

## Chapter 1: The Church of St Jude

***‘And remember, St. Jude never sleeps. Any prayer to him that you offer will be repeated to God even when you sleep, or while you are busy at work, or while you are watching TV.’*** (Catholic Bible 101: The Power of St Jude)

It was obvious now that she had taken a wrong turn, Milk had been walking now for over an hour and her google map had entirely failed her. The Church of St Jude clearly had not been located correctly by those funny google trucks and now she was standing on a dusty street corner looking at a children's playground that no child should ever play in, as she caught a whiff of urine and could see beer cans and rubbish blowing about over the rickety wooden roundabout and two swings, one of which the chain had broken and was clattering and squeaking in the breeze. Scanning the road she could see a dilapidated newsagent with a smeared sign saying Benti's News, she thought best just go and ask, Milk now was tired and thirsty and wished she had stayed in and watched Netflix.

Benti's News turned out to be much better inside than its outside facade had suggested, suddenly she was standing there in a cool, clean, air conditioned aisle with all the goods stacked neatly with little pink labels denoting its name and price. Feeling better she thought she would take her time browsing and getting cool. She located a diet coke, the eye watering price she was prepared to pay for the pleasure this would be to drink and a rehydrating bottle of water, equally expensive. Thinking she might get hungry she also picked up a bright red apple and a healthy snack bar. Milk wandered to the counter and, she assumed, Benti was sitting on a high stool reading the local paper, the headline on the front read 'St Jude's Apartments Bid Successful'. Benti was a small plump asian man in his 50s, wearing wire rimmed spectacles, a clean blue shirt which stated 'Benti's News' on the pocket.

'Hi' Milk said brightly

'Hello, hot day isn't it?' Benti eyed her keenly and started scanning the goods with a small hand held device that made reassuring bleeping noises as the purchases went through the till.

'Yes, lovely in here though, I noticed your paper had a story on the front about St Jude's. I am actually on my way there, got a bit lost. Do you know the quickest way from here?' Milk asked hopefully.

'You're going to St Jude's? Why do you want to go there? That place will be better as apartments, bring the area up. Benti lifted his chin towards the window

I need to ...(Milk faltered as she couldn't say she was going there to pray, ask or plead to St Jude because her life just made her sad)... I want to visit before they change it..I like old buildings, Milk got her camera out, I like to photograph things..'

'Ah, a photographer, I need a photographer to photograph my shop - are you any good? I have a card, if you like..'Milk handed the card to Benti

'Milk Hall' an unusual name..' Benti said reading her card

'My parents were a bit hippie, met near the Milk River in Montana so they called me Milk. You can look at my website, you just fill in the contact form if you are interested..' Milk did not know why she gave him the card, the man was hardly likely to ever call for her services.

'No problem, will do. Now St Jude's - just round the corner on the left, can't miss it has a huge red cross on the side that looks like an angel, postmodern they say...' Benti stated thoughtfully

'Great, great thank you' Milk paid and exited the shop, immediately the humidity hit her and she was sticky and hot instantly.

St Jude's 'postmodern' cross was a brightly lit, massive red angel shaped like a cross. The red arms spread out and the wings sparkling in the sun. The strangeness of this neon icon in the middle of what was a clearly a poor dilapidated housing estate, probably built in the 1970s, shocked Milk into wondering exactly how she had ended up here.

Milk woke that morning and simply hadn't wanted to get up, she crawled out of bed, showered, threw on clothes and made toast that she can barely remember eating. Coffee had revived her somewhat and that was when she saw it... the glint of gold on the floor near the letterbox. She went over to investigate and discovered that it was a small statuette, it looked like a cheap religious icon sold in churches for tourists, she turned it over in her hand and on the base of the statuette 'St Jude' was roughly engraved. The gold glint she had seen was emanating from a small plate with what like Jesus' image painted on it that Jude was holding. Jude was dressed in a white flowy dress tied roughly at the waist with a rope and his tiny feet wore leather sandals. Weird thing to put through the letterbox, Milk did not really know the neighbours but they did not seem like the religious type, she lived in a small terrance and on one side was a single mother who spent all of her time looking harassed and dragging around a small boy of about three, who constantly seemed to cry and on the other side was an older couple in their 50s who had a penchant for Elton John's entire oeuvre and liked to play it on high volume early in the morning and sometimes throughout the evening.

Milk lived alone now, two weeks ago her boyfriend had left her, saying he wanted to 'pursue other options'. Milk should have been devastated however after the initial shock, she had felt a weight had lifted off her. Milk was in her early 30s, she was pretty enough if a little unusual looking with brown/grey eyes that were slightly too big and ears that stuck out ever so slightly. Milk was slim with and wore her light brown hair bobbed with a fringe mostly to detract from her large eyes and slightly protruding ears. After the boyfriend left (John was his name) Milk went to work every day as usual, came home as usual, spent her evenings as usual and last night had reached the point where she wanted to scream, instead of screaming she had drunk a bottle of Pinot, cried and fallen asleep. Milk worked in an averagely boring job at the city council processing housing benefit claims, she earned averagely okay money as she was a supervisor of her section, she had no particular friends at work, and she had no friends living nearby as after university her friends scattered to the four winds and kept in touch spasmodically and these days sometimes a year would pass before she or they would remember to text or email.

St Jude stared up at her and phone in hand she googled St Jude, apparently one of the original 12 apostles who was now the Saint of lost causes, he was not really loved much before the 20th century as often he was confused with Judas Iscariot. Jude was present at the passion of Christ and was a missionary for Jesus until he was bludgeoned to death by a mob in Persia for his beliefs. Milk did feel completely lost, she thought was a lost cause, what point did her life have? What use was she to this world? These questions had often

plagued her. She loved to take photographs but that was not her job as she had not 'made it' as a photographer, work was hard to come by and with a full time job that paid her rent it was difficult to fit in any real photography work anyway. She was lost and now here was this St Jude on her doormat.

It was Saturday so Milk gave herself a good talking to and pulled herself together, while googling St Jude she had found the Church of St Jude not far from where she lived and so, feeling she was in desperate state anyway, if not particularly religious, she set off that morning with St Jude in her bag with no real plan of what she would do when she got to this church. Now here she was standing on a dusty estate staring at a massive bright red postmodern angel.