

EDITORS OF GUIDEPOSTS

A CUP of
CHRISTMAS
CHEER

HEARTWARMING HOLIDAY TALES





THE SNOW GLOBE

Ginger Kolbaba

Tina Wayans was tired. She had spent the better part of the morning and afternoon unpacking boxes at the bungalow she and her husband, Mike, had rented on Daisy Street in the small town of Lawrence, Wisconsin. She wasn't sure why she should even bother unpacking. They'd probably be moving again soon enough.

"Hey, babe, I'm home," her husband called from the front door.

"In here."

She could hear Mike trudging through their living room with his boots on.

"Take off your boots, mister. I'm not in the mood to clean up snowy footprints all over the house."

He chuckled, caught. "Sorry."

She heard him pull off each boot and drop it.

He walked into the room, looked around at the boxes still stacked, and gave her a kiss. "How's it going?"

"The same as every other time." After six moves in three years, Tina was finding it difficult to pretend she enjoyed the task of unpacking and "settling in."

Mike raised an eyebrow.

"Fine, it's great!" Tina said. "I love unpacking. It's my favorite thing in the whole world." She clasped her hands in a mock beg. "Can we please move again soon so I can pack and unpack all over again?"

Mike laughed. "I know. Being married to an army consultant doesn't exactly allow for stability in the home decorating department." He pulled

off his jacket to reveal his army fatigues. He looked good. His lean, muscular build and buzz haircut suited her thirty-two-year-old husband.

“Yeah, well, I think I’m going easy on the decorating this time around. That way I’ll have less to pack the next time. What, in a month?” Tina didn’t mean for it to come out so snarky, but she was worn out and hungry, and that always made her a little cranky.

“Tell you what. Why don’t you unpack the Christmas boxes? You could listen to some carols—that always puts you in the Christmas spirit. And we can leave the rest of the boxes for later.”

Tina shook her head. “It’s bad enough constantly doing and undoing our things. Now we add Christmas. I just don’t—”

“Come on, babe.”

“I’m serious, Mike. What’s there to celebrate this year? I don’t know anybody here. I’m nowhere close to any of my family or friends—and I won’t get to share Christmas with them. For the first time in my twenty-six years, I might add. I want to settle down. I want to be somewhere long enough where I actually have to dust!”

“Tina.” Mike shook his head gently. “You knew this would be our life when you married me.”

“I know. And I thought I could handle it. All you need is love and all that. But I also need friends and my family and a little bit of a routine. I can’t even get a job, since we’re never around long enough.” She raised her hands in defense. “I know, I know. There’s nothing you can do about that, so I should just get over it and finish unpacking.”

Mike drew her to him and wrapped his arms around her. “I know this has been difficult for you, and I’m sorry you’ve had to handle most of it on your own. You’re right. For right now, I can’t change it. So let’s make the best of it, okay?” He kissed the top of her head. “Do the Christmas stuff. Having all the decorations up will make you feel better. It will feel like a home then. I promise.”

Tina sighed. She knew he was right. She should at least try to be a little more mature about it all. “Yeah, okay.”

“And we’ll do the decorating together. I have a few things going at work, but I can probably squeeze out of them early and we’ll get it done. How’s that sound?”

She smiled. “Thanks, Mike. That’s sweet, but it’s okay. I know you’ve been swamped at work, and hey, what else have I got to do all day? I’ll get started on it. And you’re right. I’m sure it will make me feel better.”

She doubted it, but at least that was what she hoped.

* * *

Two days later Mike brought home a tree and stored it in the snow in their backyard, “until you’re ready for it,” he said. But a week passed and Tina still hadn’t unpacked the Christmas decorations. Mike would hint about it in the evenings when he got home from work—even reoffering to unpack and decorate—but she always declined, and with each hint, she gave an excuse to why she hadn’t gotten around to it yet. She had to focus on the window treatments. The laundry needed attention. She had to arrange the spice shelf.

But the truth was that every time she opened a box, sadness swept over her. Christmas without her family. Why remind herself of that with decorations all over the house? What was the point, anyway?

At the end of the week, Tina was making her grocery list for that evening’s meal when her cell phone rang.

“Hi, babe.” Mike’s voice sounded hesitant.

“What’s up?”

“I hate to do this to you, but we’re working on some time-sensitive items, and I don’t think I’m going to make it home tonight for supper.”

“It’s Friday night. We always do dinner and a movie on Fridays.”

“I know. And I wouldn’t miss it if I had a choice.”

“What time do you think you’ll be home?”

“I don’t know. It could be late.”

Tina sighed heavily. “So what am I supposed to do?”

