



HOW I MET THE POPE LICK MONSTER

by **Debbie Kuhn**

The teenager was a petite blonde and reminded me of my younger sister, but I offered her a ride anyway. Darkness fell early at the end of November, and this evening it was being hastened by ugly clouds that spit icy raindrops over the drab landscape.

The girl jumped into my silver Mercedes and gave me a dimpled smile, her blue eyes filled with relief and gratitude.

“Thank you so much, ma’am,” she said, sounding breathless and deeply southern. “I was already getting cold.” She tossed her bright red duffel bag into the backseat of my sedan and then ran her hands through her short, damp hair.

I didn’t like being called ma’am, but I turned up the heat when I noticed she was shivering beneath her denim jacket.

“My name’s Amy. I don’t normally hitch rides with strangers – especially men – so I’m glad you came along.”

“I’m Michelle. Was that your VW I saw broken down a little ways back?”

“Yeah. I knew it probably wouldn’t make it from Atlanta to Chicago, but I had to try. My boyfriend is working up there right now with his cousin and I wanted to surprise him for his birthday. ‘Course, now I gotta call him and ask for help.”

Amy let out an exasperated sigh as I maneuvered my car back onto I-75.

“Well, I live in Fisherville, just south of Louisville. You’re welcome to come to my house and use the phone - even spend the night if you need to.”

“Wow, you would let me do that? Really?”

I smiled at her in the dark. “Sure.”

“Jeez, I was so worried back there. I was hoping someone would stop to help, but I was scared that I’d get picked up by a serial killer.”

“Monsters are everywhere, Amy. They’re not always human either.”

I could feel the girl staring at me. “Hey, you’re not saying you’re a vampire or a werewolf, right?” She ended the question with a giggle.

“Of course not. I’m just a very open-minded science professor.”

“Whew, that’s a relief! My boyfriend is real smart, but he believes in UFOs and even Big Foot, I think.”

“And what do you believe in?”

“Um, I believe in God. And I might have seen a ghost one time. But mostly, I don’t think about that kind of stuff. These days all I can think about is Malcolm and how much I miss him. I want to marry him real bad, but my parents think I’m too young.”

“Eighteen or nineteen, I’m guessing?”

“I turned nineteen last month.”

We were both silent for a few minutes. I thought about the reluctant road trip I’d taken

when I was nineteen and how it had changed my life forever.

Amy shifted sideways in the seat and stifled a yawn. “So, if you don’t mind me asking, how did a professor who teaches science end up believing in real monsters?”

Honestly, I thought she’d never ask. It had been a long time since I’d told anyone the absolute, unbelievable truth.

Read the rest of this story in an upcoming issue of Shroud Magazine (Issue #10).