

ROMANCE

A few days before Christmas, Miriam, a depressed history professor, 30s, walks into a small Boston chapel in the evening to contemplate her failed marriage. The snow has been falling hard since early morning. Somehow Miriam manages to lose track of time and stays long after the janitor locks up. An intoxicated mailman named Mick, 30s, bursts into the same chapel that night to talk to God. Given the time of night, both end up startling each other. Eventually Miriam tries to flee the scene and head off toward the bus station for the night, but the snow has gotten worse. Mick persuades her to wait until the snow clears up a bit. While she's there, he takes the opportunity to ask her opinion about God and the afterlife.

MICK: Do you believe in an afterlife?

MIRIAM: No. I believe we live on in the hearts of those that love us.

MICK: Oh, don't give me that crap! I guess that means you figure when we croak, that's the end.

MIRIAM: I think it's pretty egotistical to assume we go on forever.

MICK: So what? Is it egotistical when we don't walk in front of a car or that we stop someone from stabbing us with a knife? We want to go on, live. We don't call that egotistical. It's called self-preservation. And all us healthy ones believe in it.

MIRIAM: I really don't know the answer.

MICK: I do. I believe in anything that keeps us goin' on after this lousy life. Reincarnation, heaven, any of that stuff. Of course, I'd like to be reincarnated with the same name. Then you're used to answerin' to it. *(He holds out hand.)* The name's Mick. You got a cigarette before you go?

MIRIAM: *(She hands him the suitcase. Then goes through her purse.)* Miriam. Sure.

MICK: You don't have a clue of how to get to the bus station, do you?

MIRIAM: *(She continues to look through purse.)* A little clue. It's okay. I'm used to having no direction, literally and figuratively.

MICK: So stay, at least, until it quits snowin'. I couldn't hurt a flea. I hang out in chapels all night. I light candles for my mom. And she wouldn't think it was very nice if I killed somebody.

MIRIAM: Yeah, and I'm sure that's what Norman Bates said to his mom too.

MICK: I like you. I trust you. That's rare.

MIRIAM: *(Pause.)* I'm sorry I've been abrupt. I know you mean to be nice. But talking isn't . . . well, it's not easy. *(She hands him the pack.)* Here.

MICK: Could have fooled me. *(Looks at pack.)* Lucky Strikes? Wow. *(He offers her one.)*

MIRIAM: I know. I hate smoking. I just bought them for the rough neighborhoods.

MICK: What does that do? Relax you as you get pulverized?

MIRIAM: No. They make me look intimidating.

MICK: Intimidating? Right . . . okay.

MIRIAM: I also thought it would be dramatic to offer them on occasion. I guess I've been looking for drama in my life.

MICK: *(Sarcastic. Lighting cigarette off a candle.)* And look how cheaply you got off. Two bucks for Dr. Æma. Some of us aren't even looking for it, and we end up payin' a lot more.

MIRIAM: I'm married.

MICK: And what does that have to do with the price of eggs in Iowa?

MIRIAM: I just thought you should know. I mean, I heard you before when you were talking to God. I mean, *accidentally*, I overheard you mention that you were sad because some *her* was leaving and that you'd never forget *her*.

MICK: Wait? You thought I was talking about you?
MIRIAM: *(Pause.)* No. No! Did I say that? Don't be ridiculous.
We've only just met. I only meant that—that whoever the
her is I might be able to offer some advice about her. Being
a married woman and all. *(Pause.)* So what happened to her
if you don't mind answering?
MICK: *(Takes a drag.)* Where's your ring? *(Coughs.)*
MIRIAM: Pardon?
MICK: If you're married, where's your ring?! *(Mick coughs.)*
MIRIAM: Well, I'm not sure I'm technically anything right now.
I'm in the midst of a separation. I think. Though my hus-
band doesn't know it. I imagine.
MICK: And I'm coming to you for advice? *(Touches his head.)*
Oh, boy. *(He puts his cigarette out.)*
MIRIAM: What's the matter with you?
MICK: I think I'm gonna be sick.
MIRIAM: The drinking?
MICK: I didn't think it would still have this effect on me.
MIRIAM: Still? You mean this has happened before?
MICK: Only a few times. Maybe a dozen or so.
MIRIAM: Oh my God, you really are sick. Take off your tie.
Wow, you're all dressed up.
MICK: Yep, you can dress me up, but I still puke everywhere.
(Cough.)
MIRIAM: Don't be contemptuous. Here, put your head down.
(She puts his head gently on her shoulder.)
MICK: Ow. Not so rough.
MIRIAM: Breathe deep. *(Pause.)* So what was the occasion?
MICK: *(Adjusting on her lap.)* When were you gonna tell your
husband you split?
MIRIAM: Why don't you just relax for awhile? Close your eyes.
MICK: When he started posting signs up for your whereabouts?
After he poured millions into search helicopters? After he
quit his job, worried sick, exhausted and half-dead? Were
you gonna wait till the very last minute?! Till it causes him
the most pain and embarrassment?

