The 'priest' They Called Him

Nirvana

"Fight tuberculosis, folks"
Christmas Eve, an old junkie selling Christmas seals
On North Park Street
The "Priest" they called him
"Fight tuberculosis, folks"
People hurried by, gray shadows on a distant wall
It was getting late and no money to score
He turned into a side street and the lake wind hit him like a knife
Cab stop just ahead under a streetlight
Boy got out with a suitcase
Thin kid in prep school clothes
Familiar face, the Priest told himself
Watching from the doorway.
"Reminds me of something a long time ago"
The boy, there, with his overcoat
Unbuttoned, reaching into his pants pocket for the cab fare
The cab drove away and turned the corner
The boy went inside a building
"Hmm, yes, maybe," the suitcase was there in the doorway
The boy nowhere in sight
Gone to get the keys, most likely, have to move fast
He picked up the suitcase and started for the corner
Made it, glanced down at the case
It didn't look like the case the boy had or any boy would have
The Priest couldn't put his finger on what was so old about the case
Old and dirty, poor quality leather and heavy
Better see what's inside
He turned into Lincoln Park
Found an empty place and opened the case
Two severed human legs that belonged to a young man
With dark skin, shiny black leg hairs
Glittered in the dim streetlight
The legs had been forced into the case
And he had to use his knee on the back of the case to shove them out
"Legs, yet," he said and walked quickly away with the case.
Might bring a few dollars to score
The buyer sniffed suspiciously
"Kind of a funny smell about it"
"It's just Mexican leather"

"Well, some joker didn't cure it"
The buyer looked at the case with cold disfavor
"Not even right sure he killed it, whatever it is
Three is the best I can do and it hurts
But since this is Christmas and you're the Priest"
He slipped three bills under the table into the Priest's dirty hand
The Priest faded into the street shadows, seedy and furtive
Three cents didn't buy a bag, nothing less than a nickel
Say, remember that old Addie croaker told me not to come back
Unless I paid him the three cents I owe him
Yeah, isn't that a fruit for ya, blow your stack about three lousy cents
The doctor was not pleased to see him
"Now, what do you want? I told you!"
The Priest laid three bills on the table
The doctor put the money in his pocket and started to scream
"I've had trouble! People have been around!
I may lose my license!"
The Priest just sat there
Eyes, old and heavy with years of junk, on the doctor's face
"I can't write you a prescription"
The doctor jerked open a drawer
And slid an ampule across the table
"That's all I have in the office!" The doctor stood up
"Take it and get out!" he screamed, hysterical
The Priest's expression did not change
The doctor added in quieter tones
"After all, I'm a professional man
And I shouldn't be bothered by people like you"
"Is that all you have for me? One lousy quarter G?
Couldn't you lend me a nickel?"
"Get out, get out, I'll call the police I tell you"
"All right, doctor, I'm going"
Of course it was cold and far walk to rooming house
A shabby street, room on the top floor
"These stairs," coughed the Priest
There pulling himself up along the bannister
He went into the bathroom
Yellow wall panels, toilet dripping
And got his works from under the washbasin
Wrapped in brown paper, back to his room
Get every drop in the dropper
He rolled up his sleeve
Then he heard a groan from next door
Room 18, the Mexican kid lived there
The Priest had passed him on the stairs

And saw the kid was hooked
But he never spoke because he didn't want any juvenile connections
Bad news in any language
The Priest had had enough bad news in his life
He heard the groan again, a groan he could feel
No mistaking that groan and what it meant
"Maybe he had an accident or something.
In any case, I can't enjoy my priestly medications
With that sound coming through the wall"
Thin walls you understand
The Priest put down his dropper
Cold hall and knocked on the door of Room 18
"Quien es?"
"It's the Priest, kid, I live next door"
He could hear someone hobbling across the floor
A bolt slid, the boy stood there in his underwear shorts
Eyes black with pain, he started to fall
The Priest helped him over to the bed
"What's wrong, son?"
"It's my legs, se

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