

Personal Jesus

by Martha A. Hood

Father John moved in the dark. His black trousers and black clerical shirt rendered him nearly invisible, while the white rectangle of his collar appeared to migrate in the dark from a spot above the concrete path to a spot above the box hedge that bordered the path.

He stared at the statue in front of his church, and willed it to make him uncomfortable. He felt he must go head to head with it. He had been caught unawares before, more than once. Just last Sunday, a parishioner, shaking hands with him after Mass, had said, “Father? Are you all right?”

The parishioner’s voice had reached him as if from a great distance. He had zoned out, captured by the gaze of Jesus upon him.

Jesus the statue. For a second, Father John could have sworn the statue had twisted on its base to look at him. Father John had glanced at the parishioner, then back at the statue. The statue had returned to normal.

Now, in the night, Father John stared at the statue of Jesus, daring it to do the same thing to him again.

Deborah heard the Johnny Cash recording of “Personal Jesus,” and a shiver went through her. He was dying. You could hear it. His weakened, but ever-charismatic voice commanded the belief of any skeptic.

Deborah’s natural skepticism had always offended her brother, Thom.

“Personal Jesus” was playing on a disk Thom had sent her, part of a compilation he had put together. (Thom and his wife no longer purchased gifts for themselves or others, preferring to donate to the needy, rather than feed the mindless consumer frenzy most fell prey to. Apparently, it was okay to download music, to shift music from disk to disk, as long as no one got paid for it.) Thom wanted her to have the peace, the joy, and the

serenity that he had found in his faith. This un-gift, this disk he had burned, was his latest attempt to lead her to what he assured her would be a new life.

The last notes of the song drifted past her. She stood in her open doorway and looked out to her street, uncharacteristically quiet on this Sunday afternoon.

Until.

At first a mere glimpse of shadow, then an explosion of projectiles. One piece knocked her in the forehead. Her hand came away bloody.

Then silence reigned again.

She stared at her hand as the dust settled.

It settled in slow motion. Particles drifted, lazy as snowflakes. Her natural skepticism fell away, as she witnessed what could not be happening.

But did happen, as if time itself had slowed.

When all had settled, and the world speeded up again, everything snapped back into place like an elastic waistband. Three cars drove by. A police helicopter whup-whupped overhead.

Her yard was a mess. Chunks of a large, white statue lay scattered across her front lawn. One of the larger pieces was one-half of a sandaled foot, a left foot.

She touched the foot. She lifted it up. Some of the shattered remains had blown through her front gate, onto the sidewalk. She carried the foot into the house, and laid it on her coffee table.

The material was odd—not marble, not cement, not plaster, nor Plexiglas. This was far lighter than any of those. But light enough to fly?

She cleaned her forehead and put on a large band-aid. She found a push broom and a dustpan. The stereo, unaffected by the crash, was now playing a Christian version of “Stand by Me.”

Would be nice, if someone was standing by her side, but the clean-up was hers to do alone.