Attending His House

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Andrew Towers  
*Attending His House*

Going to Midnight Mass was always a painful labor. I would wait in the idling Oldsmobile with my older sisters, choking on the inertia of Christmas Eve like any normal kid.

When the snow would start to fall, Mother would stand at the top of the basement steps and yell down into the hell beneath our home for the Devil to rise up and drive.

But she did not marry a wise man and had to brave the slippery road herself. She would buckle us in, all rosary and rescue, and aim the car cautiously in the direction of her faith.

We would stumble into the vestibule of St. Mary's late, brushing snowflakes off each other as if they were dandruff, and wait for a proper break in the service to sit down.

Peering through the massive white doors of the sanctuary like a ceramic lamb glued to the far side of the manger, I would look at those seated inside, singing in Spanish, getting to hold candles.

Finally, in a mad dash through these gates, Mother would seat God's bastard children, herding us past *her* mother and sisters with whispered direction and shame.

At least being late made mass blessedly short. But one unnecessary shift in weight, one unwarranted cough or look back, and Mother's fingers would pinch and twist the soft underside of my arm.

Then one Christmas Eve, late from another treacherous night journey from our house to God's house and unable to stomp the chill out of my body, I told my mother I wasn't going inside to sit down with her.

I stood in the peaceful entrance way by myself and looked outside, through a clear panel in the stained glass, at the quiet little row houses surrounding the parish.

I could tell it was snowing harder now, falling faster now, than in the past. Later that night, maneuvering home, keenly aware of holiday drunks, I couldn't fall asleep in the back seat while my mother drove us home.