

Author's note: This story is rated *adult* and contains material that is not suitable for younger readers

Dark Secret

Strong hands held him down. Christian struggled to break away, to get up, but they were stronger. He couldn't see them. Blackness coated the alley; the streetlight was broken, and it was a cloudy night. Fear such as he had never known sent adrenaline surging through his veins as he fought to free himself. But the hands refused to let go. They clamped down on his biceps, fingers digging painfully into his flesh. They shoved him down onto the wood surface of an abandoned crate so splinters pierced his shirt and lodged themselves in the skin of his chest. Breathing was hard. Air wheezed in and out of his lungs in terrorized struggling gasps. They stank of sweat, booze, and cannabis mingled with cigarette smoke. Harsh laughter rang in his ears as the hands began tearing at his clothes.

"No..." Christian cried. He didn't care that he was reduced to pleading. "Please." Not once in his life had he felt so powerless, not even when Escobar tortured him by injecting him with his own Botox. At least then the pain had been delivered for a purpose. This attack, however, was senseless, and try as he might, his terrified mind could not come up with a way to save himself.

He soon found that begging helped as little as struggling. It merely caused another burst of raucous laughter from his attackers. "Keep beggin', pretty boy." Hot, smelly breath blew the words into his ear. "That's how I like it. Takes you down a peg."

Hands groped at him, and sweaty bodies crowded in. Horrified realization of what they had in store for him gave him new strength and Christian resumed his struggle for freedom. A hard fist slammed into the back of his head, driving it down until his forehead cracked against the wood of the crate he lay on. Stars blinked behind his eyes and for a moment his vision went black. He was only dimly aware of fingers clawing at his pants.

"No... NO!" With a piercing scream, he jolted up in the bed. Gasping for air, it took a moment to get his bearings. He could still feel the pain, could still smell them, could still hear their laughter echoing in his ears.

"Christian? What's wrong?" a sleepy female voice said beside him.

His head shot around and he snarled at the naked woman in his bed, for a long moment

not comprehending. Her eyes widened with shock when she woke fully and saw the aggression twisting his face.

Christian forced himself to lie back down. She couldn't hurt him; he was safe. It was but a nightmare. He wished that were all it was.

"Get out." The words came out in a grunt. "Just --get out."

"What--"

"Get the fuck out of my house!" He dimly realized he was shouting but didn't care. He wanted her gone *right now*, so he could be alone with his fear and shame and anger.

The shock in her eyes was quickly replaced with resentment, and a hint of unease. "Fuck you," she muttered, but at least she slipped out from under the sheets and started collecting her clothes, which were strewn all over the bedroom.

"Already have," Christian said, snatching her bra from the nightstand and shoving it into her hands. "Didn't help." She glared at him. He didn't care. He didn't know her. She was a nameless body, nothing but another woman in a long line of sexual conquests with which he hoped to banish his demons. *Dr. Troy's Miracle Cure for the Mentally Haunted*. It had always worked in the past.

But it didn't work this time.

The dream that was more than a dream proved it.

As soon as she pulled the door behind her, Christian turned the lock and slipped on the chain. With the door firmly shut against possible intruders, his heart pounded a little less quickly. He walked over to the liquor cabinet, naked, not bothering with robe or pants, and poured himself a generous amount of whiskey, straight. He gulped it down in three swallows. He sighed, feeling himself relax a bit as the alcohol spread warmly through his veins and stopped the trembles the dream had left before they could turn into full shakes.

After pouring himself another glass, he wandered over to the window, staring out across the beach and the white foamy waves rushing ashore. They glowed in the pale moonlight.

He caught his reflection in the glass and studied himself. He supposed he should count himself lucky. After all, he was still alive. Nobody would suspect what had been done to him; nobody would ever have to know. The bruises had faded; his torn flesh had healed.

On the outside, nothing hinted at the nightmare he had lived through. But the memory burned fresh in his mind; their terrible smell lingered in his nose. During the day, he could keep the memories at bay. He worked harder than he ever had before, operating on patient after patient after patient until Sean worried they would soon have no patients left.

Nights were the worst. Asleep, when his defenses were down, the ghosts moved in and hijacked his consciousness. Night after night, he was forced to relive that horrible evening, the shameful incident that he could never mention to anyone. No supply of work, no number of female companions, and no amount of mindless sex and fleeting one-night-stands could help him forget.

Three months ago, Christian had sworn an oath that he would never tell. Once they were finished with him, leaving him torn and bleeding, he had managed to drag himself back home. A long hot shower sufficed to wash their taint off his body, and replaced their stink on his skin with the scent of soap. His wounds would heal, he had told himself. He resolved to forget what happened, to push that night out of his mind, to erase the memory. But although his body healed, forgetting what they had done turned out to be not so easy.

A part of him knew he should talk about it with someone, let his emotions out. He needed to vent all the hurt and anger and shame before it consumed him and ate him alive. But whom could he talk to? There was no one in his life he could trust with such a dark secret, was there?

His partner? Sean would say he was sorry, yet beneath the compassion would live the thought that it was Christian's own fault. He shouldn't have taken a shortcut through that particular part of town, in his fancy new Porsche and designer suit. And maybe Sean was right. But how was he to know that the damn car would break down, just when he had forgotten his cellular, forcing him to go on foot in search of a payphone?

Who else was there to talk to? Matt was too young; the knowledge would shatter the boy's idolatrous image of him, and Christian wouldn't be able to live with the pity his story would bring to Julia's eyes. Liz then, or Grace? He snorted. He knew they didn't like him, they thought him cocky and superficial. They'd probably gloat at his story and tell him it was his comeuppance for every time he broke a woman's heart and didn't care.

He raised the glass to his mouth, surprised to find it empty. Determined to make himself forget even if he had to drink himself into oblivion, he walked back to the bar, and returned to his perch near the window with his fist wrapped around the bottle's neck. He took another long swallow, relishing the burning in his throat.

It was the still of the night, the beach silent and deserted, the world black except for the pale silver of the moonlight. Daylight was hours away. But Christian Troy didn't think he would be able to sleep. He feared he would never be able to sleep again. The dream would continue to haunt him. The dream that was real.

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