

The worst part about it was the sinking feeling in your stomach. Like there was a massive sink hole in my abdomen just eating me up from the inside out. I could feel my chest tighten and that insatiable feeling of dread dragging me down like I had a ten tonne weight strapped to my ankles and I was being pushed into the Marianas Trench. My skin had gone cold to the touch but I could feel the warm trickle of sweat drip down from my scalp, down my back and right along my spine like a skateboarder on a rail. Then I saw *him* and I felt my leg go. It began to tremble as if it were about to give way and I was going to collapse to the floor. My head went light and my vision fuzzy. All I could see was his white cloak and *that* hat. It was him. It was the Pope.

Whenever I tell anyone, it's always the same response: "You're a priest who's scared of the pope?" followed by the laugh. I join in so they think it's a joke. It's not. Papaphobia is no joke, not to me. I became a priest so I could be close to God. I didn't come from a religious family, I'd never been to church until I was in high school, when I started seeing a catholic girl and she insisted I went to church with her and her family, and when the priest, Father Sanderson, spoke, I felt touched. His words, the worlds of scripture, they called out to me, something deep inside of me, like God himself was speaking the words. I knew then that priesthood was meant for me.

At least, that's what I thought. Then I read Revelations. And then I knew fear. The fear of God. This omnipotent being who knew all. Who could see all and hear all. And what they would do to humanity if we did not follow their laws. Which laws exactly is up to debate, which makes the whole thing worse. Let's say we follow the laws posed to Moses on Mount Sinai and we get to the pearly gates and find that we've all been fooled and really we should've been following another set of rules posed somewhere else in the bible. We get there and God tells us that Leviticus was a joke or that one of the books was written when God was having a bad week. Does God have bad weeks? Probably, if the Old Testament is anything to be believed.

Then there was the Pope. The Pope was meant to be the closest thing between us and God since Christ himself, and that's why I was afraid. He smiled and he waved to the members of my congregation and others who'd gathered to come and see him, but I knew what kind of power he held in the realm of the almighty. Who knows what would happen if you sneezed in his direction, squeezed his hand too hard while shaking it or even accidentally dropping a tack or something which pops a tire on the *damn* Popemobile or whatever it's called. One wrong move and next thing you know there's a swarm of locust at your door demanding your first born. Not that I *had* a first born. I took my vow of celibacy very seriously. Not even marriage would protect me from his wrath. Besides, it's not like the Bible paints women in a decent light. If you're a woman and you're named in the bible chances are you're in some way the cause of the downfall of humanity. If you're not, you're the wife of someone important. Or a prostitute. I once read somewhere that prostitution is the world's oldest profession, but a Bishop I knew also told me it was priesthood "spreading the word of God since the dawn of time". If that's true, then at some point the only jobs going would've been prostitution and priesthood, meaning one group was *definitely* not doing their job right.

As the Pope came past he reached over the barrier to shake my hand. I was clammy and trembling and I faked a smile and as my hand touched his I began to shake and I swear I

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could feel something powerful in my hand and I held his hand tightly and he smiled back and when he let go and walked away the sense of *relief* I felt almost made me drop to my knees and sing sweet hallelujah because God, or at least his representative, had chosen not to smite me on this glorious day. What a glorious day indeed.