Thy Will Be Done

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THANKS for bringing me to Mass, Mr. Vermillion. Uh ... I’m sorry to make you go out of the way like this.” Jean smiled apologetically as she opened the door.

“Oh, that’s all right. Guess there’s some work at the garage I could take care of anyway. Uh ... by the way, what time should I pick you up?”

“In about an hour. I’ll be standing out on the front steps.”

Jean closed the car door and started up the walk toward the church. She paused a moment at the bottom of the steps. Why couldn’t Bob have come — just this once? He knew how she felt about her religion. She’d even had to ask his dad to bring her to Mass today, when Bob had stayed in bed. Bob just couldn’t see why it was so important for her to go.

The sky was grey and heavy with dark clouds — gloomier than Jean had ever remembered. The air was still, as if forewarning a storm. Nonsense, it was all imagination! After all, this was Colorado, not Iowa — Colorado was always beautiful. No — nothing was going to spoil this week — not after dreaming about it and planning it since last summer. Why shouldn’t she be happy? Christmas was the best time of the year — best of all this year, with Bob and his family.

Suddenly conscious of the sharpness of the morning air, Jean shivered a little and drew her coat collar tighter around her throat. Must be early yet — not many people around. She started up the steps and opened the heavy wooden door. It was warm inside. The main lights of the church weren’t on yet, but there were already a few people settled in the back pews.
Jean walked slowly down the long aisle and took a seat near the front. The altar was beautiful in the flickering half-shadows — overflowing with evergreen and poinsettias. Little lights shown around the manger scene at the side altar. Jean had never been in this church before, but she felt at home. She was proud to be a Catholic — you always had that to hang on to, no matter where you went. It was a good feeling. More people were coming in now — the empty places were beginning to come alive with excited youngsters — happy families — smiling, red-faced people sitting together in little groups. Jean smiled — that’s the way it should be. She felt the familiar tightening in her throat. But why should she feel so terribly lonely today? She had been alone before — many times since her mother had the nervous breakdown and was sent to the state hospital — that had been a long time ago. Besides there was her dad and Johnny — of course he’d been gone from home two years now. It must be Christmas that makes a person especially want to be with a family. It was nearly time for Mass. The main lights were on now, and the organist was playing softly.

If only I could convince Bob how much religion could mean. But how can I hope to, when I cannot explain it even to myself? “How can you believe so strongly in something you don’t know, but are told? Isn’t that hypocritical?” Bob had asked. Was he right? How can I say this is best when I know only this? “And how can you think it is fair when children, like yourself, are forced to believe something, before they get a chance to think for themselves?” he had argued. How can I tell now what I really believe, and what I believe because I have been told? The altar bell rang softly. The priest and servers came out of the sacristy to begin Mass. Jean opened her prayer-book.

The prayers of the Mass — they too were set by church law. Jean knew them by heart. It was hard sometimes to keep from losing their meaning because of it. “Jean, when you pray in church, do you talk to God or do you say what someone else has told you? I think I’m as close to God as anyone, but I can talk to him anywhere — anytime — and
tell him just what I feel." Bob's words again rang through her mind. "But Bob, I . . ."

A sharp roll of thunder shattered the still air. Torrents of frozen pellets pounded furiously at the windows. The storm had come.

I don't know. I just don't know. Would it be better to live as you believe yourself, or live as someone else tells you? Perhaps God wants each one to work things out for himself. Perhaps it's not fair to God or me to live on blind faith.

Time for the sermon already? Jean's eyes focused on the short, dark-haired man behind the pulpit. The sound of his voice faded into a rhythmical pattern and Jean heard her father as he had talked to her several nights before the trip. "Don't ever throw away your religion, Jean. There is no greater place to find strength when you need it; take it from one who knows. Your mother was not a Catholic — she never understood. In marriage, two must become one — in all things. Your mother couldn't believe as we do — she couldn't change. When a couple is really one, they can face anything together, they know real happiness. If there are doubts, they will only reach the borders of happiness. You and Bob — well, that's your decision. Be careful though, Jean. You've got a whole lifetime ahead of you. Be strong enough to do what you know is right."

Yes, she knew what was right. If someone else were asking her what to do, she would know. It would never work — not when two people felt so differently about religion. But this wasn't someone else. This was Jean and Bob.

How could she forget the first time she saw him last summer — tall, handsome, with an easy smile and serious brown eyes? It had happened so easily. No one really introduced them. They danced, he took her home and from then on they were together always. Nothing ever really planned — both knowing it was meant to be that way.

The offertory bell rang. "Oh God, make me strong! Help me do what I know I must!"

The wind continued to rage, slapping against the stained glass windows. How could she tell him? They'd been over it a thousand times. She mustn't be with him tonight — she must leave on the afternoon train. It would be easier that way. He would have to understand and help her to be
strong. She'd be home tomorrow and it would be all over. It would be hard at first, but she could find plenty of things to keep her busy. School would begin in a couple of days.

