

Read the following short-short story.

The New Year

by Pamela Painter

It's late Christmas Eve at Spinelli's when Dominic presents us, the waitstaff, with his dumb idea of a bonus—Italian hams in casings so tight they shimmer like Gilda's gold lamé stockings.

At home, Gilda's waiting for me with a surprise of her own: my stuff from the last three months is sitting on the stoop. Arms crossed, scarlet nails tapping the white satin sleeves of her robe, she says she's heard about Fiona. I balance the ham on my hip and pack my things—CDs, weights, a vintage Polaroid—into garbage bags she's provided free of charge. Then I let it all drop and offer up the ham in both hands, cradling it as if it might have been our child. She doesn't want any explanations—or the ham.

Fiona belongs to Dominic, and we are a short sad story of one night's restaurant despair. But the story's out and for sure I don't want Dominic coming after my ham.

Under Gilda's unforgiving eye, I sling my garbage bags into the trunk of the car and all Christmas day I drive with the radio off except when I call Gilda from a phone booth by the side of the road. Bing Crosby and me singing "White Christmas" means nothing to her, so I head west, the ham glistening beside me in the passenger's seat. Somewhere in Indiana I strap it into a seat belt.

I stop to call again, but Gilda hangs up every time. After the next state, I send her pictures of my trip instead: The Ham under the silver arch of St. Louis; The Ham in the Grand Canyon; The Ham in Las Vegas. I'm taking a picture of The Ham in the Pacific when a big wave washes it out to sea. I send the picture anyway: The Ham in the Pacific Undertow. In this picture, you can't tell which of us is missing.

Consider the story arc of this story. Make notes on the document pertaining to the story arc in any way you would like. You will share these notes in small groups during our workshop. There is no correct answer; do what feels right. You may rely only on prior knowledge or research the concepts of the story arc.