

Photographing Jesus

By Richard Lutman

Arnold was sure he'd seen Jesus in a slightly torn silver raincoat checking out the marked down wine in aisle three. Really sure. He'd seen the ID badge she wore around her neck and the heavenly arc that emanated from her. Only this Jesus looked like a woman and an attractive one at that.

No one else in Krobe's Discount Liquors, Bait and Sushi Bar had seemed to notice. Curly who had a sixth sense about such things just kept waiting on customers, nor Fred who pushed his broom down the aisle where Arnold had just seen the rain-coated figure.

"Do you know who was just here?" said Arnold.

"Enlighten me, monsur," said Fred who Arnold thought had seen one too many French films in his amorous pursuit of women.

"Jesus. Only it wasn't a man," said Arnold.

"That's a good one, Arnold. A real good one."

"She was the person in the silver raincoat."

"Starting out kind of early with the medicine today, aren't you?" said Fred.

"But she was right here looking at the wine that's on sale."

"Hey, Curly, hear that? Arnold thinks he saw Jesus standing right here."

The three customers at the register looked at Arnold where he stood two aisles away. The store lights felt hot and stuffy.

"I really did," said Arnold.

The register's drawer shot open and Curly gave change to a man in a striped tie and yellow tee shirt.

"Jesus was right here, I tell you," said Arnold. "I know what I saw."

"What did he look like?" said Curly.

"It wasn't a he. It was a she, only she didn't have a halo or a beard."

"Heem funny," said the Mexican who came in regularly to buy tequila. "I see Jesus alla time when I drunk. He don't look like that."

"But I wasn't drinking."

"We've heard that before," said Fred. "Remember the time you thought you saw the president dressed only in a top hat and tails?"

"You don't understand. This is different."

"Bring us some proof,' said Curly. "Pictures maybe."

"You can't photograph Jesus," said Arnold.

"How do you know?"

"You just can't. It wouldn't make any sense. Imagine what would happen if you suddenly started photographing Jesus."

"You get the pictures, Arnold, and I'll make some phone calls," said Curly. "We won't have to worry about anything ever again."

Arnold pushed open the door to the sidewalk. He began to sweat. It was nearing four o'clock and the rays of the sun were still hot. People, he said to himself. People, what a place the world was. He'd seen Jesus; there was no doubt about that. But what did it mean? Why had he been selected above all others to see her? He didn't go to church much anymore and certainly he wasn't a complete believer in the Bible, although he did know the Lord's Prayer in Pig Latin. And he did save a puppy once. He wondered whether this was going to be one of those life changing moments he'd read about. He suddenly felt very important and ready for anything.

From the corner of his eye he caught a flash of silver. He quickened his steps, turning right at the corner of 12888 ½ and 1590th street. Two blocks ahead he saw the raincoat, and then lost it among the men who were unloading damaged refrigerators in front of the U Buy It U Bought It store.

Just as he was about to give up he saw the figure dart into Tiny's Squat and Trot on in the middle of the block by the used bed store. Now he'd get this matter settled once and for all. A lot depended on it. And he would be sure to ask her about photographs. He bet this Jesus was someone who liked a burger with the works, the burger Tiny's was famous for. After all being Jesus must be a strenuous job. He went in cautiously and saw Jesus at a table in the back near the plastic ferns.

"Ah, Arnold, my love. You've arrived," said Jesus in a husky woman's voice. Up close she was a real looker and smelled freshly washed. "I was hoping you'd come. Please take a seat, there is much we need to talk about."

"Why me?"

"Why not? There's nothing to worry about. I'll see that nothing will happen. Now sit down and enjoy yourself."

Arnold slid across from her.

A large container of chicken nuggets was on the table in front of her.

"Why didn't you order a burger its Tiny's specialty?"

"I'm not in a burger mood. Don't you get that way sometimes? I felt like doing something different with my life for once. Haven't you ever felt the same? I've always wanted to come to a place like this. There aren't many where I'm from. I'd forgotten how good the food can be here on earth."

It made him feel good sitting across from her.

"Do you want anything?" she said. "I can put it on my expense account."

"Can I ask you something?" said Arnold.

"That's what I'm here for. I hope it's nothing too serious? I can't always handle stuff like that."

"I don't think so. Would it be possible to take your picture?"

She frowned, and then frowned again. Arnold squirmed.

"There's a policy against such things, but I think we can work something out. Don't you? I was thinking a seventy thirty split of the profits."

"I suppose you wouldn't want to make that fifty fifty?" said Arnold.

"You're a tough one, aren't you? I like that. I have a bikini I can try on back at the motel. Would that help?"

Arnold nodded his head.

"It usually does," she said.

She picked at the nuggets with her fork.

"I could have been anything I wanted," she said. "But I decided to become Jesus. Besides, I can't go back now. And the perks are pretty good.

"You could have been something, too Arnold. Not everyone can fold underwear in a laundromat. It's still not too late. I have great faith in you."

She dipped a nugget into the sauce, and then put it into her mouth. She chewed slowly. Arnold thought the way she moved her jaws was very appealing and just a little bit sexy.

