the army providing me  
what I needed.

ISAAC  
That's your excuse? Stealing,  
Father? God punishes the sinful.

FATHER JACK  
Are you without sin?

ISAAC  
I've been to church every Sunday I  
can remember. I try to do what's  
right. I hope it's enough.

FATHER JACK  
If it is, what was the sin of the  
priest who deserved to be crushed  
by his own church? What was the sin  
of your own dear departed padre?

ISAAC  
He wasn't a padre.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

8 EXT. ROAD - DAY

8

Isaac and eight West Indian soldiers dig, supervised by an imperious, white, LIEUTENANT. Sporadic artillery fire lands around them. With each explosion, Isaac flinches.

LIEUTENANT  
Is it customary for darkies to  
dawdle while Jerry takes pot shots  
at them? Get on with it!

ISAAC  
Winston...

Isaac looks to the benign soldier beside him, WINSTON, mid-20s, who heartens him with a warm smile.

WINSTON  
Courage, brother.

The shellfire intensifies. Isaac screws his eyes shut.

WINSTON  
Lord, help me remember nothing will  
happen today that we can't handle  
together. Pray with me, Isaac.

ISAAC + WINSTON  
Lord, help me remember nothing will  
happen today that we can't handle  
together.

WORKING PARTY  
Lord, help me remember that nothing  
will happen today that we --

LIEUTENANT  
Cover!

The men dash to a nearby ditch. As they shelter, Isaac realises he's the only one without his pickaxe. His eyes widen in panic as the Lieutenant spots him empty handed.

LIEUTENANT  
Deary me. Something's missing,  
private. You'd better fetch it.

WINSTON  
Sir, the artillery --

LIEUTENANT  
Otherwise you'll all be digging on  
your hands and knees.

Tentatively, Isaac peeks over the ditch. A blast forces him back down. Winston scrambles over the top and disappears.

ISAAC  
Winston!

9 EXT. ROAD - DAWN

9

Isaac is tied to a wooden fence, crucifixion style. The Lieutenant addresses the section, Winston is missing.

LIEUTENANT  
It is clear your kind suffers from  
ill-discipline...

He turns to face Isaac.

LIEUTENANT

And cowardice. So, let this be a lesson to you. Natives can never be real soldiers. Section! Dismissed!

The men disperse, leaving a tearful Isaac alone. Shells land nearby. He squeezes his eyes shut in fear.

SOLDIER (O.S.)

'Ere lads, look what we have here!

Isaac opens his eyes to see a white SOLDIER in his face. A shell bursts, Isaac jumps, the soldier laughs.

SOLDIER

Don't worry, my little pickaninny. Jerry couldn't hit a barn door.

He patronisingly pinches Isaac's cheek.

SOLDIER

But I guess you've got to be good for something, might as well be target practice.

He hurries to catch up to his buddies. Isaac sees him wipe his pinching hand against his trousers.

END FLASHBACK.

10 INT. ATTIC - NIGHT

10

Same as before. Isaac buries his face in his hands.

FATHER JACK

So what sin sealed his fate?

Isaac looks up at Father Jack, his anger building.

ISAAC

Don't. That's my brother.

FATHER JACK

My point exactly. Would you call that God's punishment?

Isaac says nothing as he wipes away his tears.

FATHER JACK

Nothing but luck.

ISAAC

How does a priest believe that?

FATHER JACK

Have your lot been allowed up to the front yet?

Isaac shakes his head. Father Jack pulls a wry smile.

FATHER JACK  
Is that God's protection?

BEGIN FLASHBACK.

11 EXT. FRONTLINE TRENCH - DAY

11

Men cower in the mud as shells burst and bullets zip overhead. Father Jack, eyes wide with fear, stumbles towards a wounded man, screaming at his bloodied stump of a leg.

Father Jack picks him up and they stagger on, until another shell bursts and shrapnel cuts the man down. Father Jack flails wildly. Freeing himself from the lifeless face staring at him, he fights for the breath to cry out.

FATHER JACK (V.O.)  
Out here, there's no 'if', because  
all you can think of is 'when'.  
Eventually, you last long enough to  
start to hope for it. The release.

ISAAC (V.O.)  
How can you --

FATHER JACK (V.O.)  
Because I didn't understand. Not at  
first. Not until Harry.

ISAAC (V.O.)  
Harry?

As Father Jack lies in the mud, curled up on the fire step clutching a bible and muttering prayers to himself is a boy, barely out of his teens, HARRY.

12 INT. DUGOUT - DAY

12

Father Jack reads a letter from a pile beside him when Harry enters, clutching a piece of paper.

FATHER JACK  
Another one, Harry?

Harry hands it over. Father Jack inspects it: 'I hope, dear one, to know your charm and affection again before long.'

FATHER JACK  
Forgive me, censorship is a  
necessity, but with words like this  
I forget why. Someone special?

Harry hesitates.

HARRY  
Father, is it right for me to die?

FATHER JACK  
Come, come, Harry. What's this?

