

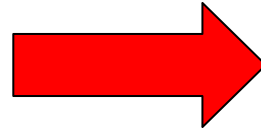
## The Plastic Madonna

Lia, do you have a thing (any kind of personal possession) that is really special to you? Something that you've had for a long time, and would be very sad to have go missing? Perhaps it is not a thing of large size or great monetary value, but you just like having it around. There's something special about it. Something comforting. Yes? No? Well, maybe it's just me...

Anyway, I've got this thing, you see, that has special value to me. Actually, I like to call "it" a "her," which just shows how much personal attachment I have to this thing. I have had her so long that I honestly don't know where she came from. It's kind of mysterious, and that just adds to her special-ness, in my mind. I can't remember a time when she wasn't just, well, there.

Would you like to know what, or rather who, she is? Turn the page to see a picture...

I'll wait. Hum dee dum dum. Didya see her?



As you noticed, the mystery gal is a small statue of The Madonna. In many Christian religions, The Madonna is revered as the Mother of God, and goes by the name Mary. Perhaps you can see little baby Jesus in her arms.

Now, I am so totally **NOT** religious it isn't even funny, so the fact that I am unreasonably attached to a statue of God's mom is pretty hilarious. Well, I think so, anyway. If you look up the definition of "irony" in the dictionary, you might find an interesting way to think about the humor of this situation. If you enjoy it, you might like to note your views on irony on page 132.

At any rate, it's not about religion (intensely religious people are likely to tell you it is *all* about religion, but I advise taking a wary stance toward anyone who claims to have all the answers, and is willing to punish you if you don't agree\*). It's about presence.

\*see page 96 regarding advice

Presence is a word I find interesting and useful. Presence to me is a quality of being, if you will, an influence that can be felt by those nearby. This can apply to a person who is very confident and strides about the world in an assured, powerful way. I once saw John F. Kennedy, Jr.\*\* in a New York hotel. That guy had some serious presence, let me tell you. It can also describe a person who is deeply peaceful and caring, their compassion radiating to warm and lift the spirits of those around them. This is how I imagine The Dalai Lama\*\*\* to be, although I have never met him. It can also be a useful way to describe a performer who holds an audience rapt with the magic of their gift. Like you, Lia! When you play your violin so confidently and amazingly well, all I can do is watch and enjoy. That's what I mean by presence.

What's this got to do with a little plastic statue of Mary? Glad you asked! I always thought she had presence, and I wanted you to have an idea of what I was talking about. There you go. Gaze at her picture for a moment or two. What do *you* think?

When I was a girl, I didn't have many words for what she meant to me, I just liked her calm, peaceful face, and I felt calmer and more peaceful with her around. I liked to take her out into the woods behind our house (the place next door to Uncle Tom and Aunt Susan's house in Bothell) and set up little scenes featuring her. Atop a mossy rock near the creek with the sunlight dappling her robes was my favorite. She lived in my room on a shelf or a window sill when I was growing up, sometimes forgotten for awhile. I always enjoyed coming across her again and getting reacquainted with the familiar texture and folds of her robes, the baby's tiny hand on her chest, her small feet.

Time passed, and I grew up. It seemed to take *forever* to grow up, but it did happen eventually. Even though I got all grown up and was gradually leaving behind the things of my girlhood, I never wanted to let go of my Plastic Madonna. Every time I moved, I brought her with me and set her up on a shelf or, more often, in a window. I imagined she liked the light and being able to see out. I mean, wouldn't you?

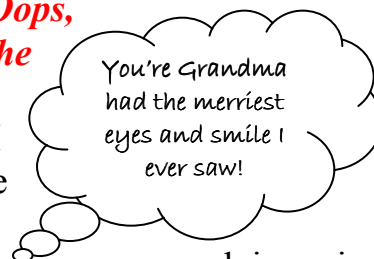
\*\*a really famous, wealthy, powerful man who was the son of the President of the United States

\*\*\*leader of the Tibetan Buddhists, and a deeply compassionate spiritual leader and speaker for peace in the world

I never thought too much about her as I got older. As I said, she was just always around; a familiar and comforting presence. Then something funny happened...

Now, before I go on, Lia, I have to pause for a bit to fill you in on some things about your grandma—my Aunt Jeanne—because here's where she enters the story. AJ (that's how she signed her letters to me, in lovely calligraphic script) was a huge influence in my life. She was my Mom's (your Aunt Barbara's) only sister, and my Dad (that's your Uncle Gordy) had only brothers. My Mom, Grandma Nita, Aunt Susan and your Grandma were it. There just weren't a lot of women around in the family for me look up to. So, as you might imagine, my Auntie Jeanne was very special to me.