MIRIAM: You've got the wrong Morris. I don't even think it
will disrupt his patient's appointments.
MICK: *(Sits up.)* How do you know? *(Touches his head.)* Ow.
MIRIAM: Maybe you ought to lay your head down again.
MICK: No, I'm fine. Answer. How do you know?
MIRIAM: I pick up his hair follicles in the shower. I know.
MICK: So what! What does that prove? You don't know his
every thought. People are surprised every day to discover
mysteries and secrets about their lovers. Nothing is set in
concrete. Especially when the day comes that they are put
on the spot. Wham! *(He slaps his hands. Touching his
head.)* Ow. Anyway, that's when the truth comes out. That's
when you really know.
MIRIAM: I didn't mean he wouldn't be concerned. He's not
that cold. He'd probably assume that he'd forgotten that I
had one of my Literature Conferences. After a day, he'd fig-
ure out that the lovely sweet smell in our room comes from
my powder spray, and he'd discover that he has to put his
own tea on in the morning. By the second evening, he'd
begin to miss the sound of Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*
playing over and over with the taps of my typewriter. He
laughs at the primitiveness of me still using one. And then
he'd get a case of heartburn, but he wouldn't know why.
He'd feel as if he'd lost something, but wouldn't know
what. And then he'd remember that he'd felt as if I should
be home by now. After which, he might feel a slight pang.
A pang of longing. Longing for only me. But he'd brush it
off quickly. So quickly. Too quickly. Finally, he'd call my
mother. *(Pause. Laughs sadly.)* And she'd get the helicop-
ters out.
MICK: You can't think like that. You can't make all those
assumptions. It's not fair not to give him a chance to respond.
MIRIAM: Oh, but I have!
MICK: No, you just think you have! You've never laid it on
the line. You never came right out and said, "Do ya love
me, or don't ya?! Cause if you don't, I'm leavin'!" Never

since you've been married, right? *(Pause. She goes back to her suitcase.)*

MIRIAM: But why should I have to? If you love each other you know.

MICK: Oh, it's just like a woman to think like that! You assume mental telepathy. You say, "I've been so upset. How could you not know?! My hand was on my hip like this all night." We're supposed to read hand gestures?

MIRIAM: You ought to. I read yours—I mean his.

MICK: No, you just *think* you do.

MIRIAM: When he's angry he puts his head back, his shoulders tense a bit, and he strokes his hair out of his eyes.

MICK: Maybe he had a crick in his neck, his shirtsleeve was wrinkled wrong, and his hair was buggin' the hell out of him.

MIRIAM: He seems so angry with me. But it all remains polite. Civilized. Just like a doctor.

MICK: Maybe he thinks you don't want him anymore. Maybe that's what makes him angry. Makes him furious to think you don't love him anymore. *(She moves away from him.)*

MIRIAM: You don't know. You've never been married!

MICK: No. I haven't. *(Pause.)*

MIRIAM: I didn't mean that insultingly.

MICK: It must feel powerful to be so beautiful.

MIRIAM: *(Pause.)* Beautiful? Are you talking about me?

MICK: Yes, you and . . .

MIRIAM: It's been a long time.

MICK: So remind him. Be blunt.

MIRIAM: He used to say it all the time when we first got married.

MICK: When was that?

MIRIAM: Seven years, and about thirty-three hours ago. But who's counting?

MICK: Did he forget the anniversary?

MIRIAM: No, he bought me a new briefcase. One I had admired. It was lovely.

