

MIDWINTER LIGHT by Sandra Churchill

Grappling for her winter robe on the nearby rocker, Lily slipped out of bed and scuffed toward her teenage son's room, pulling her robe tightly around her. She tiptoed over to smooth the covers over the sleeping boy, wishing for time to slow down.

Lily pulled the door closed and slipped down the hall to the living room. Winter moonlight caught the glimmer of an idle silver strand amid the tree shadows. Twists of gold and silver garland brightened the room as delicate spruce filled Lily's lungs with the country scents of Christmas.

A long-time artist, she caught the glow of moonlight spotlighting delicate ice patterns across the frozen windowpanes. Then she caught her reflection...

Crystal grey eyes looked tired, and time had etched its unforgiving lines upon her temples. Ash-blond hair was generously streaked with grey, appearing snow-dusted. She glanced down, glimpsing her once-light figure now hidden beneath the dough-like fullness of an older body. Even her artist inspiration seemed dull, devoid of fresh ideas for paintings.

Lily shivered as a gust found its way through a crack in the sill, her mind resting on Nick's reaction to her lately. Actually, he'd said little about her appearance.

Soft footsteps brought her out of her thoughts as Nick appeared, rubbing his eyes.

"I couldn't sleep..." she said quietly.

"My Lily doesn't even smile at me anymore. Don't you love me, Sweetheart?"

Lily started to cry. "I'm just old, Nick. What do you need a round old lady for?"

He took her face in his hands. "I won't have you talking that way about my bride."

"The children are nearly grown—Melanie's getting married and Kenny will graduate this year... Just look at me! My body's falling apart..." she choked.

Without another word, he pulled open the hall closet and reached to find Lily's winter boots and his own. He draped her woolen cape over her shoulders and pulled on his overcoat.

They donned boots and emerged into the winter ballet of nature outside. He led her across the snow-covered backyard, and down the gentle slope that reached the pond, now frozen silver in the winter light. The pair slid, "sans skates" across the frozen mystery of the ice.

Sweet memories flooded the pair as Lily caught the hushed, low sounds of her husband's singing.

"Through the years we all will be together," he sang softly to the night wind. "If the Fates allow... and have yourself a merry little Christmas now."

Lily quietly studied his face, touched only gently by time, in soft wisps of grey that framed his ruddy, lightly-whiskered face.

"You will always be my beautiful Lily..." he murmured into her hair, as he spun her into his arms. "You are my joy, my queen, my first love."

Lily shed tears of relief and gratitude, kissing him in the silvery darkness.

She glimpsed the crystal tree limbs around her, composing her next painting. Lovers paused in midwinter light, frozen in silent silhouette.