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Midnight Run to Nacogdoches

By Robert L. Penick

He is sitting in a fast food restaurant, pining for a woman who has never had an original thought in her life. It is Christmas Eve, and she is five hundred miles away, celebrating with her new in-laws. He is a damned fool, but hasn't quite realized it yet. Like Dostoevsky's *Raskolnikov*, he is seized by a compulsion, far from murder but born still of desire and indignation. Outside the window, snowflakes pile up like feathers in an uncomfortable pillow. He stares out into the night, and that is all he sees. Night.

There were certain promises made which were not kept. Precise itineraries not completed. His present situation bears no resemblance to the Facebook account he abandoned fifteen months previous. There is no somewhat attractive woman sitting across from him, gazing with an amused smile over a pile of hamburger wrappers, matching him fry for fry while jabbering about office politics and daytime television. There is no second toothbrush in his bathroom, no dresser drawer reserved for feminine undergarments. No carton of Trader Vic's vegetable soup inhabits his refrigerator. Anything left are empty words still ringing in his head. They were fiction as they sprang from her mouth. Never had she meant the June wedding, the four bridesmaids, the honeymoon on the gulf coast. A changed heart was just another way of saying "liar."

He deserved an explanation. That and an apology. This sort of wrong simply could not be allowed to stand. He had been treated as less than human, as a tool. A resolution was required. Picking up his plastic tray, he moved to the garbage can by the exit.

Five hundred miles to Nacogdoches. He could be there by dawn.