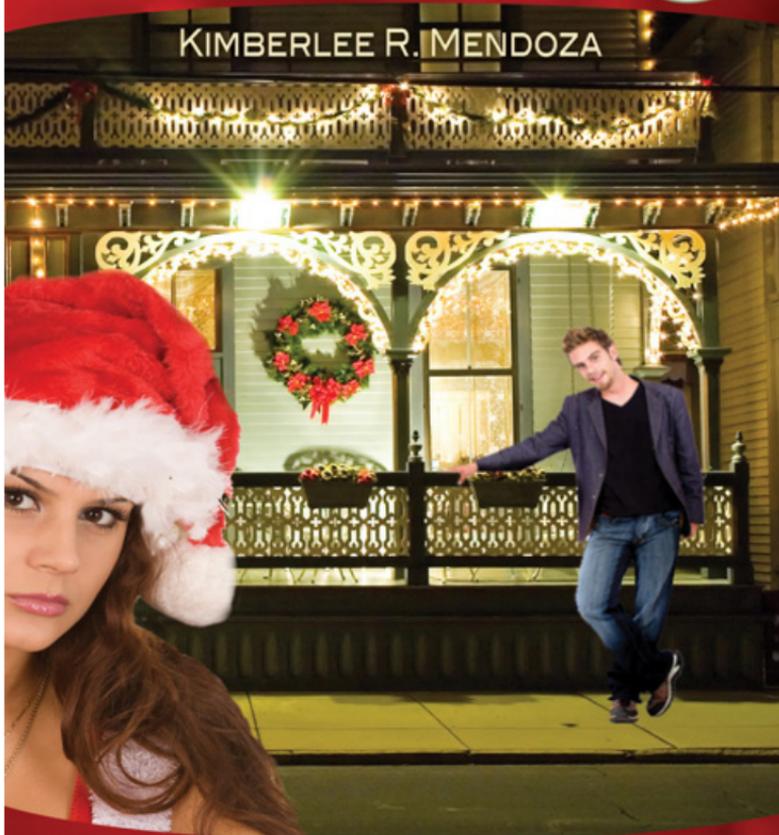


MINIATURE
ROSE



KIMBERLEE R. MENDOZA



JOHNNY B. GOODE
for Christmas

She blinked, wondering if she'd somehow been transported back in time. There, standing across from her, framed by a sea of people, stood her Johnny. Or, not her Johnny, but the jerk who ruined her life. "No way."

Ginger glanced around. "Where?"

"Am I imagining him? Do you see a guy with dark messy hair, a goatee, and way too attractive to be a thirty-three year old man? Or am I having a hallucination brought on by a traumatic experience in my adolescent years."

Her friend followed her gaze and smiled. "Who, Jonathan Goode?"

Emma spun around and slumped to a nearby bench. Her chest constricted. *In, out. In, out. Just breathe.* Her vision blurred. *This is only a nightmare. Nothing more.*

"Honey, I think you're about to hyperventilate. You have to slow down and breathe." Ginger grabbed a water bottle from the refreshment table and handed it to her. "You're really worrying me. Are you okay?"

She focused on a crumpled yellow candy wrapper on the floor and exhaled deep. How stupid was it that he could still make her legs wobble like gelatin? "Is this some sick joke? What is he even doing here?"

"He's the new health teacher and football coach. I met him in the hall this morning. He's super nice. Cute, too."

"What?" Emma jumped to her feet. "You aren't serious!"

Ginger put a finger to her lips. "Ssh...we're supposed to be the adults here, and the kids are staring."

"Sorry," Emma said, lowering her voice. "It's just...you have no idea what *that man* put me through."

Johnny B.
Goode for
Christmas

by

Kim Mendoza

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales, is entirely coincidental.

Johnny B. Goode for Christmas

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Contact Information: info@thewildrosepress.com

Cover Art by *Kim Mendoza*

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Dedication

To Pastor Kathy Meek for her constant encouragement. It's good to know we're not alone.

Praise for Kim Mendoza

Ms. Mendoza writes from her heart and the development of her storyline and characters reflect that notion."