Your Grandma was a trouble maker, Lia. **Oops, was that a secret that I just let out of the bag?!** Don't tell anyone I told you, if that's the case. We'll just keep it between us. I mean trouble maker in the best sense of the word, of course. *She* never took anyone's 'cuz they said she had see her at Medicine I would stay for an talk with her about all stuff. World peace,

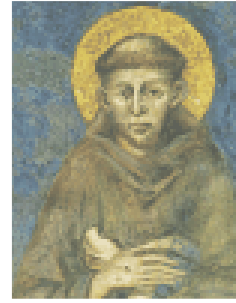


living, dogs, cats, great books, spirituality, women's rights, chickens, your dad and uncles (my cousins), and later my daughter Tasha and my work and on and on and on. We would do art and go to town and brush the dogs and sit in the creek and play with the cat and go for walks and watch birds and talk about everything under the sun.

advice just to! I loved going over to Wheel Farm. Sometimes extended time, and get to kinds of important, crazy organic foods, sustainable

So, anyway, I hope you get the idea that I LOVED your grandma very, very much. It was she, as you well know, who created the first book in this series for me when I was a girl. I still have it, and it ranks right up there with Mary on my list of mostest favoritest things. Knowing how much I adored your Grandma, you will understand that when she asked me, not too terribly many years ago, to do her a favor, I of course wanted to help out. And now we can return to the story.

Your Grandma was getting ready to sell her Medicine Wheel Farm. She'd heard that it might bring luck for a quick, easy sale if she were to bury a small statue of St. Francis of Assisi (another Christian saint—did you look up “irony” yet?—there's his picture to the right) under the front steps. She knew of a Christian supply store in Seattle, and called me to ask if I would pick one up for her so she could work the magic-sell-spell. Since my office was just a couple of blocks away from the store, I was happy to oblige.



I walked in to the store, called Kaufer's Catholic Supply, and immediately had the worried feeling that I should *not* be there. Remember what I said about being very **NOT** religious? I got serious heebie jeebies in there. The place was filled with Christian merchandise for personal use and for outfitting churches. Piles of it. Mountains of it. Angels, candles, paintings, books, statues, nick-nacks, wall hangings, artwork, crucifixes, Christian books, books, books, as far as the eye could see. Being pretty much a heathen myself (personal affinity for one particular Plastic Madonna statue notwithstanding), I imagined a bolt of lightning zapping me where I stood, leaving shoes. Nobody a ticket holder however, and in kind to me. I statue such as and they said, down that aisle to the left. There are bins of statuary there at the end. Just holler if you don't find St. Francis.”



I breathed a sigh of relief that she didn't kick me out on for being a non-churcher, and headed down the aisle. I found the bins. Lots of bins. Rows of bins. All filled with little statues of various saints and important personages. Several of the bins, in fact, were piled with varying likenesses of St. Francis; most just a few inches tall. Excellent! Just what Aunt Jeanne wanted. I was glad it had been so easy to find. I'd be able to send it off in a jiffy and she could have the help of a saint in selling her place. Yay!

I'm not sure, Lia, if I can do justice to the feeling I got when I started to walk back up that aisle. I was passing bin after bin of statues, St. Francis in my fist, when (*whoa!*) my scalp began to tingle, (*ack!*) my eyes bugged out of my head, and (*holy personal earthquake, Batman!*) I stopped in my tracks as I saw a bin...

### **FULL OF COPIES OF MY PLASTIC MADONNA!!!!**

The world tilted crazily. I gaped, frozen to the spot. I may have drooled, since my mouth was surely hanging open in astonishment. Don't tell, okay? I'm normally a fairly self possessed person.

It was a shock. Yes, that's the truth, Lia. You may not be able to appreciate what a truly shattering thing it was to stumble across a box of Plastic Madonnas identical to—not similar to, not eerily like, not closely resembling, we're talking *exactly* like—my friend Mary, The Plastic Madonna, who and companion for me, she really was Madonna. But now, hundreds of her, all way in a bin on aisle thought, after *never* her in all my years, Or at least rarer than, figurine. To see a heaping pile of EXACT COPIES didn't fit into the whole mysterious, she's-always-been-there, feel-better-when-she's-around personal mythology I had fashioned around her.



After about a hundred years of standing stock still staring at this bin full of *copies of my friend* (*egad!*), my brain began to function once again. I hesitantly picked up one of the clones. My first thought was that this one was a lighter weight, clearly inferior material to mine. The color was less patinaed (that means a sheen or colored coating developed over time), and more plain looking. I could also see the faint seam of the mold used to form the new statue. My Mary didn't have any junky seams in her!

I had gotten used to the solid heft of my Plastic Madonna, and I did **NOT** like the cheapie feel of this version. I checked it out when I got home, seeking my Mary out and examining her closely. Yup! My friend was weightier; her color was darker and more varied. I immediately felt better.

Okay, so she wasn't the *only* Plastic Madonna on the planet, so what. I found that I still felt very fond of her, and in fact the intensity and sheer freak-a-zoid oddity of the experience heightened my appreciation for her. It sort of brought her to my attention, you know? Whew, and how. Without that adventure, I would have continued to keep her in my life out of habit, without really getting to reflect on how much I have gotten out of having her around.

I have decided that, although she is not one of a kind, my Plastic Madonna has special magical properties imbued in her over time. Being cherished and loved has given her a quality all her own. Yes, I'd still call it... presence.

Now she sits, serenely as ever, on my kitchen windowsill where I can see her every day. When I look at her, Lia, I get to remember talking with my beloved Auntie Jeanne, your Grandma, about The Goddess and spirituality and women's issues and cats and all kinds of important stuff, and how weird and funny it was when she sent me on an errand to find St. Francis. I'm glad she did!



**THE END**