

Christmas Dinner at Mary's Place

Jon Walton
Wilmington, Delaware

It was Christmas Eve in the city with a chill in the air and a dusting of snow on the sidewalks.

Jeff Murdock held his daughter, Grace's, hand, while Mateo, two years older than Grace, carried a shopping bag jammed with ribbons and wrapping paper and stocking stuffers.

The children's other father, Miguel Santero, was preparing a Christmas dinner of family favorites: pozole soup, chicken tamales, pavo with cornbread, and cinnamon buñuelos, which were Mateo's favorite part of the meal ... dessert.

As evening came and the stores began to close, it finally seemed like Christmas had arrived.

"Grace, c'mon," Mateo said, "you're moving too slow, we have to get home. Pappa Miguel is making dinner."

"I'm coming," said Grace, "but look!" Grace had stopped to focus on a doll named Saige in the toy store window. "Just look at her dress and cowgirl boots, Dad. You know Saige is on my list for Christmas, right?"

Mateo knew everything on Grace's list, but he tried to get her mind off the presents by saying, "Look, we'll have to wait and see what Santa brings."

Mateo looked at Grace to see what she was thinking. He wasn't about to say anything to spoil Grace's hopes, but Jeff had been out of work for three months this past year, and Mateo knew that he and Grace shouldn't expect too much from Santa, Dad, or Pappa. Nevertheless, Saige was on Grace's list and she would be in a special wrapped box in the morning.

"C'mon," said Jeff, "time to get home." Grace took Jeff's hand again while keeping her eyes fixed on the window.

By the time Jeff and the kids made it to their apartment building they could see the Christmas tree in the window on the second floor. It had been a family project to decorate the tree with Chrismons, paper stars and crosses and angels in white and gold. And there were twinkling lights and homemade strings of popcorn, each one a nursery school creation that Mateo and Grace had made just a few years before.

They were carefully packed away each year for the tree that was always in the window. This year Grace had made a special angel of papier mâché and placed her where the angel could keep an eye on all that was happening below.

As they climbed the stairs to their building, Mateo paused to say "Hi!" to Mary, the homeless woman who had gathered all her worldly possessions of plastic bags and scraps of food and pieces of paper into the cart that she had taken from the grocery store on permanent loan. With everything jammed into the cart she camped on



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