

A Snowball's Chance
by
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EXT. - PARK - DAY

Winter sun brightens a downtown Chicago park. Several inches of wet, heavy snow have fallen overnight. JIM O'MALLEY, 36, well-groomed investment banker, sits on a park bench reading his newspaper.

A large snowball smashes into Jim's ear and spatters into pieces. He bolts to his feet. An outburst of HEARTY LAUGHTER rises from SISTER MARIA MAGGIO, a 42-year-old nun in full Franciscan habit. She rushes up to Jim, her youthful face flushed from running. Six-year-old MARIO LONGINI dashes forward to pelt her with snowballs and then sprints off, laughing.

SISTER MARIA

(yelling after the boy)

Next time it snows, Mario, you
better watch your back!

She turns toward Jim as she brushes snow from her habit.

SISTER MARIA

You'll have to forgive me! I have
horrible aim. He was moving so
fast, and I thought that, but...
Anyway...

Jim removes his glasses to dry them.

JIM

You pack quite a stinger, sister.

SISTER MARIA

I really am sorry.

JIM

Is this how you set an example for
your young friend?

He stuffs his newspaper into his briefcase.

SISTER MARIA

He's only seven. It was innocent play.

She extends her hand to him.

SISTER MARIA

I'm Sister Maria, with the Sisters of Mercy. We run the soup kitchen down on 80th.

JIM

Jim O'Malley.

SISTER MARIA

You look familiar. Were you at noon Mass last week?

Jim checks his watch.

JIM

Look, I have to go. I'd love to stay and frolic in the park, but...

SISTER MARIA

Wait! Turn around. You missed a spot.

He turns to let her brush snow from his coat collar.

SISTER MARIA

There. Nice to meet you. Maybe we'll see you at St. Patrick's again soon?

JIM

Good day, sister.

He walks off briskly. She bends down and packs another snowball. She's about to throw it at his back, but then thinks better of it. She takes a bite of snow and then launches the ball off to one side.

INT. - OFFICE - DAY

Jim works beside a large window with a view over the park. He writes furiously at a desk with neatly arranged files.

The BELLS of a church strike twelve. He pauses, leans back in his chair and looks over the park until the bells cease.

He returns to writing.

EXT. - PARK - DAY

It's the following morning. Jim, sitting at his bench, hides his face in his paper when Sister Maria approaches. She stops in front of him and bends the paper back.

SISTER MARIA

I've had a conversion. No more snowballs.

JIM

(lowering the paper)
Morning, sister.

SISTER MARIA

It is. I'm on my way to the coffee shop for a quick espresso. Would you join me? To make up for yesterday...

JIM

Espresso? Is this what the sisters drink now?

SISTER MARIA

It's what this sister drinks... on a feast day. The coffee in the refectory is like dishwater, really. So, will you join me?

JIM

I don't drink coffee.

SISTER MARIA

No matter. I'll buy you juice or a muffin. It's on the convent. C'mon.

JIM

I have a nine o'clock meeting.

SISTER MARIA

No problem. The shop's just around the corner.

(Smiling)

Give a poor sister a chance to do her penance. And maybe do a little of your own.

Jim packs away his newspaper and rises.

JIM

You make a good beggar. Lead the way.

SISTER MARIA

Great.

They walk off as the camera zooms out to an aerial shot.

JIM

So why would I need a penance, sister?

SISTER MARIA

Do I look like your confessor?

INT. - COFFEE SHOP - DAY

The coffee shops BUZZES with executives. Jim sits with orange juice at a small table opposite Sister Maria. A few people stare at this unlikely twosome.

JIM

We were married at Saint Patrick's,
so I try to make it every February
10th.

SISTER MARIA

How long has it been?

Jim begins playing with a packet of Sweet N' Low.

JIM

Three years, two months... four days.

He tightens his focus on the sweetener. She reaches over for his hand but he pulls away in a reflex. ALLIE, a college student with a nose ring, brings over Sister's espresso.

SISTER MARIA

Thank you, Allie.

(to Jim)

Any children?

JIM

No. We were four months pregnant.

SISTER MARIA

Jim, I am so... I can't even
imagine what that would be like.

JIM

I'm sure you couldn't. I mean, I...
Listen, I really need to get to
work. Thanks for the juice, sister.

He drops the open packet and sweetener spills across the tabletop. Sister Maria sweeps it into a pile.

SISTER MARIA

It was nothing. If there's anything
the sisters can do, please let me
know.

They both stand. Jim buses their tray to a nearby counter and Sister Maria follows.

SISTER MARIA

Jim...

Jim looks back to her. Sister Maria extends her hand to him.

SISTER MARIA

Thanks for doing penance with me.

He shakes her hand and smiles weakly.

INT. - SOUP KITCHEN - DAY

Sister Maria sponges down tables as people leave. Outside the windows at the front of the dining room, trees bloom. SISTER ROSALIND, 55, a grandmotherly African-American, follows Sister Maria, flipping chairs upside down on the tabletops.

SISTER ROSALIND

I'm plannin' some bowlun for the little ones. Know where I might find a man to help out?

SISTER MARIA

Rosalind, I know the perfect man for the job.

CUT TO

EXT. - PARK - DAY

BIRDS SING loudly and CREAKING SWINGSETS can be heard in the distance. Sister Maria sits beside Jim on the bench.

JIM

I haven't bowled since I was fifteen.

SISTER MARIA

You've never set foot in an alley,
have you?

JIM

Of course I have.

SISTER MARIA

Jim O'Malley, you lie about as well
as you bowl.

JIM

Judge not, sister. Besides, you've
never seen me bowl.

SISTER MARIA

No one has.

Jim gets up and walks toward his office.

SISTER MARIA

Not even for the kids?

Jim stops walking.

JIM

Not even for them.

SISTER MARIA

You're sure?

CUT TO

INT. - BOWLING ALLEY - NIGHT

The alley echoes with GUTTER BALLS and CLATTERING PINS. Close
up of Jim's face.

JIM

Positive. You just have to think
positive, that's all.

Shot zooms out to reveal Jim standing with Mario in front of a lane with padded gutters, surrounded by a dozen youth ages six to eleven. Mario holds a bowling ball, but looks tentative. Jim, dressed in business casual, blends in like caviar at a cookout.

Jim reaches for Mario's ball.

JIM

Here, you want me to demonstrate?

Mario nods and hands him the ball. Jim becomes animated as he coaches.

JIM

The first and most important method
is the Granny Shot.

Jim runs up to the lane, stops suddenly with legs spread wide, and bowls between his legs.

The ball bounces over the gutter and stops in the next lane as Sister Maria's ball whizzes down the lane for a STRIKE. Sister performs a victory dance.

Jim's face burns red and bursts into laughter. Mario reaches eagerly for a ball on the return tray.

INT. - OFFICE - DAY

Camera pans Jim's vacant office as CHURCH BELLS strike twelve. Shot rests on a view out the window over midsummer day in the park.

FADE OUT