~Diana Coyle, Night Owl Romance Reviews

[Kimberlee's] ability to show spiritual growth in her characters without preaching and their desire to trust in God even in unlikely circumstances indicates a natural knack for faith-filled storytelling at its best. I am anxious to dig into another book by this author.

~Lily, Long & Short of It Reviews

Mendoza writes with the mind of a chess champion. She's always at least three moves ahead of her reader. I got mental whiplash trying to stay up with this extremely clever and well-written story.

~Paul McShane, Good New Etc.

Kimberlee Mendoza is the 2006 recipient of the Sherwood Eliot Wirt Writer of the Year Award.

Chapter One

Emma adjusted the front of her burgundy silk bodice and ducked through a wall of green and red streamers. The band was still setting up and several of the high school students were just beginning to arrive. She walked toward the registration table to pick up her name badge and orders for the evening.

“Miss Hurst.” Lauri, a petite redhead, jumped up from a table and revealed new braces with an enormous smile. “I’m so glad you agreed to chaperone tonight. You’re way cooler than all the other teachers.”

Emma grinned. “Thanks, Lauri.”

“I have a badge for you.” She rummaged through a shoebox and withdrew a small paper stocking attached to a string. “Here you go.”

Emma took it and frowned. The badge would do little for accessorizing her dress. All the hours shopping with her mother for the perfect Christmas outfit would now be trumped by a tacky decoration. She sighed. *Oh well. I’m not here to look good. I’m here for the kids.*

“Thanks, Lauri.” She carefully pulled it over her auburn up-do and let it rest on her bare shoulders. “Anything else I should know before jumping in?”

The girl checked her clipboard. “You’re to hang out around the punch bowl. I guess you’re in charge of making sure it isn’t spiked.” Lauri winked, probably assuming the “coolest teacher” wouldn’t stop anyone.

Too bad for you. There was no way anyone would spike the bowl on her watch. “Okay, well, I

guess I'll get to it then."

Emma weaved through the growing crowd of adolescents to a white table in the back of the gym. A group of jocks stood around the red bowl laughing.

"Hello, boys."

They cleared their throats.

"Oh, hello, Miss Hurst," Justin said.

"I know you guys haven't gone and put something in the punch, because I'd hate to have you cleaning all the school windows over Christmas break."

They shook their heads fervently.

"Of course not, Miss Hurst." Justin looked at the other boys, wide-eyed. "Mike just told a good joke. That's all."

"Good thing," Emma said.

The band started to play, and the boys pushed each other away quickly.

"You made it." Emma's best friend, and resident English teacher, Ginger, came alongside her. She was ten years her senior, but they clicked like they'd been girlfriends since grade school. "I really didn't think you'd come."

"Neither did I." Emma glanced around the room with disdain. Fifteen years ago, she'd been humiliated in this same room during the same event. She hoped today would be different. "Any sign of your date?"

"No, I talked to him earlier and he can't make it. Some family event. He wasn't real clear on the phone."

Emma picked up a paper cup and poured some of the ruby liquid inside. She took a sip and almost spit it out.

"Is it spiked?" Ginger asked.

"No, it tastes like sugar water. Want some? It's awful."

"No, thanks." Ginger laughed. "Look, I know you hate being here. I'm sorry I roped you into it."

“It’s for a good cause.” Emma forced a tight smile. *Just keep telling yourself that.* “However, I’d be happier keeping past memories completely buried.”

Ginger touched her shoulder. “You never did tell me the complete horror story about what happened?”

“Johnny B. happened.” She blinked, wondering if she’d somehow been transported back in time. There, standing across from her, framed by a sea of people, stood her Johnny. Or, not her Johnny, but the jerk who ruined her life. “No way.”

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supposed to be the adults here, and the kids are staring.”

“Sorry,” Emma said, lowering her voice. “It’s just...you have no idea what *that man* put me through.”

Ginger motioned for her to sit again. “Maybe you should tell me about it. Getting it off your chest may help, and if nothing else, it will tell me how I can help you.”

Could she do it? Spill the whole sordid tale. *Might as well.* It was fifteen years ago, and it still blanketed her like a recent memory.