HARRY

I mean, for a greater purpose.

FATHER JACK

My dear boy, there is sacrifice in every struggle, but that does not make it inevitable. The Lord watches over his heroes. Have faith in Him to see you through.

HARRY

Even if --

Gough bursts in abruptly, cutting Harry off.

GOUGH

Don't worry padre, you take your time with those.

FATHER JACK

There's a lot to get through.

GOUGH

Oh I am sorry. I'll tell the boys going out to pray for you.

FATHER JACK

Going out? When?

GOUGH

Tonight. Spot of Hun-ting. You like that one, Private?

HARRY

Very good, sarnt.

GOUGH

I know, I should be in the music hall. But I'm here looking after you because I'm kind like that.

HARRY

Permission to go out, Sergeant.

GOUGH

You've done your fair share, Private. You can sit this one out.

HARRY

I'd like to go, Sergeant.

Gough sees the determination on Harry's face.

GOUGH

Suit yourself.

He stalks off.

FATHER JACK

Harry?

HARRY

The Lord watches his heroes,  
Father.

Harry turns and exits, leaving Father Jack alone, worried.

13 EXT. FRONTLINE TRENCH - NIGHT

13

Father Jack sits on the firing step, anxious. A flare goes up, and he stares, transfixed by its glow.

FATHER JACK (V.O.)

Waiting. That's all we do.

ISAAC (V.O.)

There must be more to it than that,  
Father.

The sound of gunfire snaps him back to reality.

GOUGH

Cover fire!

The men fire rapidly as a body's rolled into the trench, followed by Harry and two others. As they collect themselves, they gather round the body.

GOUGH

(casual)

They're still there, then.

Father Jack glares at Gough, then fixates on the body. The dead body of their fallen comrade.

FATHER JACK (V.O.)

Men, waiting their turn.

14 EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

14

Father Jack and the rest of the unit trudge along the muddy, broken road, the flashes of artillery behind them.

15 EXT. ROADSIDE - DAWN

15

Father Jack leads a funeral service. The men surround a simple grave, marked with a makeshift wooden cross.

FATHER JACK (V.O.)

We go up, we live or die, then we  
come back to do it all again. And  
so it goes on.

Shells begin to fall, forcing the funeral party to scatter.

END FLASHBACK.

16 INT. ATTIC - NIGHT

16

Same as before.

ISAAC

It's what has to be done.

FATHER JACK

It gets to you eventually.

ISAAC

Does that explain the whiskey?

FATHER JACK

Every man needs a release.

BEGIN FLASHBACK.

17 EXT. BROTHEL - NIGHT

17

Gough and the men queue outside a seedy establishment. Harry stands quietly among them. Father Jack approaches.

GOUGH

Come to sample forbidden fruits,  
padre?

FATHER JACK

I'm holding a service down the  
road. Perhaps I can persuade you?

GOUGH

Not when Madame Moxie calls.  
Besides, Wilson needs breaking in.

Gough slaps Harry on the back, he's visibly uncomfortable.

The door opens and several boy soldiers emerge. They don't look satisfied, just relieved. A scantily-clad Prostitute appears at the door. Gough herds them inside eagerly.

END FLASHBACK.

18 INT. ATTIC - NIGHT

18

Same as before. Isaac shakes his head in disgust.

ISAAC

It's wrong, Father.

FATHER JACK

What would you do if you thought  
you'd be dead tomorrow?

ISAAC

Why do you think I'm here?

FATHER JACK  
Everyone has their own way of  
accepting their fate.

Isaac springs from his chair and makes to leave.

FATHER JACK  
Where are you going?

ISAAC  
If I didn't understand, I do now.  
And I can't stay in the presence of  
a coward.

FATHER JACK  
Say that again.

ISAAC  
A coward. A deserter. However you  
want to justify yourself it's true.

Father Jack bounds across the room to confront Isaac.

FATHER JACK  
You hypocrite. You scold me when it  
was you who sought me out.

ISAAC  
I came for guidance.

FATHER JACK  
No, you came for absolution. You  
fear your sin is your death  
sentence.

ISAAC  
What do you know of it?

FATHER JACK  
I know it to be true!

A moment as they stare at each other, and their anger fades.

FATHER JACK  
It's true. Harry proves it.

BEGIN FLASHBACK.

19 EXT. FRONTLINE TRENCH - DAY

19

Father Jack moves among the men, chatting and handing out  
cigarettes. As he does, a soldier, HUDGINS, approaches.

HUDGINS  
Padre, sarnt wants a word.

20 INT. DUGOUT - DAY

20

Father Jack enters to see Harry stood like a schoolboy before the headmaster, Gough.

FATHER JACK  
Is everything all right, Sergeant?

Gough takes out a telegram.

GOUGH  
Signal from the provost marshal...  
(reading)  
38266, Lance Corporal Stockdale,  
first battalion, East Lancs, placed  
under arrest on several counts of  
gross indecency.

