

'THE UNSAID'

a novel by Hank Schachte

(an excerpt from a work in progress)

The priest walked quickly up the lane of the reserve and turned in at one of the ramshackle cottages. On the front stoop he knocked on the cottage door a few sharp taps. Momentarily it opened halfway, revealing the man's wife. Her eyes dropping she spoke almost in a whisper— 'Hello Father.' When he asked her if Johnny was home she abruptly left him at the door, shutting it apologetically but without looking at his eyes.

The woman in the yard across the lane was hanging laundry, a clothespin in her mouth. She stopped to eye the priest. Already he was looking annoyed or perhaps just impatient. In a few moments the door reopened. 'He's not feeling well' the wife said. 'Could you come back another day?'

But he was the Priest with important business and not to be put off so easily. 'Dolores— the constable called me' he said. Her eyes widened. She sucked in a breath nodding slightly. 'He needs to talk to me' he said. She nodded again but made no move. 'Tell him Dolores.'

The priest was tall, white-haired, proud— he never talked about himself to anyone. She spoke to his chest. 'Okay. You come back later?'

'He's dead' the priest spoke out.

She sucked in another breath. 'Lennie?' she said. The priest nodded sighing heavily. At this she looked up at his face. Quickly he bore into her eyes. 'I'll tell him' she said. But still the priest stood there becalmed or run aground on the little front porch. 'You better come back later' she said as gently as she could.

He turned quickly to conceal his irritation and started down the steps. Behind him the door shut carefully.

Inside the small cottage was crammed to bursting with things apparently of value. Here and there this sea of objects had been kept back and islands of space occurred. At the dining table which occupied one of these the man sat studying the coffee mug between his round hands. She eyed him from the door. When finally he looked up she asked 'Did you tell them?'

He stood up spilling a little cold coffee, spitting out his words as he turned away from her— 'Are you crazy?!

He showed her no tenderness no special closeness. If anything he treated her almost always worse than any slight friend would be treated, as though she were a part of him and could be abused the way he would abuse himself. This she was accustomed to— refusing not to love him no matter what he did— but just cast her eyes down as though praying for him offering excuses for him to God her witness and displaying for Him her constancy.

He turned back around to face her taking this opportunity to vent some of the explosive pressure building inside him through a display of anger transferred from all that was foreign and unassailable to her. 'No-one's going to tell— ever! It never happened!'

She spoke steadily evenly against the volcano. 'He's dead. They sent the priest to tell us.'

'He's in a coma. They said he was in a coma.'

Tears started pathways down her cheeks but her small clear voice continued— ‘Now they’re going to say you murdered your brother. They’re going to take you away from us.’

Again he spun away from her. She spoke to his huge back. ‘We have to tell people Johnny. It’s not right.’

‘He was my brother’ he said finally. ‘Let him die without shame.’

She looked at him. She could admire his awesome stubbornness but it was not understandable— only acceptable.

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