Emma sat back and took a drink of her water. “Okay, here it is...”

Chapter Two

Fifteen Years Ago

Emma sat at a table in the quad eating lunch by herself. Not unusual. The few friends she had usually spent their lunchtime studying in the library. She probably would have too, but she liked the sunshine.

Out of her peripheral vision, she caught sight of Johnny and his friends walking her way. Why she liked a jock was a mystery. From what she'd observed, his friends were all morons and could be pretty mean. She turned the page in her history book and tried to concentrate on the Battle of Belleau Wood.

It was March 1918, and nearly fifty divisions were freed when the Russians surrendered on the Eastern Front, the German Army...

"Bombs away!" one of the jocks yelled.

Emma looked up, just in time to see a Christmas sugar cookie fly toward her and then knock her milk over. White liquid guzzled out of the carton, smearing all signs of the historical war.

"Jerks!" Emma lifted the carton and tried to wipe the wet pages.

They laughed.

Inside, she felt like crying, but she refused to give them the satisfaction. Usually, she just ignored them. Why she felt the urge to yell at them was beyond her. Acknowledging them was just stupid. Now they knew they got to her. The next time would likely be worse.

"I'm sorry," a deep voice said.

Her eyes shot up.

Johnny B. stood less than a foot away. His hands were shoved in his pockets and a sheepish grin was plastered on his face.

"I'm fine. Now go away."

"Look, I said I was sorry. My friends can be dumb sometimes." He straddled the bench next to her, flashing his million-dollar smile, which included two dimples the size of peanuts. She wanted to touch them.

"Emma?"

She blinked. Had he been talking to her? "I'm sorry. What did you say?"

"I wanted to know if you'd like to trade books. I don't read mine much, so a little milk won't bother me."

She stared at him for a minute, unsure if he was pulling her leg. "Seriously?"

He reached in his backpack and pulled out the same history book. "Seriously."

"Thanks." She reached for the new book and then passed her soiled one over. Maybe he wasn't as bad as her friends thought. Of course, she always assumed that. Emma had often defended him to her crowd, probably because she'd harbored a huge crush on him since grade school, or maybe she saw something else there.

"I know this is going to sound weird coming from me, but a bunch of us are going to the school Christmas dance this Friday night. Do you have a date?"

"Me?" *Yeah, right.* "No."

"I wondered if I could make it up to you." He scooted close enough that she could smell his aftershave. It was intoxicating. "Come as my date."

Her heart stopped, then pumped madly in her chest. "Um, your date? Is this some kind of sick joke?"

“Of course not. I’m really asking you out.”

Emma glanced around. His friends weren’t there. Still, it wouldn’t be unheard of for them to be watching in the wings. Or suppressing their laughter for a story in the locker room. “I don’t know.”

His smile fell. “Why? Am I not smart enough to go out with you? I get A’s in some subjects.”

“Really? Which ones?” *Not the right question, Emma. After all, who cares?*

He grinned sheepishly. “Woodshop and P.E.”

She raised an eyebrow, then shook her head. “Look, I’m really not your type.”

“My type?”

“I see you and your friends. You pick on people like me for enjoyment.”

He sucked his bottom lip behind his top teeth, obviously considering his response. “Would it shock you if I said I’ve liked you for a while?”

“Yes.”

He laughed. “Well, it’s true. I want to take you out on Friday night. So be ready at seven.”

Emma dabbed some olive eyeliner at the corner of her almond-shaped eyes to accent the gold in her green eyes.

“Hold still, darling.” Her mother attempted to zip Emma’s dress the rest of the way.

“Sorry. I’m just so nervous.”

“You are simply gorgeous, my darling. It’s like looking in the mirror twenty-five years ago, back when my hair was auburn and not speckled with gray.” Her mother spun Emma to face her and stepped back. “Your guy is going to fall through the floor when he gets here.”

“And that’s a good thing, why?”

Her mother laughed. “I just meant he’s not going to keep his eyes off you the entire night.”

“Thanks, Mom.”

“Wait, you almost forgot the choker we bought.” Her mother walked to her bedroom and returned with the saltwater pearl necklace. “This will look perfect with the dress.”

