

# *Christmas Shops*

by Seth Sjostrom



Allison chewed on the end of her pencil. She had been studying the numbers all day. With a deep sigh, she set the pencil down and leaned back.

“They don’t change no matter how long you look at them, do they?” Ryan grinned from the doorway.

Allison did not want to smile, but seeing Ryan standing there, two coffee cups in hand, she couldn’t resist. “Please tell me one of those is a Peppermint Latte and it has my name on it,” she said.

“Rough day at the shop?” Ryan asked, handing her a cup.

“This year is tough on everyone. Folks come in and it’s great to visit, but no one can afford much for Christmas this year,” Allison lamented. “The store just isn’t doing well enough. And it’s not just my store, it’s most of us. We count on this time of year to carry us, but the economy being what it is and online shopping killing us more than ever...”

Ryan took a sip from his cup and pondered. It was a look Allison had grown to be familiar with, it meant a plan was hatching inside his head.

“The solution isn’t more money from the few that are already struggling, it’s enticing others from surrounding towns to come here instead of shopping the big boxes or online,” Ryan announced.

“How do we do that?” Allison asked.

“How do you feel about ice skating and snowmen?” Ryan grinned.

Allison looked wary, “Why?”

“Just something I need to speak with Mayor Faslee about,” Ryan said and bolted out of the office.

Allison stared over her mocha at him as he left the store.

Ryan’s conversation with the mayor was a rather animated one. The mayor knew he had to do something to help the businesses, but Ryan’s ask was not a small one.

“We have a tree to light and carols to sing, can I think about it?” Mayor Faslee asked.

“You can, but remember, time is running out. Some of these shops may not be here next winter,” Ryan warned.

“I got it, I got it,” Mayor Faslee waved his hand over his head as he walked off.

Ryan hurried across the street where Allison stood in front of her shop. Sliding his arm around her, they counted down with the crowd that had gathered around the tree until the entire downtown was ablaze in brilliant, twinkling lights.

“So, how did your discussion with Mayor Faslee go?” Allison asked.

“He said he’d think about it,” Ryan said.

Allison laughed, knowing who she was dealing with, “He doesn’t have a choice, does he?”

“Not really,” Ryan grinned.

The next morning Ryan rapped on the gift shop window. Peering in, he could see Allison scurrying towards him. Unlocking the door, she smiled at Ryan and then was quickly taken aback as two fire trucks with lights flashing appeared on Main Street.

“Is something wrong?” she asked, craning her neck to look up and down the street.

“No,” Ryan shook his head.

“This was your doing?” Allison asked.

Ryan smirked, “The mayor’s. I merely gave him the idea.”

Behind the fire trucks, a fleet of dump trucks rolled down Main Street. To Allison’s shock, they began dumping loads of snow onto the roadway.

“Uhm,” Allison looked confused. “Won’t that make it *more* difficult for shoppers to come downtown?”

“Yes,” Ryan grinned. His eyes twinkled, “But it will make it a whole lot more exciting!”

Allison took a step out to see crews leveling snow along the entire stretch of Main Street. In one section, the snow was banked on all four sides and the fire department began spraying water over the area. Sections on either side were piled deep with snow.

“Ice skating and snowmen?” Allison asked as the picture in front of her story began to take shape.

“Yeah. Who doesn’t dream of finishing their Christmas shopping or sipping cocoa with their family in a winter village?” Ryan asked.

“And that area?” Allison asked pointing over Ryan’s other shoulder.

Ryan winced, “I do believe that is the arena.”

“Arena?”

“Snowball fight arena. I warn you, if you step foot in there, well, I don’t miss,” Ryan grinned.

Allison shook her head. “Alright, it’s great and all, but people still have to be able to get here. Where is everyone going to park?”

As if on cue, or coinciding with Ryan’s pre-worded text he hit send on, jingle bells rounded the corner and a horse drawn sleigh powered up the snow covered street.

Allison rolled her eyes.

“I already got the word out with the help of a few friends...,” Ryan began as a helicopter rattled overhead. “The transformation is being broadcast on news channels all over the region. This town is so charming, people need to know about it. They need to see that it is worth the short drive. It may not be as efficient as clicking ‘purchase’ on a laptop, but it is an experience that they don’t want to miss,” Ryan said.

“How did you get them to do that?” Allison asked.

“I told them the truth. If we ignore our local businesses, restaurants and movie theaters, they won’t be here. Our winter wonderland gives them the opportunity for a healthy reminder. Bundling up the family and heading downtown to shop is a wonderful part of tradition,” Ryan said.

The word got out. Allison’s shop was as busy as ever, so were the other shops in town. Families and couples ice skated and built snowmen. They tossed snowballs at one another and laughed.

Taking a moment, Allison stepped outside and intercepted Ryan as he walked by.

“This isn’t just good for the shops and the town. The families are having so much fun, together,” Allison beamed as she wrapped her arm around him. “The store is going to be okay.”

“It only takes a little from a lot to make a difference,” Ryan said. “Easier than a lot from a few, anyway.”

Allison looked up at Ryan’s eyes, “Merry Christmas!”