

MIDNIGHT SNOW FALLS SOFTLY

By Donna Stuccio

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Christmas Eve, 1971. It is almost midnight in a small diner located in a rural Pennsylvania coal mining town along the Susquehanna River. There are twinkling multi-colored lights lining the walls and paper cut out holiday sentiments, hanging midair. A jukebox in the corner plays Bing Crosby singing "I'll Be Home For Christmas." Booths line one side of the stage and a few small tables and chairs fill the center. On the other side of the stage, a pie case sits on the counter. The place is empty except for JANEY, 17, who is wearing a classic short white waitress dress, black apron and white shoes. She is counting her tip money at the counter. MICK, 19, enters from the swinging doors that separate the dining area from the kitchen area. He takes off a dirty white apron.

MICK

Well, I washed my last dish. Good night?

JANEY

Let's see... Seven dollars and thirty-five cents. Not bad, especially because it was slow. Someone left me two dollars on one cup of coffee.

MICK

I bet from the old guy in the overalls who sat over there by himself?

JANEY

Yeah. He looked like he just walked out of Hobo Jungle.

MICK

Maybe he did.

JANEY

He left me this, too.

She holds a small gold cross.

MICK

Lemme see.

(He takes it from her.)

This cross is real gold.

JANEY

Yeah. Really freaky.

(He offers it back to her.
She places it in a pocket.)

Not sure what to do with it.

MICK

Hmmm. You gotta wonder about someone who would have to come to a place like this to eat dinner, alone, on Christmas Eve.

JANEY

I don't want that to be me.

MICK

That won't ever be you, Janey.

JANEY

Because I'll have you forever.

(She holds up his high school ring, fitted on her ring finger with red yarn to fill the extra space.)

Right?

MICK

(Slight hesitation.)

Right.

JANEY

That was a bit of a wishy-washy confirmation.

MICK

Sorry. Yes, right!

JANEY

That's better.

(Wistfully, as she looks out the window. Big sigh.)

Still no snow.

MICK

Not midnight yet.

JANEY

It just wouldn't be Christmas Eve without it.

MICK

Don't give up hope.

JANEY

I love the kind of snow that would fall on a night like tonight.

MICK

What kind is that?

JANEY

Those big flakes that fall very softly. Defying their size with grace as they land. And then they linger just long enough on my skin so I can study them before they melt.

MICK

It would make you happy if it snowed tonight?

JANEY

Very.

(She looks out the window.)

Maybe it'll come while we walk to your house to exchange presents.

MICK

I'm sorry you have to walk. I almost have enough saved to put the Chevy on the road.

JANEY

That's okay, Mick. I love walking with you. So, your house?

MICK

Well, I thought we'd go somewhere peaceful.

JANEY

Guess that leaves my house out, too.

MICK

We need happier parents.

JANEY

Yeah. Oh, I have an idea of a quiet spot! How about the Harry E?

MICK

Too many ghosts in that old coal breaker. I get a little spooked when we go there.

JANEY

But then you hold onto me tighter.

MICK

Well, I have a different sort of place in mind.

JANEY

Everything's closed.

MICK

This is something that is very important to me.

JANEY
You found a bowling alley open tonight?

MICK
Funny.

JANEY
Sorry. Couldn't resist.

MICK
I'll let it slide. No, this is something that is perfect to do on Christmas Eve.

JANEY
Perfect?

MICK
Yes, perfect.

JANEY
Will this be very weird?

MICK
I hope you don't think it's weird.

JANEY
Tell me and then we'll see.

MICK
Midnight mass.

JANEY
OK. Weird.

MICK
Why?

JANEY
That's in a church.

MICK
Yes, Janey, it is.

JANEY
I bet a Catholic church.

MICK
Yeah. St. Mary's.

JANEY
The big old Polish church across hobo jungle?

MICK
Yeah.

JANEY
Church? Now? I wouldn't know what to do, when to do it-

MICK
You just follow me.

JANEY
The kneeling, the standing, the praying...

MICK
The music, the tradition, you and me together.

JANEY
They don't even speak English in there.

MICK
You got a kick outta listening to my grandparents argue in Polish.

JANEY
The only word I understood was pierogi.

MICK
And babushka.

(She looks at him quizzically.)
The scarves the old Polish ladies wear when they go to Woolworths?

JANEY
Thanks for reminding me! See, I don't even have a hat!

MICK
We'll figure out something.

JANEY
You really are suggesting church?

MICK
Yes. I want to go.
(pause)
I want to go with you.

JANEY
You know I was raised by pagan heathen communists who despise the idea of a god.

MICK
Not "a god." God. There is only one.

JANEY
Your God.

MICK

The God. The reason why we celebrate Christmas in the first place.

JANEY

That's why you want to go to church? To sort of cancel out all the commercialism? Because that's a pretty huge undertaking.

MICK

There's more to it than that.

(He struggles.)

I wish I could figure out a way to make it snow for you. Maybe I could get up there somehow and shake it loose. You know I would do anything to make you happy. Anything. You coming to midnight mass with me - well, that would make me happy.

JANEY

But church-

MICK

It will be like when we go to the movies.

JANEY

We'll sit in the back and neck?

MICK

We'll be together. And safe.

JANEY

But there are no Milk Duds.

(Pause.)

Where's this coming from, Mick? In the two years you've been my boyfriend, you've never pushed church before.

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