

The Confession

by Paul de Denus

He told me he once burned a church.

“The whole thing baby!... everything... vestibule to cross. I tell you, that hellfire spread like it knew where to go. A bit of rain fell and kinda' spoiled the party, left the frame standing, black and smoldering, timbers quivering like they was shivering cold. Man, it was divine!”

Why would you do such a thing? I asked.

“My mother did work for that church, did the free stuff, the washin' and ironin' and sewin'. On top of it, she gave them money we didn't have. She believed in all their 'reward of heaven' crap. But when she needed help with me and my brother after the old man took off, those church-suckers were nowhere to be found. The nuns didn't care much for Roddy and me, thought we was trouble from the get-go. The priests accused us of breaking into the sanctuary and stealing some of their cheap-ass wine. Couldn't prove nothin'. It nearly broke our mother, defending us around town. She's the only one who's ever been there for us.”

“Did you... break in, I mean?”

He stayed quiet a moment, then said, “Come on now, can't think like that, all judgmental. That puts you in the same house as them other church folks. Do you like your big house here? Comfy and all? Warm enough for everybody?”

“I didn't mean to say yo...”

He raised his head up through the dim light.

"I'm just kiddin'! I don't think I'll burn anythin' again. Really, I can trust you with my secrets, can't I? My mother said I could, said this was the best thing to do. She said it's cheaper than payin' for therapy, said the church owed her. That's the way this thing works, ain't it?"

