

He could hear the priest shifting in his seat and almost felt pity for him. But he had to continue. He spent the next half hour explaining to the priest about his past, his present, and what should have been his future. He told him in detail about the person he'd stalked for many months, then finally caught up with in the park tonight-- and murdered.

"And that is why I have come to you, Father. I am not asking for forgiveness for this deed. I just had to tell someone before I die."

The priest cleared his throat, his voice hoarse. "Are you ill, my son?"

He sighed, no longer feeling the pain but knowing that time was short. "Yes, Father. I must go now. It's almost time."

The priest's voice became desperate. "Wait. Don't go. You need help. Allow me to get you medical attention at least. It will be private, trust me."

He jumped up, not wanting anyone to help him. He didn't want to live. He had nothing to live for anymore. "No thank you, Father. Just keep my secret, that's all I ask."

Before the priest could say any more, he left the confessional and walked briskly down the aisle to the end of the church. He noticed the stained water he'd used to clean his hands and felt guilty. But he had to go. He had a feeling he was no longer alone. Someone had seen him and was on his trail.

He ran down the steps, thankful they weren't slippery. There was a nativity scene out front, and he ran past it, not seeing the eyes that watched him go. Not seeing the flash of steel inside a black cloak or the look of hatred in eyes as bright as the stars.

He trotted down the street, not sure where he was going. He just knew he had to leave--to get out of there before it was too late. Perhaps he could live after all. He could go to a clinic that didn't ask any questions and be cured and...

No, he couldn't. But he wasn't going to be taken down by anyone else either. He would go to a spot and die

on his own terms.

He lost his footing and fell to the cement as stones tore at his bare hands. He cursed his bad luck but jumped up and continued running. He could hear footsteps behind him as they matched his pace. Only a little faster.

His breathing became harsh, and he fought the pain in his lungs as he moved toward the park. He needed a place to hide, somewhere to stop and rest. Just not near the other body. They couldn't be tied together. It was too dangerous.

Many people still remained in the park but kept to the lighted areas where trees were strung with white lights and the pond had been frozen over for skating. He heard excited laughter in the distance as he lifted his nose to the wind.

Something caught his attention, and he stopped to listen. He could hear the crunching of snow behind him and he froze. He caught the scent of death, and when he turned to see his attacker, he tried to yell out but it was too late.

He hit the snow hard, although he didn't feel a thing. As his blood seeped into the white of winter, he watched his assailant walk away, joining another who had watched in silence.

Smiling.