

## A Christmas Story.

This year our children went away to their respective in-laws and we had a quiet Christmas day at home.

The morning started with Peaches objecting vociferously about our attempt to sleep in. In her world things are just not right if her humans have decided not to get up at the appointed hour which is between six and seven. Tucker joined in the protest with an incessant whine indicating that he was in dire need of a potty run outside.

This Christmas being a special morning we decided to make pancakes of which Peaches and Tucker are inordinately fond. That bird can devour half a pancake with maple syrup in the time it takes me to eat one. The meal is followed by a gift exchange which is more of an event for the avian member of the family. We get toys from Value Village and wrap them up for her. She rips off the paper with the same frantic exuberance of any three year old leaping from one present to the other squealing and shrieking in excited delight.

Now, this is the part of the day I most enjoy. The bird is satiated and napping on her perch, Tucker is busy gnawing on his Christmas bone and Sue is trying to recapture the sleep that Peaches interrupted earlier on. I have the place to myself a good book, a comfortable chair in a sunny corner with a little libation. As the afternoon progresses one good libation deserves another until the head droops, the eyes close and the book slides gently to the floor.

That evening we were expected at my niece's home situated in Scenic Acres a suburb of Calgary. I prepared a basket of hot hors-d'oeuvres, duck terrine and two bottles of wine, doffed my Santa Clause hat and let Sue drive me to our destination.

Upon arrival at our destination, Sue dropped me off with the basket of goodies while she drove to the first convenient parking space. My niece's home is one of those modern two story homes in a new suburb of which every fifth house is an exact architectural replica.

Now, I am not one of those people who like to fling open the door and shout "Hello we're here!" I sort of lean towards the more dignified approach of ringing the doorbell and being greeted at the door. It is the moment I intuitively judge the evening's possibilities and the host's temperament by the sounds from within and the greeting. I reached for the doorbell, hesitated, feeling that on this occasion it just might be more appropriate to just barge in, thought again and rang the bell.

A charming young lady, not my niece, but possibly a girlfriend or spouse of someone I should know, answered the door and politely inquired if she could help me all the while eyeing the generous basket of goodies. Being the patriarch at this family gathering I was a little affronted by the lack of recognition and that absurd question, "Can I help you?"

Straightening my Santa's hat, which had slipped over one eye, and pulling myself up to better portray my dignified presence, I gave the young lady a look of mild righteous indignation and walked into the vestibule, muttered something like, "Thank you I can find my way to the kitchen!" thereby claiming that, if you don't know who I am, at least be informed that I am not a stranger and perfectly capable of finding my way around.

She looked at me rather quizzically as I proceeded to take off my shoes, a Canadian custom that annoys me intensely. She kept looking at me and it then occurred to me that, apart from being the doorman, she was probably sent to make sure that I did not fall, as my legs are in rough shape, or possibly to make sure that I removed offending footwear. I proceeded in my socks to the kitchen and the dining room which was all part of one big room and froze. I don't remember exactly how many people sat around the table, but three of them looked like large belligerent walruses and everyone else was silently staring at me as if I was a hyena disturbing a fresh lion kill. Several thoughts flashed through my brain as I silently mouthed the words, "Oh shit!" One, this was not my niece's house. Two, I have interrupted a serious Christmas celebration. Three, these people look a little hostile at a strangers intrusion.

"So sorry, wrong house." Was all I managed to blurt as I bolted for the door followed by the young lady who was grinning from ear to ear a little too smugly. I hurriedly grabbed my shoes repeating a litany of apologies. To her credit she remained quite gracious and courteous. I am quite sure I provided some lively conversation at that Christmas party.

When we did arrive at what was certainly my niece's house I was still too traumatized to make the initial approach and sent Sue to ascertain without doubt that we had indeed arrived at the right destination.

A Happy New Year to you all.

From,

Pat, Sue, Peaches and Tucker.