MICK: But . . . ?

MIRIAM: That was all.

MICK: All?

MIRIAM: Well we didn't . . . I mean, I expected . . . Where are those cigarettes? *(She begins rummaging through her purse.)*

MICK: *(Pause.)* Would you dance with me?

MIRIAM: *(Looking around.)* I don't think that would be appropriate.

MICK: And sitting in here smoking at three in the morning is? *(He takes her hand.)* Besides, who would know? Other than God, you, me, and Santa Claus. Come on.

MIRIAM: *(She stands.)* Why?

MICK: Because I want to. It was something I wanted to do. *(He takes her gently.)*

MIRIAM: Sorry that my hand's so cold.

MICK: Well, you know what they say about that.

MIRIAM: And it's true. *(He twirls her a bit.)* This seems really silly.

MICK: I don't feel silly.

MIRIAM: I don't keep rhythm so well. No music.

MICK: Here's one you might know. *(Mick hums "Jingle Bells.")*

MIRIAM: *(She laughs, humming along.)* When we went on our honeymoon, my husband, Morris, told me he had a great Christmas present for me. And I was guessing like a necklace or some real big thing . . . Oh, I can't tell this. I'll be embarrassed. *(She stops dancing.)*

MICK: Don't be.

MIRIAM: Okay . . . Oh, I can't!

MICK: Don't worry. You'll probably never see me again.

MIRIAM: *(Pause.)* Why?

MICK: I don't know. Does it matter?

MIRIAM: Yes. *(Pause.)* Well, he wrapped himself up in Christmas paper, he was nude, and he tied a jingle bell on his . . . well, you know. And it was great. The best—I mean, not the jingle bell. We took it off for safety reasons.

MICK: And now . . .

MIRIAM: And now . . . what?
MICK: No more bells?
MIRIAM: You could say that. You know I just realized that I still haven't finished my Christmas shopping yet. Isn't that weird?
MICK: Why'd you stop?
MIRIAM: *(Pause.)* The day I was supposed to get it done, I bought this red dress instead. Perfect. Low cut but sophisticated. The kind that shows my legs off just perfectly. I have nice molded calves, the thighs aren't so fine.
MICK: That's exactly how I'm built too.
MIRIAM: Ha. Ha. I was so anxious. I waited for him. I felt so, so red in it. So voluptuous. You know? I wanted him so bad. I didn't mean to have him be uncomfortable. I never intended that. This red dress was supposed to cure his problem, OUR problem. So I tried to remain hopeful while he seemed both humiliated and terrified. I knew it was a problem, but we both figured it would go away. But it doesn't. And he blames me. Like I cause it. Like maybe, I don't want him bad enough. Isn't that crazy? And the months go by and it becomes harder to talk about. I thought the dress would . . . I gave it away to a friend. I couldn't look at it. It reminded me of our failure. My failure. I try, I try to get him to talk about it. To go get help. But he shuts down. And I can't take it anymore. I'm so lonely without him. I'm so, so lonely. God, I'm lonely. *(Mick hugs Miriam. He slowly begins dancing with her again.)* I can't, I can't do this with—
MICK: Shhh. For a few seconds close your eyes and dance with me. You can be anywhere you want, with whoever you want. Just dance.
MIRIAM: You smell nice.
MICK: Thanks.
MIRIAM: *(Touches his breast pocket.)* What's this in your pocket?
MICK: *(Stops.)* Nothing.
MIRIAM: What's the matter?

