

I'll be Home for Christmas

by J. Mykell Collinz

She hasn't called me in days.

Before calling her, I search my memory for something romantic to say. Shakespeare's Sonnet 73 says exactly what I'm thinking. But she doesn't need to hear it. She already knows, as all human efforts come to an end, my core energies are tapering off. Which is what the three quatrains of the sonnet are essentially saying. What I want to tell her is contained in the final couplet: "This thou preceiv'st which makes thy love more strong / to love that well which thou must leave ere long."

Answering on the first ring, she says: "Hi, I was just getting ready to call you."

I'm not sure if that's true but it makes me feel better just to know she wants me to think so. I begin my prepared speech.

She briskly interrupts: "I'm leaving for Chicago in less than an hour. I'll be there throughout the holidays, visiting with relatives, staying at my sister's place near the lake." Then, with a pleading voice, she adds: "Meet me there. Get a downtown hotel room. Find a festive and romantic place where we can bring in the new year together. Chicago is known for its parties. It's a wonderful town."

The likelihood I'll go there is close to zero and she knows that. I feel a strong urge to call her bluff. Yet, as I visualize the task of locating a suitable hotel room, making a trip to the airport, flying in a crowded plane, catching a cab at the other end, and all the possible mishaps along the way, I can't do it. Plus, I've never enjoyed New Years celebrations. They're bad luck to me, in one way or another. And Chicago's the same. She'll be happier there without me. We both know that.

After she says goodby, I hold the phone to my ear, thinking I should call her back, tell her I'll make it. The world has suddenly become hollow and empty.

It's only half past four in the afternoon and it's starting to get dark already. The temperature has fallen well below freezing with a wind chill in the low teens. I cleared snow from the bird feeders earlier, filled them with seeds, shoveled the patio, and dropped seeds for ground feeding. Now, looking out through the window at the kitchen sink, I see mostly Cardinals, coming and going, maybe a dozen in view at once. They're always around late in the day. Males and females are easily distinguished, making them one of my favorite birds to watch.

My mind is cruising, shifting through gears as I chop vegetables for a soup. The doorbell startles me, I haven't hear it ringing in such a long time. Lights are out in the front of the house. Maybe they'll go away if I don't answer. Curious as to who it could be, I reach into the drawer for my handgun. No cars at the curb or in the driveway, I ascertain by peeking through the front window drapes.

It appears to be one lone person, a woman, but I can't recognize her in the dark and I don't want to turn the porch light on. "Who's there?" I challenge through the door.

"It's Marge, let me in. I'm freezing."

"Marge who? I don't know a Marge."

"Listen, I'm fucking freezing to death out here and you're the only one home. In this whole goddam neighborhood, you're the only one who came to the door. I need help or I'm gonna die out here."

"That's not my problem. You should have thought of that before you allowed yourself to be caught out in the cold."

"Come on, man, don't be such a hard ass. Let me in. I'll do what ever you want."

"I want you to go away."

"No! Please, help me."

She sounds sincere. So I tell her: "When I open the doors, I want you to come in with your hands up. Then get face down on the floor until I determine you're alone and unarmed. I have a loaded gun in my hand. Don't try anything funny."

As she gently lowers herself to the floor, I close the outside door and re-lock it. Then I close the inside door and re-lock it. Turning on

the overhead light, I say: "Roll onto your back. Keep your hands in front. Sit up. Take off your hat and coat so I can get a better look at you."

She's an attractive woman, not too old, not too young.

"Can I sit by the radiator?" she says, wrapping both arms tightly across her breast to hold in the heat.

"Stand by the radiator and take your cloths off. That's the only way I can be sure you don't have a hidden weapon. There's a folded quilt on the back of the sofa. You can wrap yourself in that once you're naked and I can see you don't have a gun up your ass."

"Is this the way you treat everybody who comes into your house?"

I'm getting turned on watching her undress. She's too good to be true. Something smells fishy and it isn't her body. She smells delightful. I fondle her clothing heaped on the floor, feeling for weapons, returning one item at a time beginning with her panties.

The doorbell rings again. I peek out the window and see a full moon rising. I'm getting weird vibes. And it's the longest night of the year.

