

“Karma”

A short story by William Hrdina

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The robbery happened in broad daylight as only the best robberies do. The score: a 250 pound Buddha. It was carved from stone and nearly three feet tall. Daniel spotted it on his ride home from his part time job. The stone statue sat in the lawn of a woman named Deborah Jameson. She'd received the Buddha as a gift from her Father seven years before. Before her Dad left for his first business trip to Japan Deborah asked for a small statue of Buddha. Because her Dad was a man who thought that a big statue was always better than a little one, he went for the super-sized and shipped it in a big crate that arrived on her doorstep like the electric leg lamp in “A Christmas Story.”

As the Buddha Liberation Front (or BLF) was prone to do, they approached the robbery like a SWAT team. Daniel, the group's leader liked to repeat the motto, “Go in fast, and get out before anyone knows what's going on.” Because the BLF consisted exclusively of gonzo art students, the robberies always had a bit of a tendency towards the ridiculous and overly dramatic.

For this particular job the group, inspired by James Bond, decided to go with the classic black clothing with black ski masks, black boots, and for those who chose to wear any, black underwear. Daniel's girlfriend Carla even had a pair of night vision goggles propped up on her forehead like a pair of electric antenna.

The BLF rolled up on Deborah's house in a black SUV, the four-wheel drive bounding up and over the curb causing everyone to involuntarily whoop. All six members of the BLF piled out of the car and with a great deal of struggling and swearing managed to hoist the enormously heavy Buddha into the back of the truck. Just before they left Daniel took out a magic marker and wrote the letters BLF on the statue's stone pedestal. When he was finished Daniel triumphantly held the pen up into the air like it was a sword. He was, as you can probably guess, the most dramatic of the group. They all jumped back into the car and tore off back onto the street with another big jolt.

Deborah's neighbor, a dour old woman named Clarice watched the entire affair through her window. She called the cops, who dutifully showed up and took down the information. To say the case wasn't a high priority would be generous. The police thought the whole thing was obviously a prank and stopped thinking about the case two minutes after they left the scene.

Deborah, who was on a week long vacation in Florida, didn't take the robbery so lightly. Her Father died unexpectedly the year before and the statue had taken on great emotional value. Her Dad loved the outdoors and she couldn't help thinking his spirit lived on in the statue. He always liked to stand out in the rain smiling and looking up into the clouds which was why she kept the statue outside. She liked to look at the Buddha in the rain, the water running over the jovial smile and the eyes gleaming with the happiness of nirvana. The mischief she saw in the statue's eyes also reminded her of her Dad.

Upon hearing the statue was gone she almost went so far as to cancel her vacation. In the end she decided she was being silly and did her best to enjoy what remained of her time in Florida. Even though she had a good time, the fact that the Buddha was gone was always in the back of her head. When she got home she spent more time than she would comfortably admit driving around random neighborhoods, trying to spot her Buddha in the thief's lawn.

The Buddha Liberation Front was jubilant. This was the fifth Buddha they'd located and stolen in the past two months. Their latest acquisition, at 250 pounds, was their largest by far. Their first only weighed five pounds and was less than a foot tall.

“We may have to rob a museum to find a bigger Buddha than this sucker.” Daniel said, patting the statue on its head.

Their bodies were still buzzing with the adrenaline of their gonzo art, and the BLF decided they were hungry. They drove to a Denny's to celebrate their successful caper with overpriced diner food. “I think I'm going to send you my chiropractor bills Daniel.” Kyle said from the passenger seat, his hands rubbing the small of his back.

While Daniel and company scarfed down their “Moons Over My Hammy” a 24 year old meth-head named Charlie skulked through the parking lot in the way only a meth-head can skulk.

Say what you want about Charlie, he was a screw-up, and a thief, and a junkie; but to be fair, he was really good at stealing cars. He was good at electronics too. He might have been a valuable asset to some company if he wasn't too busy trying to score crank to get a job. You'd think a guy who regularly went days without sleeping would have ample time to get stuff done, but somehow it just didn't work out that way.

Charlie was in the SUV and had the engine started in about 35 seconds. It was still broad daylight. If anyone told Charlie that he was doing gonzo art he would've looked at them with his deep-set, bloodshot eyes; and laughed. Life *was* gonzo art as far as he was concerned. Charlie didn't use those words in his head, but they encapsulated his opinion on the subject very well.

He didn't notice the Buddha in the back seat until he got the car to Ernie's; Charlie's chop guy. Charlie stole the cars and turned them over to Ernie who broke the car down and sold it for parts, usually over EBAY. He then gave Charlie a cut of the money which he immediately spent on a drug synthesized from an assortment of cleaning chemicals and gasoline.

"What the hell is this thing?" Ernie asked in his cigarette husky voice. He pointed at the Buddha that revealed itself in Ernie's routine inspection of the vehicle.

