

One Fine Winter Day

To Matthew, the streets outside the bookstore window looked like mirrors, reflecting the moonlight back to the source. Snow was piled up as if to create a frame for the mirror. The number of admirers started to dwindle, so he put out the front light, locked the door, and turned the open sign to closed. He then reshelfed a Hemingway book that an earlier customer had considered too shallow and failed to see the writer's purpose in writing such an ordinary tale of fishing. Matthew chuckled quietly to himself as he put the book back on the shelf.

It was then that he remembered to pick up a book for his roommate, Martin. The two shared an apartment over Matthew's Aunt Sylvia's garage. They were both students at the local university. Martin was studying world religion while Matthew took up English. Matthew had taken a job at the bookstore so he could be privy to any material he might need in his studies and the extra money came in handy now and then.

He combed the shelves for Salinger's masterpiece, *The Catcher in the Rye*. Martin wanted to read it because the night before Matthew had referred to Holden Caulfield as a saint. This started a big, long argument as to whether he really was a saint or not. Matthew pulled the book off the shelf and tucked it under his arm. He

draped his overcoat around his thin body and locked the back door as he let himself out into the cold night air.

He watched his breath for a while, until it became less exciting than the shopkeepers closing their shops. One rather plump man was desperately trying to knock the snow from above his shutters. Apparently, they'd iced shut while folded in the corner of the windows. "Winter is very stubborn," Matthew said as he passed the man. The man turned and stared. Matthew kept walking.

Dark clouds hovered over the city and it felt as if it were about to snow. Matthew quickened his pace to be home by dinner. Martin was fixing a pasta dish and at this point the warmth would feel tremendous.

"Hello, Matthew," the man behind the newsstand greeted him as he paid for a magazine. "How's that roommate of yours?"

"Fine," Matthew assured him and walked on. He knew that the man wasn't really interested in Martin's welfare. Martin had had an argument with the man some time ago about the quality of material at the newsstand. It was a rather frivolous and pointless argument, as Martin assessed later.

It immediately started to rain and Matthew did everything but run to get to his bus. It was a long, dreary ride five miles to his apartment.

"Hi," a fresh face said to him. "Remember me?"

Matthew tried to place the girl's glowing face, but couldn't. "I'm sorry, I don't."

"I was at your party last month," she informed him.

"I really don't remember too awfully well who all was there," he admitted.

"You were rather intoxicated," she smiled. He bent his head down in embarrassment, but with a grin.

"How's Martin?" she asked.

"He's well."

"You know," she said thoughtfully, "he said the damndest thing to me that night."

"Oh?"

"Yeah, it was kind of strange," she started. "We were sitting outside on the steps watching the cars race up and down the street and he leaned over and said 'Lover you must promise. Promise that if I die, you'll kill yourself so we can be together in heaven.'"

Matthew gazed out the bus window.

"He was drunk, though," she added.

"Yeah, he can be quite weird at times," he agreed.

“Martin,” the voice whined, “stop and sit with me for a minute.”

“Okay,” Martin came out of the kitchen wrapped up in a cooking apron, “but just a minute. Matthew will be home any time and I have to finish the dinner.”

She looked deeply into his eyes as he stroked her long, beautiful black hair. Her lips blushed as he kissed her gently.

“If you ever die, I swear I’ll kill myself so we can be together as lovers forever,” he promised. She looked at him silently and he kissed her again. Then she watched as if she were made of stone as he walked back into the kitchen.

Matthew stepped off the bus into the dark, cold night air. The street lights spot-lighted his way to the apartment. As he crossed the street, he dropped the book he was carrying into a puddle of slush. After cleaning it off, he tucked it under his arm again and went on his way.

He could smell the pasta from the foot of the steps and that only quickened his pace. “I’m ready!” he declared as he pushed his way through the door. He threw off his overcoat and went into the living room to rest for a moment, but there was no place to sit. His favorite chair was occupied by Martin, with a bullet hole right between his eyes and on the sofa was Martin’s girlfriend of only a month, blood streaming from her hair.