"I'm going to need your help, my dear," she said. She looked at him and for a moment he lost himself in her deep green eyes. "An historic event. You'll be written up in all the papers and even be on TV. You'd like that wouldn't you?"

"I don't know," he said.

"Come on. It'll be fun. There's no one else I can trust. What do you say?"

She winked at him.

He nodded his head.

"I thought so," she said. "Everything's set. All you have to do is to meet me at Wonder Park in half

an hour. I'm looking forward to our association, aren't you? Who knows where such things could lead."

He wondered how he'd gotten himself into this situation. Once his life had been as simple as an afternoon in the park watching old men with their pet lizards or drinking Fred's turnip wine as they sat on his porch counting the number of purple cars that passed.

Wonder Park, once a famous show place for thrills and dreams, was now best remembered for the man who hid for years in the Tunnel of Love and claimed to have had several visions of the apocalypse appear to him in pink cotton candy. Business had been good after that.

Arnold thrust five dollars through the window of the polka dot ticket booth.

"Child or adult," said the voice.

"Adult."

"You sure?"

"Of course I am," said Arnold.

"Just have to check. One never knows."

A precisely manicured hand shoved a ticket at him.

"We close early tonight. Last ride's at nine thirty."

"Welcome to Wonder Park," a static laden voice blared over the loudspeakers. "One of the world's great undiscovered wonders filled with excitement galore, and a thoroughly enjoyable experience for the entire family. And be sure to visit our famous dinner hall. The menu tonight features a special hash made from our own secret recipe. And don't forget our free dish giveaway in the entertainment area located next to the haunted castle. You won't be disappointed. You can even invite your mother in law for a meal."

Ahead of Arnold was the Tropical Lagoon where two flamingos waded in stagnant green water. A couple with a young baby approached Smuggler's Island, where the figures of pirates raised and lowered their swords. The baby started to cry loudly.

Arnold saw Jesus coming out of the Tunnel of Love. She waved and ambled toward him.

"You found me. How romantic. And right on time, I see. I like that in a man."

She had changed into a tight fitting white suit and blue wrap around sunglasses.

"How do I look?" she said.

"Just fine."

"I'll bet you say that to all the girls."

She kissed him on the cheek and led him to a large tent. Arnold blushed.

“I had to check out that vision thing,” she said. “Just to keep the records straight. Cotton candy was new one.”

ONLY GOD SPOKEN HERE was written in swirly letters on a sign above the entrance.

“What do you think? I designed it myself.”

“It’s very impressive.”

“You know just what to say, don’t you? After this is over why don’t we go back to my motel and have a drink or two.”

They passed through the aqua-colored entrance and she headed to a stage where she stood in front of a projection booth which had been converted into a pulpit complete with loudspeakers and flood lights. Over the pulpit a flashing sign read: COLLECTIONS EVERY FIFTEEN MINUTES.

An old woman, a very fat man with tattoos, and a boy in a baseball hat looked up at the stage as the loudspeaker snapped on.

“THE BIBLE HAS THE ANSWERS!” said Jesus in a deep voice. ‘IT WILL AMAZE YOU!!!!’ Then in a lower voice, “If you want a red car ask for a red car and don’t complain when you get a blue one if you failed to be specific. Remember to write down the exact wording of your requests to God. It not only helps us to be specific, but it helps us to remember what you asked for. Hallelujah! He’s coming through the roof!

“And now remember my friends that only holy body water can cure all illnesses. It has been scripturally documented and scientifically validated. For a free booklet just send nine-fifty to cover postage and handling to the your local Reverend, Box HEAVEN. Please allow four to six weeks for delivery.

“Remember—if God wants to ring your doorbell, he’ll know where the button is and if you go down the wrong road, God will let you make a U turn. Let us pray.”

The loudspeakers hummed. Near the entrance a man in a motorized wheelchair with a butterfly net in his hand came into view. He started to drive his wheelchair in circles waving the net at a white butterfly that flew about his head. Each time he passed the gate, a card shot out. With a quick movement of his net he caught one of the cards before it hit the ground.

Then a solemn voice announced: “Visitors will be interested in the world renowned Thrustmohr decorations adorning our modern and convenient tabernacle. A special anointing series for the sick plus musical fest will be held in ten minutes in the recreation room adjacent to our fully staffed cafeteria. All are welcome.”

Organ music filled the air.

"We have a special announcement," the voice continued. "Don't miss the chance to meet your friend and mine, Jesus at Bob's Holy Tabernacle tent. It's your one and only chance to be spiritually cleansed and fortified. Please have your cameras and a twenty dollar bill ready. And remember that tonight's special is our own homemade hash. And don't forget our free dish giveaway in the entertainment area located next to the haunted castle."

"What do you think, Arnold?" said Jesus. "Did things go well? I can never tell. Once I performed a miracle and another time I had to kiss a hamster. But we can talk all about that back at the motel after I put on my bikini. I hope you have a lot of film. I feel very photogenic today."

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