

WE ARE SPARED HELL:

JUNIUS IN THE CRYPT

Written by

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**Context:**

In 17th century Holy Roman Germany, Junius lives amongst a convent of Nuns, near a small town in the forests of northern Bavaria. Her father, Johannes, was the practicing priest for the town, a small settlement deeply ingrained with poverty that was situated under the Catholic sphere of the greater city of Bamberg.

However, as war broke out across the Empire, large swathes of Germany was swept up in superstitious hysteria. Beset by terrible blight and an outbreak of plague, the Bishop of the Bamberg - Johan Fuchs - ordered a mass inquisition across his bishopric, and although Junius' father tried to resist he was accused of heresy and summarily burned at the stake.

Junius, battling with her own questions of faith, faces an impossible choice: lead the sisterhood in submitting to Bishop Fuchs, or doom them all to the wrath of the inquisition. Having begged for clemency in the town's square, she faced humiliation, sent back to the convent with the charred remains of her father, as a lesson and a warning. The following scene picks up with Junius, and another nun of the sisterhood - Mary - on the evening following the events in the town square, in the convent church's crypt.

**Characters:**

**Junius** - late 20s, very pale and thin, but beautiful in an ethereal sense. Outwardly very calm and imperturbable, bolstered by a strong sense of conviction in her Catholic faith bestowed in her by her father. But with him gone, that veneer has begun to crack.

**Mary** - late teens, newly inducted into the convent from the town and much more unsure in her surroundings. The daughter of the town's mayor, she abandoned her family because of a genuine sense of duty to God, inspired by Junius' father.

## INT. CHURCH CRYPT - NIGHT

The crypt is lit by candlelight, hazy orange shadows dancing across weathered stone walls. It is a small space, the curved ceiling barely high enough to stand at the apex, movement restricted around the circular well in the centre. Against each of the walls are raised stone slabs, resting tombs of long forgotten patrons to the convent.

JUNIUS and MARY kneel in prayer beneath a slender window carved into the back wall, moonlight projecting onto the slab below where the body of Junius' father lies. Behind the body a small IRON CROSS has been placed, slicing between the reflection of moonlight and casting the white funeral shroud half in shadow. Where the light hits, it renders the shroud almost transparent, and we see subtle hints of charred and crippled flesh, any human features almost gone.

Junius' hands are clasped tight around prayer beads, her face taut in deep introspection - she does not seem upset, but exhausted. Eventually the silence is broken as she takes a deep sigh and turns to Mary.

JUNIUS

We have done enough for tonight,  
thank you, Mary.

MARY

It is the least I could do, for  
him...  
(beat)  
...and you.

Mary turns to the older Sister, her eyes searching, but Junius cannot match her gaze.

JUNIUS

Don't concern yourself with me...

MARY

You mustn't bear it alone, Junius.  
Your father deserved more than this  
injustice, you mustn't bear his  
shame.

JUNIUS

(sharp)  
I feel no shame, Sister.  
(beat)  
What is done is done. I will not  
take the weight of their  
accusations, their falsehoods. I  
need not make absolution for his  
sins.

There is a long silence. Junius turns to Mary, embarrassed at her outburst, and extends a comforting hand. She knows the girl is only trying to comfort her.

JUNIUS

We will let him rest tonight. Will you help me bury him tomorrow?

MARY

(smiles, reassured)  
Of course. But where...?

JUNIUS

In the forest. I know a private place, he often visited alone.  
(beat)  
He once told me he thought God was understood better in nature.

MARY

He was such an insightful man.  
(looking at Junius)  
I believe you both are.

Junius does not respond directly to this. She is not embarrassed by Mary's affection, but fearful, unsure how to uplift the younger woman's hope.

JUNIUS

Mary... Today, when your father called out to you...

MARY

(mutely)  
Yes...

JUNIUS

Why did you shun him?

MARY

Our vows forbid us...

JUNIUS

He is your father.

It is Mary's turn to look away, flexing her fingers across her thighs.

MARY

He writes to me. I told him not to, but he still finds ways. He wants me to come home. He is scared, of the Bishop's men, of what will happen now that...

She trails off, not wanting to give life to the thought.

JUNIUS

You would defy him?

MARY

I do not need to. He would never force me home, he is too kind. But his fears weigh heavy on me.

JUNIUS

So why stay?

Mary looks at Junius with shock, incredulity and a little frustration - the reasons should be obvious.

MARY

Because my purpose is here. I have given my life to the Sisterhood. In that town I am just a daughter...

Mary reaches forwards and clasps Junius' hands tightly, the older woman taken aback.

MARY (CONT'D)

...but here I can be more. I can serve something greater. Your father showed me there is meaning in this life of obligation. In giving myself to the Lord.

JUNIUS

Even if it means dying?

MARY

Yes! Of course! I loved him Junius. I loved what your father gave me. I love him still, and so does every other Sister. We will all stay - because of him. And you...

(beat)

You give that same meaning. All that you have endured, all you have suffered, and still you put us first. You keep us together. Your faith is an inspiration. You are his love - and it gives me reason to stay.

Junius sees the certainty, the faith, on Mary's face, and it takes everything not to recoil in horror. Instead she pats the girl's hands and returns them to her lap.

JUNIUS

Thank you, Mary, you are kind. And right. There is purpose here, not just for you or I. But we must rest when we can, so please go to bed. Tomorrow will be a challenging day.

Mary, feeling a little reproached, recomposes herself and stands.

MARY

And you?

Junius bows her head, refusing to look up.

JUNIUS

I will stay a while. I wish to have a moment with him, alone, but I will follow. Thank you.