Unconsciously, Jean mumbled the prayers after Mass. . . . She stood and walked slowly to the door. As she opened it, she turned once again toward the altar, “Jesus, help me—give me the strength I need!”

The wind bit sharply into Jean's face and swirled the new snow around her feet. The street was nearly empty now. A loud horn blast suddenly pierced the air. Jean turned. The blue Ford—no, it couldn't be! As the car door opened, Jean blinked unbelievingly—it was Bob. He walked toward her. Jean felt panicky, unable to move. The snow made his dark hair look even darker. His eyes sparkled and he broke into a wide grin as he walked up the steps. “Hey, earlybird, wake up! Let's go! Did you put in a good word for me?” he winked.

Jean gulped. “Huh? Oh, hi! Uh . . . guess I am still asleep.”

Bob took her arm and guided her toward the car. “I've got a surprise! After you left this morning I got up and packed your things in the car. I thought we could go on into Denver now. Your train doesn't leave till one-thirty tomorrow morning, so we'll make a real day of it!”

“Oh! But Bob, there's something I must tell you . . . .”

“The folks—oh, they understand. I told them good-bye for you. You can write them when you get home. We'll go downtown and have some breakfast first—eggs without broken yolks like you used to cook,” he teased.

Why did he have to say that now—why was he making it so hard to forget last summer?

They drove silently for a few moments. Jean swallowed hard. “Bob, please listen and don't stop me, there's something I've got to tell you. It's no good, Bob—you and I. It will never work. We better go right to Denver now, and I'll take the afternoon train. There's nothing more to say, Bob. I've made up my mind. It's for the best.”

Bob stared straight ahead. “Jean, we've been over this before. You know it can't be any other way. You and I were meant to be together. We'll work it out somehow.”
God only knew how much she wanted it to be that way. "Bob, don't make it so hard. This is the only way. It will be hard for awhile, but we're both young. We'll find somebody else."

"Oh Jean, stop—for God's sake stop!" He pulled off on a side street. "Look at me, Jean—look at me and say we're through."

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, help me! Jean looked straight at him. The square set jaw no longer held the easy smile. "Bob, I'm sure this time. I won't change my mind. Hurry, Bob, or I'll miss my train. There's nothing more to say—it's all over."

The deep brown eyes looked hurt—unbelieving. "You really mean that, don't you? What can I say? It's not fair, Jean. There'll never be anyone else for either of us."

He turned, started the car and drove straight ahead—silently. Jean turned on the radio. They were playing "I'll Never Stop Loving You."

"Oh, no!" Jean gasped silently. "Not now. He mustn't look at me now. That was our song. God, don't let him see me now." A few tears traced wet paths down her cheeks.

The car sped on. Squares of pavement stretched endlessly in front of them.

After what seemed like an eternity, they came in sight of the tall buildings. They drove around a maze of streets, past other automobiles, buildings, people—until finally they came to the station.

Silently Bob carried her bags inside. Jean bought her ticket. They sat on one of the benches together—oblivious to the hurried crowds of people around them.

"Bob, my train leaves in about an hour. There's no sense in your waiting—I'll get on okay." She stared past him.

"Jean, you've got to listen. It's not too late to change your mind. Hon—I love you—I..."

"Bob don't! Please go! I want it that way!"

"But, Jean..."

"Bob, please. Goodbye! There's nothing more to say. I want you to go!"

He stood slowly. "Jean, if I could only change your mind. I'll never forget you—you know that. If you ever need me, you know where to find me."
He walked away, not turning back — his strong shoulders square in the light of the doorway.
Jean bit her lip. No! How could she just sit there, when she wanted to stop him, to run to him and tell him he was right — they should be together. “Oh God, make me strong — just for a while longer!”
The minutes passed like hours. Time for the train. Jean walked numbly to the gate. She got on the train, found her seat and settled back, exhausted.
As the train pulled out of the station, the long held-back tears streamed freely down her face.

— Sue Fitzsimmons, H. Ec. Sr.

Bitter November

He PULLED the Ford up to the curb. “Here we are.”
She nodded her head, saying nothing. “You ready to go in?”
She lifted her head and looked across at him. “I guess so.”
He got out and walked around to open the door for her. The bare streetlight on the opposite corner cast long shadows of trees and telephone poles across their path. Something rustled in the grass and he saw a rabbit run a few feet and then sit to watch them pass.

At the door, he stopped and turned to her. “Maybe you better wait here a minute. I’ll go tell them.” He saw the scared, trusting look in her eyes — “and then you can meet them.”
He lifted her chin and forced a smile for her. “Hey, cheer up. They’re nice people, really. They won’t bite you.”
She looked up at his smile and his words. She managed a weak smile, “Yes, I’ll be all right. You go tell them.” He patted her shoulder and turned toward the door.
His hands were trembling as he reached for the knob and