“Well.” Mike cleared his throat. “I know you still haven’t done anything to make the house Christmassy and—”

“And you want me to put up some decorations, is that it?”

“Well, it would make it nice. Christmas is in a couple of weeks, so it seems appropriate.” He paused, then continued quickly, “It doesn’t have to be anything spectacular—”

“You got that right.”

“Will you at least...try?”

Tina clenched her teeth. “Fine. I’ll do my best.”

“Thanks, sweetie. This means a lot. I’ll make it up to you.”

“Yeah, I know. See you tonight.” She hung up and leaned back hard in her chair.

She pushed the list away from her on the table, then ran her fingers through her long, thick hair. “Okay, Tina. Guess we can’t delay the inevitable anymore, can we?”

She stood slowly and walked to the back bedroom where the Christmas boxes were stored. She would have placed them in the garage or attic or the garage, but Mike had insisted they sit in the house since Christmas was so close.

She opened the first box and pulled out two bunches of gold and silver garland. Then she grabbed her miniature nutcracker and soldier set and placed them on top of one of the other boxes. She fished through the box, choosing what she’d bring out and what she’d leave behind.

“I may have to decorate, but I’m not going all-out and I’m not going to enjoy it.” But Mike would enjoy the results. If she didn’t feel like doing it for herself, she could at least do it for him.

She closed that box and moved to the ornaments box. It was filled with green, red, blue, and white shiny spheres. She pulled those out and then spotted her treasured ornaments— the ones she had collected every year since she was ten. When she was growing up, her parents would buy her an ornament that signified something special that had happened each year. She had an ice skater ornament from when she learned how to skate when she was twelve. The cap and diploma were from the year she graduated from high school. Then she spotted the bride and groom figures her younger sister gave her three years ago, when Tina and Mike were married.

The next box held a Nativity set that her grandmother gave her the year before she died. Pulling each piece gingerly from its padded container, she placed them on another box, then she sat on the floor. Tears flooded her eyes and threatened to spill onto her cheeks.

“Grandma would skin me alive for not wanting to celebrate the Lord’s birthday this year.” Slowly she rubbed a hand over her cheek and eye and pulled herself toward the next box.

Glancing at the contents, she didn't see anything she wanted to use this year, but just as she began to close the flaps, the glint of something at the bottom caught her eye. She reached in and pulled out a small, ornate snow globe she'd given Mike one year while they were dating. The winter scene depicted a countryside with a cottage nestled in the back and a horse-drawn sleigh, with laughing children running alongside.

Absently, Tina shook the globe and watched the glittery snowflakes dance until they settled on the cottage and horse and ground. She shook it again and watched quietly.

This is my life, she thought. Shaken and frenzied.

She knew snow globes offered a serene, peaceful feeling. There seemed to be something hypnotic about shaking them and then watching the snow settle slowly and peacefully all around. But for her, this year it felt more chaotic. Like her life. Just as she'd get used to being in one place, someone somewhere beyond her control would shake the globe and send her world into chaos once again. The snow never seemed to settle but was constantly getting jarred and turned upside down and shaken side to side.

She exhaled, then gathered the decorations in her arms and headed back into the living room. She placed the manger and globe on the mantel and then scattered the other stand-alone decorations around the room. It didn't look overtly Christmassy, but it was something. It would have to do for now, she decided. She'd tackle the tree later.

To clear her head she decided to walk to the town square, about six blocks from her house, to check out a gourmet kitchen shop she'd seen there. She hoped a brisk walk in the winter chill would help her to stop feeling sorry for herself. She grabbed her purse, scarf, and coat and left the house.

The sun was just setting as she headed toward the downtown area. The cold air tingled her cheeks. As she passed through her neighborhood, she noticed it seemed every house was filled with the Christmas spirit. Lights twinkled and outdoor Santas greeted her as she walked by. Several houses had manger scenes. But by the fourth or fifth house she began to see a pattern with one particular type of decoration: large inflatable snow globes sat in everyone's front yards. They hummed as they blew artificial snow around inside the globes like huge popcorn poppers.

She turned a corner and saw a giant lit banner above the street entrance to the town square—SHAKEN BUT NEVER STIRRED: LAWRENCE'S SNOW GLOBE DAYS. WELCOME!

She couldn't help but smile. "That explains the snow globes on everyone's lawn," she said aloud. The town square was filled with the same type of large outdoor snow globe decorations. And as she passed the shops, she saw snow globes decorating each window display. Every globe seemed to be unique, each sporting a different and beautiful scene inside. They went from beautiful landscape scenes to outrageous cartoon figures. All sizes and colors and even shapes were represented.