FATHER JACK  
Poor wretch. But I don't see --

GOUGH  
Among the sordid correspondence  
found by Army censors...

He pulls out a second letter and hands it to Father Jack: 'I hope, dear one, to know your charm and affection again before long.' Father Jack looks to Harry, dumbstruck. Harry does not react, or show any emotion whatsoever.

Gough snatches the letter back and makes to leave.

FATHER JACK  
Is that it?

Gough glowers at Harry, who remains stoically still.

GOUGH  
I've said all I need to say.

FATHER JACK  
He'll be arrested the moment we're  
out the line. You do know that?

GOUGH  
Good riddance.

Without another word, Gough storms out.

FATHER JACK  
Harry --

HARRY  
Spare me, Father. I am abominable.

FATHER JACK  
No, you have proven yourself equal  
to this task, as much as any man.  
(MORE)

FATHER JACK (cont'd)  
If not more. That does not make you  
an abomination.

HARRY  
God made me this way. When I got  
here I thought I could atone for  
his actions. But then you persuaded  
me to trust Him. And now...

Harry just shrugs, and makes to leave.

FATHER JACK  
Harry, please. Let me --

Harry doesn't listen, he just pushes past and exits. Before  
Father Jack can follow, an explosion rocks the dugout. He  
hits the floor and is showered in dirt and dust.

21 EXT. FRONTLINE TRENCH - DAY

21

Father Jack catches up with Harry who stands with the others  
around Gough, who's looking through a periscope.

GOUGH  
Jerry's bombardment's cut the wire.  
Any volunteers?

The men stand in silence.

HARRY  
I'll go, sarnt.

They stare each other down, long enough for the men to  
exchange confused looks. Gough doesn't break his gaze.

GOUGH  
Wallis, Boorman, Duffy.  
Congratulations.

Gough stalks off, and the men disperse. Harry makes to move,  
but Father Jack pulls him back.

FATHER JACK  
Harry, just think for a moment.

Harry shrugs him off and joins the others.

22 EXT. FRONTLINE TRENCH - NIGHT

22

Father Jack sits anxiously on the fire step.

FATHER JACK (V.O.)  
Waiting for our turn. That's it.

ISAAC (V.O.)  
It's for God to decide.

FATHER JACK (V.O.)

Is it?

A flare goes up. Father Jack gazes up. A single shot rings out. He jolts, and closes his eyes, sorrowful.

END FLASHBACK.

23 INT. ATTIC - NIGHT

23

Father Jack stands at the window, staring out.

FATHER JACK

The boys said when the flare went up they took cover. Except Harry.

ISAAC

You think it was his turn?

FATHER JACK

He always volunteered for danger. I suppose he felt it was better to hide his true self behind a veil of heroism.

ISAAC

He paid for his sins.

FATHER JACK

Sins that God charged him with. Harry was faithful, he deserved forgiveness, not betrayal.

ISAAC

He disgraced himself.

FATHER JACK

The greatest victory a man can win is to accept himself. Out here men do unspeakable things, and face themselves afterwards. Harry faced that his whole life. To do what he did, I can only conclude he was at peace with himself, and not even God can condemn him for that.

ISAAC

His treachery doesn't explain you.

FATHER JACK

You proved the sinful can be spared. Harry proves faith is no guarantee of salvation. How can one serve God by first betraying Him? Then again, how can God save man by first betraying him? My reason is simple, I've no use for Him.

ISAAC

Then you're no use to anyone. If  
you can't help me, what else can I  
do but trust His infinite wisdom?

FATHER JACK

Keep your head down.

24 EXT. FRONTLINE TRENCH - DAY

24

Isaac throws himself into the mud as a shell lands close.  
Together with a COMRADE, he carries a stretcher towards a  
WOUNDED MAN, who laughs when he sees them.

WOUNDED MAN

I must really be bugged! Whenever  
you're ready, darkie!

Isaac and his comrade lift the Wounded Man onto the  
stretcher as chaos erupts all around them.

25 INT. DUGOUT - DAY

25

Isaac and his Comrade enter and set the stretcher down. A  
Medic treats the Wounded Man as Father Jack holds his hand.  
Father Jack and Isaac lock eyes for a moment before his  
Comrade pulls him outside.

26 EXT. FRONTLINE TRENCH - DAY

26

They emerge into the barrage and curl up in the mud.

COMRADE

Pray for us, Isaac! Pray for us!

ISAAC

Lord, help me remember that nothing  
will happen today that we can't  
handle together. Lord, help me  
remember that --

A shell lands directly on the dugout. Isaac shields himself  
from the blast, then sees the dugout's been obliterated.

The ground is strewn with limbs, bloodied and ripped  
materials and papers. Isaac digs through the mud, eventually  
pulling out: a bloody, filthy, smouldering clerical collar.

As soon as he pulls it out, another shell lands and there  
are more distant cries from the wounded. Isaac tosses the  
collar aside and with his Comrade, carries the stretcher up  
the trench towards the explosions.

FADE TO BLACK

END.