Emma held it as her mother clasped the back.

The doorbell chimed.

“It’s him.” Her heart dropped into her stomach. She ran around in a circle, not sure what she was doing, then focused on grabbing her purse.

“I’ll meet you downstairs.” Her mom kissed her cheek and then left out the bedroom door.

Emma took a deep breath and exhaled in the mirror. Her hair lay in curls around her bare shoulders. The white dress hugged her curves and poofed out just below the waist. Her white shoes had two white bows that matched the one at the back of her waist.

“Eat your heart out, Johnny B. Goode.”

At the dance, Johnny was the perfect gentleman. He escorted her in and to the photo booth. They took a picture and then walked to the edge of the dance floor.

“Want to dance?”

She giggled nervously. “I’ve never really done that.”

“I’m a good teacher.” He looked above her shoulder, and suddenly, his face drained of color.

She perused the crowd, trying to pick out what or who he had seen.

“I’ll be right back.” He kissed her hand and left her to wait by the punch bowl.

Johnny made his way to his group of jock friends at the entrance. Their laughter carried over the music and she wondered what was up. Knowing them, it wasn’t good.

While waiting, Emma studied the room. The decorating committee had made it look like a winter wonderland. Snowflakes and silver sparkles hung

from the ceiling, cotton lined the walls like drifts of snow, and a slideshow flashed Arctic pictures on the far wall. The gym felt like a dream, one that really existed. After all, she was here with the hottest guy in school.

Johnny walked her way and her heart accelerated.

She smiled and then realized he wasn't alone. Head cheerleader, Raquel, had her arm wrapped around his waist; his arm lay draped across her shoulders. Behind them, a posse of his closest jock friends followed, smirking.

Emma tilted her head to the side, trying to comprehend the scene. "Johnny?"

"You didn't seriously think he would come to the dance to be with you, did you?" Raquel asked, once in earshot.

"What?" Emma said, staring at Johnny.

His friends laughed.

Johnny opened his mouth to speak, but his voice cracked. He cleared his throat and said, "I had to bring you to impress my folks. They liked the idea of me dating a smart girl like you. You understand, right?"

"But..." Her stomach turned. "I thought..."

"Awe, how pathetic. She actually thought you liked her. Poor delusional thing." Raquel sneered. "Well, as you can see, that isn't true. And since I don't want you hanging around my guy like a wet puppy all night..." Raquel grabbed a cup of punch and tossed it at her.

Emma gasped. Splotches of crimson sprayed the front of her white dress.

"Yep, that should do it." Raquel set the cup down and wiped her hands together. "Come on, Johnny. Let's enjoy the dance."

Johnny's eyes were wide, maybe even sorry, but he still wrapped his arm around the blonde bimbo and walked away.

Emma ran out the back door, sobbing. The sounds of laughter resonated in her ears, even after two blocks. That day marked the rest of her senior year. Siberia.

Chapter Three

Present Day

Emma exhaled with her eyes still closed, embarrassed to look at her friend. “And that’s it.” Her past felt like twenty minutes ago, the hurt still very fresh and painfully real.

“Wow! That is the worst thing I’ve ever heard.” Ginger shook her head. “Like something out of *Carrie*. Though I’d have to say, punch is a sight better than pig’s blood.”

“It didn’t feel like it at the time.” Emma stole a glance at the man who had ruined her last semester of high school. His shoulders erect, confident, just like back then.

So sure of himself.

“I hate him.”

“You can’t hate him.” Ginger patted her arm. “God doesn’t allow it.”

Emma grimaced. “Fine, then. I really, really, *really* dislike him.”

“It all happened fifteen years ago.” She offered a smile. “Maybe he’s changed. I’m sure you have.”

“I don’t care.” Emma stood and walked behind a display of Christmas trees. Maybe he wouldn’t see her and she’d get through this night.

“What are you doing?”

“Hiding.”

“Come on, Emma. Why don’t you be a little more adult and go talk to him?”

“Nah.” Emma puckered her lips, defiant. “I don’t think I’ll be doing that.”