She arrived at Sarah's Gourmet Kitchen shop. Here too were snow globes, all kitchen-related. One was a 1950s scene with retro appliances. One had a fat French chef holding a loaf of bread and laughing. Another depicted a family of kittens baking cookies.

The shop, though snug and cozy, was packed with every conceivable kitchen utensil. And the smell of coffee and spices filled Tina's nostrils, awakening them with delight as she opened the door.

A small bell chimed as she entered, and a plump, red-haired woman in her fifties looked up. She set down the jar of honey she'd been labeling.

"Hello! Welcome to Sarah's Gourmet Kitchen."

"Hi."

"I'm Sarah. Looking for anything in particular today?"

"Just browsing."

"That's good too. We have some great specials going this weekend. They're all up here." She pointed toward a few baskets to the right of the counter. "Are you in town for the festival?"

Tina shook her head. "My husband and I just moved here a few weeks ago."

Sarah's face lit up. "Well then, a doubly good welcome! And what a great time to move here. We're a small town, but we have a great community, and the Snow Globe Days are the best."

"It's definitely something," Tina said, picking up a penguin-shaped salt shaker paired with a walrus pepper shaker.

“There’s just something about snow globes, you know? They make me smile.” Sarah picked up a basket of spiced pretzel samples and offered it to Tina. “Try these. I’m especially proud of them.”

Tina dipped her hand into the basket, pulled out one of the pretzels, and popped it into her mouth. “Mmm. They *are* good.”

“Told you. You definitely want to check out the festivities this evening. They even do a living snow globe. That’s mainly for the kids, but everyone loves it. Let me grab you a schedule.” Sarah darted to the counter and picked up a piece of paper from a short stack by the cash register. “Here you go. And be sure to stop by First Community Church tomorrow night for the choir concert and hot cocoa. The church is just a block over, behind the courthouse. I go there. Since you just moved, you’ll need to build up a support system. And my church is a good one.”

Tina couldn’t help laughing, or resist when Sarah offered her another pretzel. After Tina dug in, Sarah helped herself to a pretzel as well.

Sarah took a bite, then popped her eyes wide open. “What am I doing? I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to bombard you. Look around! Take your time. I’ll be here.”

Tina laughed again. “Thanks. And you sold me on those pretzels. I’ll take a bag.”

Sarah smiled. “I’ll put one up for you at the register.”

Tina continued to browse the narrow aisles. But as her eyes took in all the pots and cake pans and *Chocolate Rocks!* aprons, her mind was thinking about Sarah’s bubbly personality.

I used to feel that way. Happy about everything. She brushed her hand over the yellow-and-green checkered dish towels.

After a few more minutes, she chose a small egg-frying pan and miniature spatula and carried them to the front of the store.

“Good choice,” Sarah said, ringing her up. “I use my egg pan for making egg sandwiches. They’re the perfect size to go on an English muffin.”

“I’ll have to try that.”

Sarah placed everything in a plastic bag branded with her logo. Then she reached across the counter, grabbed a small snow globe that read *Snow Globe Days*, and put it in the bag as well.

“Just a little thank-you token. Each shop gives them away during the festival, but some shop owners are a little stingy with theirs and try to sell them to the tourists. I don’t think that’s right. Anyway, my dear, welcome again to Lawrence. See you at the concert tomorrow night?”

Tina nodded and shrugged. “Maybe. I’ll see if my husband has anything planned.”

“Well, bring him along! The more the merrier.”

They exchanged goodbyes, then Tina stepped out of the store and pulled her scarf tighter around her neck. The wind had picked up, and flurries filled the air. She saw more people in the square, walking around and looking at the giant snow globes. Nat King Cole was singing “Deck the Halls” through speakers placed strategically throughout the area.

She took a few steps toward home, then stopped. *Why am I rushing home? Mike won’t be back until late.* She turned around and began to walk toward the center of the square. She figured she might as well take in the festivities while she was there.

The center of the square was a winter wonderland. Strands of twinkling lights hung from tree limbs and poles, and enormous globes lit the square, humming and bouncing slightly from the wind and the snow bursting around the insides.

Families seemed congregated around a massive square inflatable bounce house that had snow-type balls ricocheting around. Shrieks of laughter rang out from inside. Tina walked over to catch the action, and after a moment began to watch the parents instead. They all seemed happy, joyous. Without a care in the world.

They probably haven’t moved multiple times. They probably get to see their family this Christmas.

The song changed, and she heard Bing Crosby’s silky voice singing, “I’ll Be Home for Christmas.”

You might be, Bing, but I sure won’t.

Suddenly it was all too much. Loneliness and hopelessness washed over her, and Tina gave in to the tears.

I don’t want to be here. I don’t want this life. I want to go home. I want to have a home, a real home to go to.