MICK: Nothing. Just . . . nothing.
MIRIAM: You never answered why you were all dressed up in a tux. Was it a wedding?
MICK: No. The weather must be clearin' up out there.
MIRIAM: Did you have to go to a wedding and just broke up or something?
MICK: No. The car's down the street.
MIRIAM: So where are your first-class tickets to?
MICK: Look, no one got Goddamned married today!
MIRIAM: Men don't often dress in tuxedos, looking so handsome.
MICK: It was a funeral.
MIRIAM: Oh God. Why didn't you tell me?
MICK: I liked having my mind off of it. So how did you plan to tell Morty?
MIRIAM: *(Pulls out letter.)* I wrote him a letter.
MICK: A letter? A lousy letter? Letters are for love, Miriam, not for ends.
MIRIAM: What makes you an expert on love?
MICK: I don't claim to be. Just on mail. Just correspondence. Mail carrying actually.
MIRIAM: So if you don't mind telling me, who died?
MICK: I suppose you'd want us *(Referring to mail carriers.)* to deliver your nasty little note?
MIRIAM: I've poured out my whole heart to a complete stranger. And you don't even trust me enough to tell me who died?
MICK: She got letters. Mushy ones. And white roses. I even took her to all the classic romances. Took her to *Casablanca, It Happened One Night, Philadelphia Story, Rocky*, on and on. I did everything you're supposed to. Everything!
MIRIAM: Oh my God, is that who . . . ?
MICK: No.
MIRIAM: But I thought you said there was a funeral?
MICK: There was. The family was spread over the pews. He isn't Catholic exactly, but close enough. The brothers and

sisters, all married, sat right here. And there . . . *(He points.)* There sat Mom, hair done up high. So they do the whole walk down the aisle, everything's smooth. Everybody's pretty. Until they get to the part where ya got to, where ya gotta . . . *(Slaps his hand.)* Wham! You know, tell it like it is. And he gets to askin' her if she wants to spend the rest of life with him and there's this pause. And he thinks—"Wow, she's makin' this dramatic!" But the pause goes on. He looks over at her and she doesn't move. She stands there. Still. Only he can hear her breathing. He tries to catch her eye to see if she's just nervous, but she ignores him. He looks over at mom and her forehead's all wrinkled, tense, and her hair starts unraveling. And then, this knot forms in his throat—like a lump, but kinda twisted, and it gets real dry. And he thinks, he can say something, do something, tell a joke, he can stop this. But the only thing that comes out of his mouth is a little moan. A little cry—a noise, so small. You can barely understand that he's sayin' "Marie, Marie." She turns to him with a face so full up of sorry. His sisters, his brother keep tellin' him that it was cold feet—cold feet. But in that instant, he knew she didn't love him. She wanted, wished, hoped to, but she just didn't. She wanted to, but she didn't. Didn't love him. And the whole thing turned into a Goddamn funeral. *(Pause.)* So don't tell me about lonely.

MIRIAM: *(Pause.)* Okay, you win. *(Beat.)* But do you really think that's your last chance?

MICK: Who's gonna want me? I mean, look at me.

MIRIAM: *(She looks at him.)* I'm looking at you now. And I think you're very attractive.

MICK: *(Embarrassed.)* You do not.

MIRIAM: *(She moves in closer.)* Yes, I do. You are a very attractive man, and if I weren't married, I would be after you in a second.

MICK: Noooo.

MIRIAM: *(She nods.)* Yes. *(Reaching her hand out to him.)* Yes.

THE JOURNAL

Anne, a single mother in her late 30s, recently discovered her teenage son's journal, which revealed that he had been having an affair with his high school English teacher, Mr. Randy Thurber, late 20s. Randy was a comfort to the 17-year-old Tad when he needed to talk about difficult things, like growing up "different." Unfortunately, as the two got to know each other better, they both started to develop romantic feelings. Innocent hugs progressed into small kisses and more recently into make-out sessions. In the last few weeks, Randy has decided that they should slow things down. Tad has been in a deep depression. Anne, concerned for her son, decided to read his journal. She was horrified to find out that one, Tad is gay, and two, he's involved with his English teacher. This evening, Anne has shown up unexpectedly at Randy's house. She is prepared to confront him directly.

ANNE: *(Holding two cups of hot cocoa.)* Hello, Mr. Thurber.

RANDY: *(Startled.)* Ms. Roberts? Hello. I, I—Is everything all right? *(A bit panicked.)* Is Tad all right? He's not—

ANNE: He's fine or as fine as he can be. He's staying with his uncle for the weekend.

RANDY: Oh. Good. Well . . . Is everything okay with you? Would you—would you like to come in?

ANNE: No. No, I'd rather not actually. I thought you might come out here since you have this big porch and all. I'd like to speak to you.

RANDY: Um, uh, okay, sure. *(He closes the door.)* I'd—that's fine. I love the porch. It's my favorite part of the house.

ANNE: You seem pretty young to own your own home. You look like you're barely out of school yourself. High school teachers must be making more than they used to.