"How the hell should I know? I think it's the Buddha- you know- from China."

"Well what am I supposed to do with it?"

"I don't know man; I didn't even know the thing was in there. Now give me my money."

"Sure thing, but first we're going to put this stupid thing in your car because I don't want it."

"C'mon man," Charlie whined, "Are you serious? It looks really heavy."

"All the more reason to get it out of my life. Now go and get your goddamn car."

Charlie went and got his goddamn car and the two men with three other mechanics transferred the statue into the trunk. The whole rear end noticeably dropped from the weight of the statue. Charlie took his money from Ernie and drove off toward home where he planned to drop off the bulk of his cash and make some phone calls.

The whole way home Charlie winced every time he hit a pot hole or bump in the road. The statue was too heavy for his car's crappy shocks and every bump caused it to bottom out. He bristled at the idea that he would have to get the statue out of his car. He didn't have enough friends to help him. His mind suddenly flashed on a dolly he'd seen in the common storage area of his apartment building.

Sure enough the dolly was in the storage room and with a great deal more physical exertion than he was used to Charlie monkeyed the statue onto it. He still had to drag the statue up the stairs and by the time he got it into his apartment he was exhausted and felt like he'd done a week of hard labor. He left the statue next to the front door and staggered into his living room. He actually slept for a few hours on the couch before getting up with the burning sickness of chemical need. In a daze disturbingly similar to the one millions of people affect before they have their morning coffee, Charlie stumbled out of his apartment to look for his dealer Manny.

Deborah Jameson stood over the concrete pad her Buddha used to sit on. The three letters, BLF, puzzled her greatly. Everyday she read the newspaper, scouring it for stories about mysterious or spectacular lawn ornament disappearances. Although she looked for a month, she found nothing.

Because the lease on her rental house was running out Deborah found herself occupied with the problem of moving. Half of her stuff was already at her boyfriend Roger's apartment and the stuff that was still in her house was in boxes. What was worse, Roger's lease ran out at the end of the month after hers so they would have to move again three weeks later, only this time there would be twice as much stuff.

Every day she tried to go to a few apartments, trying to find a place big enough for her and Roger to share, but cheap enough they didn't have to give up eating to live there. It was because of the low rent that she found herself in front of a deeply shadowed apartment building. She knew she wasn't going to live in the building from the moment that she laid eyes on it. Sitting in her car she even considered skipping her appointment with the realtor entirely and driving away. But in the end, she didn't think it was right to chump out on the realtor. It wasn't their fault they had to try to rent out whatever flea-trap apartment lay within the run down building in front of her.

Deborah followed the realtor, a chipper, overly make-upped woman in her late thirties up the stairs. She kept trying to say that the building was full of character and charm, neither of which was in any way apparent anywhere in the structure they were standing in. The apartment itself was what Deborah expected. It sucked. All of the windows were completely covered and naked low wattage light bulbs hung from the ceiling. Because of the brightness of the day Deborah couldn't actually see the details of the apartment around her until they'd walked all

the way into the living room where a single couch and a milk crate flipped upside down stood as a coffee table. In the corner was what looked like the kind of dolly people use to move furniture. Even when Deborah couldn't see the place she could smell it. The strong acrid odor of sweat pervaded the air like anti-incense. In the milk crate a towel was tossed over a tray. A glass meth-pipe stuck out from one of the corners.

“Try not to look at the current condition. Think of the place in terms of potential. Open up the windows, a fresh coat of paint on the walls.” Offered the realtor, sounding like an optimist during the last moments of the Titanic.

After giving the most cursory glance to the place she could justify, Deborah headed for the front door. The realtor was so shocked when Deborah screamed she nearly peed her pants. She was on edge anyway. The realtor almost considered blowing off her meeting with her, she knew Deborah wouldn't want the apartment, but she didn't want to leave her hanging...

Deborah was in shock at the sight of the stone Buddha. It wasn't just any Buddha, it was *her* stone Buddha sitting by the front door, smiling merrily at her as if saying, “See I told you I would be back.”

“This is mine. This statue is mine.” Deborah stammered, pointing at the statue.

“What?”

“This statue was stolen from my front yard when I was on vacation. This was like a month ago. Naturally the police never really even looked for it, but here it is.”

The cops were called, and sure enough, the inscription her Dad carved on the bottom was there. Charlie was arrested. Being in possession of stolen property was a violation of Charlie's probation, and the Buddha being in his apartment earned him five years in connection with an earlier charge of grand larceny. (He stole a cop's wife's Toyota Corolla.)

Deborah returned the Buddha to the outside, but this time she kept him on the balcony. On the eighth floor. Where only Spiderman could steal him.

On the balcony Buddha does very little. He sits. And he smiles.

Especially in the rain.