

# Miracles from Strangers

*By Jim Gustafson*

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**STORY OF THE PLAY**

In 1933 the Depression had taken the merriment from the holidays. On Christmas Eve, a gangster, two thespians, and an out-of-town couple wind up in a small diner just to get out of the cold and warm up with a hot cup of coffee. But when an inept robber takes them hostage, these strangers find a Christmas Miracle. This heart-warming holiday comedy tells an offbeat story of down-and-out strangers discovering the joy of Christmas at gunpoint.

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**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(5 m, 4 w.)*

**JOLENE:** Owner of the diner. 50-60.

**MABEL:** Waitress. 25-40.

**PUG D'MARCO:** A gangster. 50-60.

**LAWRENCE BOLIVIER:** English-born actor. Mid-50s-60s.

**ADELE BOLIVIER:** Actress. Mid-to-late 40's.

**HARLEY DUNBAR:** A retired man visiting from Florida. 60s.

**IRMA DUNBAR:** His wife. 60s.

**STANLEY RYAN:** Robber. Early 30s.

**COP:** Male police officer. Age flexible.

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**SETTING**

The Coffee Drop, a diner, in New York. 1933. There are a few tables and a counter with stools.

**PROPS**

Reversible "Open" / "Closed" sign  
Assorted dishes – plates, cups, silverware  
Coffee cups  
Large ham on a platter  
Bottles of bootleg booze  
Gun  
Valuables – including jewelry, a \$10-dollar bill and a ring  
Bag  
Dinner roll  
Police nightstick  
Money belt

**SFX**

Phone

## **Miracles from Strangers**

*(AT RISE: Lights up on The Coffee Drop diner. MABEL is by the door turning the "Open" sign to the "Closed" side. JOLENE is bringing dishes out from the kitchen. As a couple approach, Mabel opens the door to talk to them.)*

**MABEL:** Sorry, we're closed for a private Christmas Eve party... No, not tomorrow... We have Christmas off, but we'll be open on Thursday as usual... Sorry... Thank you. Merry Christmas to you, too. *(SHE closes the door and turns to JOLENE.)* Wow, I hate turning people away on Christmas Eve.

**JOLENE:** If you remember your Bible you're not the first to turn someone away tonight, Mabel.

**MABEL:** What???. *(Pause.)* Oh, I get it... You know, Jolene, you'd think everybody would be home with their families tonight.

**JOLENE:** These are funny times, toots. Since the crash not many people have much to be merry about, and the holidays just remind them how bad it is. Street looks pretty empty, though, so I guess most people are sharing what little Christmas spirit they still have at home.

*(SFX: Phone rings. JOLENE answers it.)*

**JOLENE:** *(Cont'd.)* Hello, The Coffee Drop... Oh hi, Colin. We're all ready for your family... Got everything all cooked up and now it's just simmering... What?... *(Pause.)* No, no! No, I'm not angry... I understand... If my dear mother, God rest her soul, were here she'd no doubt feel the same way... No, no... You don't have to do that... I wouldn't think of it. Besides, the streets are full of hungry people. We've turned away dozens since we put up the "Closed" sign... Now you just forget it and have a Merry Christmas... Give my holiday wish to Molly and kids for me, would ya? Thank you for calling, Colin... Merry Christmas to you, too and God bless ya.

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**MABEL:** What was that all about?

**JOLENE:** Looks like we won't be having a party here tonight.

**MABEL:** What?

**JOLENE:** Yup, Colin and Molly planned on surprising the family by bringing them all here for Christmas Eve dinner but Grandma O'Banion had a conniption when she got wind of it. She pretty much hung ol' Colin out to dry for not honoring the baby Jesus at home and eatin' from their hearth... He just canceled.

**MABEL:** He can't cancel.

**JOLENE:** Oh yes he can, and I can't fault the man's wisdom. I sure wouldn't want to feel the wrath of Glynnis O'Banion... That woman never forgets... She'd be a curse on them 'til the day she dies, and that woman will outlive Satan himself.

**MABEL:** So, what do we do?

**JOLENE:** Well, you can go home. I'll just leave the door open for stragglers for a while... Then I'll pack up the food and bring it over to St. Matthews so the orphans have something extra with their Christmas dinner tomorrow. Now scoot... Shoo... It's Christmas Eve... I felt guilty enough having you work tonight anyway.

**MABEL:** What do I have to go home for? Bill finally got that WPA job in Tennessee and he couldn't afford train fare home. Even if he could, at his age he's afraid to take time off for fear of some young fella jumpin' into his job while he's gone. We've had plenty of Christmases together. The kids can't afford to come in so it's just me. I'd rather be here with you than home listening to the Rudy Vallee Christmas Show on the radio.

**JOLENE:** Don't be silly... If you won't go home, then... Here... Here's fifty cents... Go to the picture show... If you can't spend the night with your Billy spend it with Clark Gable. I can handle it here by myself. Grab your coat and skedaddle... I'll be all right.

**MABEL:** That's it... No more talk... Besides, the movie house is closed tonight. I'm staying here with ya, Jolene. Neither of us should be alone for Christmas Eve.

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*(THEY hug.)*

**JOLENE:** You're a sweetie... Thank you, Honey.

*(PUG, a gangster, opens the door and peeks in.)*

**PUG:** Hey, Jo... You open for business?

**JOLENE:** We sure are... Come on in, Pug...

**PUG:** I didn't think you were open because there's nobody here.

**MABEL:** Well, we were gonna be closed for a private party, but they canceled at the last minute. We got a kitchen full of food. Grab a table.

**PUG:** Somebody welch on ya, Jo?... Stuck ya with the tab for a shindig? Jo-Jo, you know I love you like a sister... If somebody owes you scratch, I'll get it for ya... Or break a few legs... I'd do that for my real sister, ya know... Come to think of it, I did do that for my sister... A couple of times.

*(JOLENE hugs PUG and kisses him on the cheek.)*

**JOLENE:** You're just like Santa Claus to us, Pug... and full of Christmas joy... That won't be necessary, but thanks for the offer. I'm OK with it. It was a legit reason to cancel. Nobody was out to short-change me. How about joining us for dinner?... It's on the house.

**PUG:** I'll join you but I'm gonna pay my freight.

**JOLENE:** Oh no, you're not, Pug D'Marco... Dinner's on me tonight... My treat... Now sit down.

**PUG:** May as well, I don't have no plans.

**JOLENE:** Anything wrong, Pug? You're usually more chipper.

**PUG:** It's the holidays, Jo-Jo. They always give me blues.

**JOLENE:** I'm sorry to hear that. Want to talk about it?

**PUG:** Nah... I'll get over it.

**JOLENE:** You sure?

**PUG:** Yeah, I'm sure.

**MABEL:** I'll get you a cup of Java. *(SHE exits to the kitchen.)*

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