Mary nods, a little jarred, and quickly retreats towards the winding stone steps that lead up and out of the crypt. Just before she disappears from view, she takes an anxious glance back. Junius squeezes her prayer beads and we see small tears break free. When she hears Mary's footsteps fade and the heavy metal door of the crypt slam shut, finally given a moment alone with her father, she breaks down into sobs.

The crypt feels all the more isolated now. The weak light of the candles begin to wane, the shadows creeping further out from the corners of the room, emboldened. The air is deathly still, only punctuated by Junius' bitter sobs.

JUNIUS

(between tears)

How many times, Father? How many times have I kneeled before you and begged you listen? Was it so important to be righteous? Who will protect them now?

She leans back and wipes tears from her eyes. Her voice is hoarse, not angry, but tired.

JUNIUS (CONT'D)

Father, where are you? I fear there are no miracles left this world. I cannot be what they ask for... I cannot be more than just your daughter!

She clenches her fists and slams them on the slab before her.

JUNIUS (CONT'D)

Those wicked men will tear this house down! If I do not tell them to run, they will be raped, humiliated, all in your name! You knew the contents of their hearts, and yet still...

She throws her prayer beads aside. Finally she lets out her anger.

JUNIUS (CONT'D)

You let them believe!

She lunges forward, reaching over the body, and grabs the iron cross.

JUNIUS (CONT'D)

What good are these relics if wicked hands make weapons of them?

She slams the cross down against the slab, the sound of metal breaking on cold stone shrill, and it shatters in two. She takes slow, heavy breathes, anger washed away by shock and shame, waiting for the silence to return.

The reprieve is only brief, a sudden bang from above. The candles which lined the crypt waver, a chilling breeze sweeping the space. Junius stands, embarrassed, expecting to hear the hurried footsteps of Mary or another Sister.

But there is no-one. Met only by silence, she slowly approaches the exit, looking up the winding stone steps. She considers leaving...

Before a LOW, GUTTURAL GROAN calls her back. She freezes, her hand pressed against the wall, not daring to look back or even breathe, listening as something heavy lifts itself from stone...

JUNIUS

(whisper)

Father...?

Another gust of wind breaks the terror, slamming the door above and snuffing out the candlelight. Only the silver moonlight floods in through the window, onto the stone slab below...

The body lies still, but a hand reaches out from beneath the shroud and holds up the broken cross.

A STRANGLED VOICE calls out.

## STRANGLED VOICE

Keep faith in my symbols... I will  
uphold you in my righteous grasp...

Junius inhales sharply, too petrified to do anything but  
stare at the black and charred claw that holds the cross,  
white streaks of bone visible beneath exposed flesh.

## STRANGLED VOICE (CONT'D)

Do not bury this body... Listen,  
first, to my invocation...

The corpses' breathing is laboured, the shroud rising in  
shallow increments, every word rattling through a hollow  
chest and sounding a great agony. The moonlight does not hit  
its face, but two AMBER EYES glow dimly through the darkness.  
They are not human, but that of an APPARITION.

## APPARITION

The time of wicked men is nearly  
over... All who were incensed  
against you... shall be as  
nothing... And those who strive  
with you... shall perish.

## JUNIUS

(whisper)

The Lord's verses as if... No. You  
are not...

There is a long, pause, punctuated only by gasping breaths.

## APPARITION

I am not. I am... salvation.

## JUNIUS

(near hysterical)

No!

Junius falls back against the wall at the base of the steps,  
her hand clutching her mouth, eyes wide and wild.

## JUNIUS (CONT'D)

What trick is this?! What madness  
has my grief conjured?! Are you the  
devil, or my own sick mind?!

## APPARITION

You asked for a miracle. I offer...  
To build you an Eden. By your own  
hand...

(gasps)

Give me your service. Give me their  
worship...



JUNIUS

(shrieks, terrified)

You are an apparition! A monster  
parading in my father's corpse!  
Making false promises in his  
tongue... But your voice is not  
his!

Junius stands, tears pouring down her face, her fear  
superseded by anger flowing freely. She points an accusing  
finger.

JUNIUS (CONT'D)

I will not accept any miracles from  
you! I will give nothing! You are  
no Messiah, but a phantom!  
Unwelcome in that body, I will not  
hear your false promises! Deceiver!

Suddenly the body's head jerks up, the shoulders twisting to  
face Junius, causing the white shroud to pull from the face.  
Only half in light, she sees the gnarled and melted face of  
her father, the skull beneath grimacing in otherworldly fury.

APPARITION

(roars)

Do not dare call me deceiver,  
child! I am no false prophet, nor  
am I your Messiah! I come only with  
a warning - destiny is in motion -  
the stars have already fallen, soon  
the sky will blaze bright with  
fire. It is only you who can save  
your Sisters! Or burn with them!

Junius stumbles back in awe and terror.

The Apparition's words are so forceful that her father's  
corpse can barely contain it, and it slumps down over the  
stone slab in a cluster of gasps.

APPARITION

This body is too weak... I cannot  
save you if I am bound to the  
decays of mortal flesh... Your  
father understood this...

JUNIUS

(muted, in shock)

What could he possibly have  
understood, of you?

APPARITION  
(retches)  
He gave me this body.

The Apparition lifts it's head again, and now fully in moonlight Junius sees her father's face - present and clear. He looks scared and desperate - the facade unrecognisable to what she knew of him.

APPARITION/JOHANNES  
Give me your faith, Junius.

His voice, pleading, is too much. She shakes her head in terrified disbelief, before fleeing up the stairs.

The Apparition groans, frustrated, desperate, as it's body slumps back onto the slab and lies motionless. The moonlight drifts away from the window, leaving the crypt in silent slumber.

**END OF EXTRACT.**