

The Christmas Figurine By Harry Steven Ackley

Patricia Williams leaned over her kitchen table. Her salt and pepper hair hung down in front of her face as she furiously chopped up fruit for a new holiday recipe she was anxious to try. From the front of the house, she heard the door open and close. Her husband Mark was back from walking their dog, Millie.

“I’m home!” called Mark.

A minute later, Mark came into the kitchen.

“Hi, honey. How was your walk?” asked Patricia.

“It was good,” said Mark. “It’s starting to get chilly out. Winter will be here soon. What are you making?”

Patricia looked up at Mark and brushed the hair away from her face. “It’s a fruit cobbler recipe. I wanted to test it out before serving it to the children and grandkids at Thanksgiving.”

Mark looked down at the berries, sliced apples, and flour spread out all over the kitchen island countertop. “Sounds delicious,” he said with a smile.

“Hey, check this out,” said Mark who then dug into his pocket and pulled out a small object. “I found it on a FREE table on the sidewalk in front of the old Catholic church building. You know, the one they’re turning into condos?”

“St Alban’s,” said Patricia.

“Yeah, St. Alban’s,” Mark repeated.

Mark held up the object. It was a small ceramic figurine of three nuns. The nuns were all wearing winter coats and standing in the snow holding hymn books. Their mouths were formed in small round Os. The nun in the middle wore glasses.

“Wow, that’s interesting,” said Patricia. “It looks like it’s from the 1950s or something. You said you found it in front of St. Alban’s?”

“Yeah,” said Mark. “There was this big folding table there with a “FREE” sign taped to the edge. There were all kinds of things. Mostly old junk. Then there was this figurine of the nuns. Look, they’re all bundled up and standing in the snow. It looks like it might be from some kind of Christmas scene. Like maybe it came from a larger set.”

“Hmm,” said Patricia. “It must’ve been a bunch of forgotten stuff that was left behind when the church moved to their new building.”

“You know, I used to go to St. Alban’s when I was a little girl, before my family moved out to the suburbs. I remember, back then, there were still some nuns who were attached to the parish. They were these old French nuns. They lived in the little house next to the church.”

Patricia stared down at the figurine Mark was still holding in his hand. “Funny. Seeing that now just made me think of them.”

Mark smiled at Patricia and said, “I’m gonna put it in the curio cabinet. I figure it qualifies as a curio. Don’t you?”

Mark walked to living room, opened the glass door of the curio cabinet, and placed the figurine on the top shelf.

Late that night, Mark couldn’t sleep. He was laying on his side, facing the bedroom door when he saw something cross in front of the nightlight out in the hallway. A shadow slowly moved across the crack along the bottom of the doorway.

“Millie?” said Mark in a low voice, not wanting to wake Patricia.

Millie, who usually slept in their room, appeared at the side of the bed and gave Mark a low woof.

“It’s alright,” said Mark. “Good girl.”

Mark then got up, threw on his bathrobe, and went into the hall.

Once in the hallway, he heard the faint sound of singing coming from the front of the house. He thought perhaps the Bluetooth speaker had turned on automatically.

He turned in the direction of the music and saw what he thought was a short shadowy figure disappear beneath the archway leading to the living room.

When he got to the living room the figure was gone. But the music was louder. It was women singing. The refrain of the song went “Dominique-nique-nique.” And then the rest of the song was in another language. It sounded like French.

The light in the curio cabinet suddenly came on by itself. The music, now even louder, was coming from the cabinet. As Mark got close to the curio, he saw that the faces on the figurine of the three nuns were singing with the music.

Mark cried out, “Patricia! Patricia!”

A minute later, the living room light went on and the music suddenly stopped. Patricia, in her bathrobe, was standing in the doorway. She squinted, as her eyes adjusted to the light.

“What’s going on?” she asked.

“Didn’t you hear the music?” asked Mark.

“No, I did not,” said Patricia.

Mark turned and looked at the figurine. The nuns were motionless.

The next morning Patricia and Mark sat having coffee at their kitchen table.

“It wasn’t a dream and I wasn’t sleepwalking,” said Mark. “I don’t remember ever waking up. It was when you turned the lights on that the music suddenly just stopped.”

“Hmm. How much wine did you drink last night?” asked Patricia.

“I don’t know; a couple of glasses,” said Mark. “Certainly not enough to make me hallucinate singing nuns.”

