

Winter Break
by Kitt Lavoie

Lights rise on a crowded Amtrak train. JACKSON, 19, and JESSICA, 20, sit crammed into seats across from each other, their backpacks and luggage in a mountain around them. Jackson stares out the icy windows, cozy in a Drexel University sweatshirt. Jessica watches him. After a moment, a nearby speaker crackles:

Conductor *(over loudspeaker)* Penn Station, next stop. Next stop, New York Penn Station.

Jessica looks at Jackson. She breathes deep.

Jessica Just do it, Jack.

Jackson I'm not going to.

Jessica Christmas is for family, Jackson.

Jackson I know. And that's why I'm spending it with you.

Jackson smiles at Jessica. They look at each other a moment. Jackson turns back to the window. They chug along. After a moment, Jessica unzips her knapsack and pulls out a small wrapped box. She reaches over and places it on Jackson's lap. He looks down at the box, then up at Jessica.

Jessica It's a present.

Jackson grins and begins to pull back the corner of the wrapping.

Jessica *(cont'd)* It's from your mom.

Jackson stops. He looks up at Jessica.

Jackson What are you doing talking to her?

Jessica She called me. When you weren't answering.

Jackson That's between me and her.

Jessica It's between me, too. She wants to see you, Jack.

Jackson shakes his head. He hands the unopened box back to Jessica and turns to look out the window. She watches him a moment, then tears the wrapping off the box and puts it back in Jackson's lap.

Jessica *(cont'd)* Open it.

Jackson flips open the top of the box. He looks inside. He looks away, a little more moved by the contents of the box than he wants to be.

Jackson Hmmm.

Jessica *(cont'd)* What is it?

Jackson reaches into the box and pulls out...

Jackson Socks.

He separates the socks and pulls one over each forearm, making little hand puppets that talk wordlessly at each other. He balls up his fists, rubbing them on his forehead.

Jackson *(cont'd)* It's always socks.

Jessica She wants to see you, Jack. Call her.

Jessica reaches into her bag and pulls out her cell phone. She offers it out to Jackson.

Jackson I can't.

Jessica Jack--

Jackson holds up his socked hands.

Jackson No fingers.

Jackson pulls the socks off his hands and tosses them to lay limply on Jessica's backpack. Jessica looks at them, then to Jackson.

Jessica You need to get off, Jackson.

Jackson Jess--

Jessica My parents don't know you're coming.

Jackson Why?

Jessica Because you're not.

Jackson looks at her, flummoxed.

Jessica *(cont'd)* We've spent the past three months. I can't spend Christmas pretending. I can't sit there in my slippers and my pancakes Christmas morning and pretend. This isn't working anymore, Jack.

Jackson So... you got me on this train so you could tell me here? So I would have to get off and go back to school? And spend Christmas alone?

Jessica No, I got you on this train because I think you should go home. And I think you're as stubborn as you are smart, and you hate to be alone. They're fifteen blocks away, Jack. Don't be stupid.

Jackson I'm not stupid.

Jessica About this, you are.

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Jackson You invited me to your *house*.

Jessica I *didn't* invite you. You invited you. And I'm sorry if you think I'm all you've got anymore, but you did that, not me. And I can't spend any more time feeling like you continue to entertain the idea of me just because I'm the only one left.

Jackson Do you know what I gave up to be with you? You want to talk about stupid?

Jessica I know what you gave up. And what I'm saying is, go get those things back.

The brakes of the train squeal.

Conductor *(over the loudspeaker)* New York Penn Station. Station stop New York.

The brakes hiss, and the doors of the train clatter open. The sound of passengers gathering their things. Jackson does not move.

Jackson I don't "entertain the idea of you." Don't say that. It's Christmas. I know I haven't been always fair. Over the past few months. But the time of year... it makes things clear. You know?

Jessica I know.

Jackson And I'm saying, I want to watch you eat pancakes on Christmas morning.

Jessica And I'm saying I think you should go home.

Jackson I'm trying to say I'm sorry.

Jessica That might have made a difference in October. It really might have. But it's too late, Jack.

Jackson *It's never too late.*

Jessica *Then go home.* I didn't ask you to give them up for me. And it's making you awful, you miss them so much.

Conductor *(over the loudspeaker)* All aboard! Next stop, Yonkers!

Jackson looks at Jessica. Their eyes are locked.

Jackson I don't miss them.

Jessica It's making *us* awful. And I can't do that anymore.

Jackson So that's it?

Jessica I don't know. Maybe.

Jackson So just, "Merry Christmas. Get off my train"?

Jessica Not just “get off my train.” I’m saying *go home*. I’m saying stop punishing *her* for what *he* did. Stop punishing *him*. *It’s Christmas, Jack.*

A beat.

Jackson You didn’t even get me a gift, did you?

Jessica I got you the ticket, Jack.

Jessica takes the strewn socks off her bag and holds them out to Jackson.

Jessica *(cont’d)* Now... Merry Christmas.

Jackson “...but get off my train?”

Jessica can’t quite look at him. But she nods gently. Jackson rises. He looks down on Jessica.

Jackson I’m just going to get the return train back to Philly. You understand?

Jessica I think he’d be sorry, Jack. If you’d let him.

Jackson eyes her, then hurriedly wrangles up his bags. He turns to Jessica.

Jackson Tell your folks Merry Christmas.

Jackson hustles off the train, leaving Jessica with the socks dangling limply from her hands. She looks at them, then folds them and tucks them gently into her backpack. She sits for a moment.

The train doors clunk shut. And the train begins to move.

BLACKOUT. END OF PLAY.