“Well, I don’t know what to tell you,” said Patricia.

The two sat in silence for a while. Then Mark then smiled and said, “You know, I’ve always found nuns kind of fascinating. Like when I was a kid, there was Sally Field in the Flying Nun and Julie Andrews in the Sound of Music. It’s not like I wanted to be a nun or anything. They just seemed kind of cool, that’s all.”

“That’s because you were raised a Protestant,” said Patricia. “You were never whacked by a nun with a ruler in Catholic school.”

“Did they really do that? Whack kids with rulers?” asked Mark.

“I don’t know. Maybe not. But they certainly weren’t cool.”

“What about the old French nuns who lived next door to St. Alban’s? The ones you mentioned. Whatever happened to them?” asked Mark.

“I don’t know,” said Patricia. “I assume they just died off. They were already very old when I was girl back in the early 70s.”

That afternoon Mark sat on the front porch with his tablet, sipping on a glass of chardonnay and surfing social media. He got the idea of looking up the nuns of St. Alban’s, just to see what became of them. He found a very interesting news story from 1976...

Three French Nuns Disappear

On the morning of November 12, Father Paul Costa of St. Alban’s parish discovered the three nuns, sisters Margaret, Veronica, and Mary Joseph, missing from their residence adjacent to the church.

The three sisters had been attached to the parish for the last 37 years. They left their convent near Lyon, France, in 1939 when the German invasion of France became imminent.

It has been speculated that the nuns returned to France to live out the remainder of their old age. According to certain parishioners, the sisters had always spoken of returning to their homeland.

Father Costa commented that many in parish had discouraged the sisters from traveling at their advanced age, adding that that may have caused them to leave in secret. However, no one had been able to track their whereabouts.

The story went on to describe the years the nuns had spent at the parish, the work they did, memories from the parishioners. Then there was a picture.

It was a grainy black and white photo taken in the 1950s. They looked just like the three nuns in the figurine. The nun in the center, Sister Veronica, was wearing glasses.

It then occurred to Mark that tomorrow was November 12 – the same date that the nuns had disappeared.

Mark showed the photo from the article to Patricia who said it was just a coincidence. Lots of nuns wore glasses, she added. “What do you think that figurine is, Mark?” asked Patricia. “Some sort of nun talisman?”

“I don’t know,” said Mark. “Do nuns have talismans?”

“It was a joke, honey,” said Patricia.

That night, Mark was laying on his side again, when he saw the shadow slowly moving out in the hall.

He immediately got out of bed and headed toward the living room. When he got there, the nuns in the curio cabinet were singing again. But this time the shadow figure was still there. It was one of the nuns. She turned and looked at Mark. It was sister Veronica, the nun with the glasses. She smiled at Mark and pointed him toward the curio.

Mark approached with a look of excitement on his face. He looked back at the shadow nun, but she was gone.

He listened as the nuns sang. When they finished, the middle nun, looked at him. She smiled and said, Sing with us, Mark.”

The other two nuns then excitedly echoed, “Yes, oh yes, sing with us. Please sing with us!”

When the song began again, Mark loudly sang along. “Dominique-nique-nique.”

The lights in the living room were suddenly flipped on. “What the hell is going on in here?” came Patricia’s sharp voice.

Mark turned to his wife.

She then added, "It's one o'clock in the morning. What are you doing?"

The next day, Mark and Patricia again sat at the kitchen table.

"Maybe you need to get away for a day, just clear your head," said Patricia. "Take the dog to the beach. You haven't been to the beach for ages."

Marked looked down into his cup of coffee and nodded. "Yeah, ok. I guess you're right. I'm sorry. I don't know. Maybe I am losing my mind. I think you're right. Some fresh air will do me good."

That night, it was Patricia who couldn't sleep. She rolled over to reach for her husband, only to discover he wasn't there. Then she heard the music ... "Dominique-nique-nique."

"Dammit. Not again," Patricia said as she rolled out of bed.

She went to the living room and turned on the light, but Mark was not there. She then noticed the curio in the corner. That's where the music was coming from.

As she got close, she saw that the faces on the figurine of the three nuns were singing with the music. Then she saw that Mark's face has replaced the nun in the middle. He looked at her, smiled and raised his eyebrows, and continued to sing.

"Dominique-nique-nique."

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