

A Twist on Saint Nicholas

(With apologies to Clement Clark Moore)

--by Anne (12.25.11)

Written for the perpetual Christmas Writer's Challenge. George Sutherland is Donald Bain's creation, Tessa Sutherland (briefly mentioned) is Stephanie's creation, and Jessica, of course, belongs to Universal. This is all in good fun, never for profit.

Jessica opened her eyes to a wonderfully pleasant sight: George in his dressing gown, sitting on the edge of the bed, a tea tray in his hands and a warm smile upon his face.

"Good morning, love." He set the tray on the bedside table, bent down and placed a tender kiss upon her lips. "Happy Christmas."

"Happy Christmas," she said, smiling back at him, remembering that in England, it was customary to say "happy" instead of "merry." She stretched and sat up, intending to see what was on the tray George had brought to her, but her attention was immediately captured by what she saw outside the window.

"Snow?" she exclaimed. When they had gone to bed the previous night London had been wet, dreary and grey - not at all unusual for southern England in December. Dawn, however, revealed a city draped in white, with more snow coming down.

"Aye, I'm afraid so," George said as he handed her a buttered scone and a cup of tea.

Jessica accepted them absently, still transfixed by the scene outdoors. "A white Christmas in London!" she said. "It's a miracle!"

"It's a bloody miracle, all right," George groused, helping himself to the current jam.

Jessica looked at him keenly. "You don't sound at all happy about it," she observed.

"Only because it buggers up our plans to go to Tessa's later today for Christmas dinner."

Jessica looked out the window again - in her estimation there was no more than two or three inches of snow on the ground, the equivalent of what in Maine would be considered a mere 'dusting.' "Why?" she asked. "It doesn't look that bad."

George laughed. "It may not look like much to someone from New England," he told her, "but this is London, and I assure you that for Londoners, this is a blizzard of the first order. The city will be shut down for days."

"So ... no Tessa's for dinner, then."

"Correct."

"And no theater in the West End tomorrow."

“Highly unlikely.”

“Well, then,” she said, “we’ll just have to have our own Christmas here.”

After breakfast George found a BBC radio station that was playing classical Christmas music and headed to the kitchen to refresh his cup of coffee.

“More tea, Jess?”

“Please.” As soon as his back was turned Jessica stooped and quickly slid a present under the tree.

“So,” he said when he came back into the living room carrying his coffee and a fresh cup of tea for her, “what shall we do with today?”

“We should start with opening presents,” Jessica said promptly.

“Good idea,” George said with a roguish grin. “How about I go first?” And he reached for the top button of Jessica’s blouse.

Jessica swatted his hand away. “Naughty,” she scolded him with a smile. “You’re fortunate you didn’t get a lump of coal in your stocking. However ...” She sat up and looked pointedly at the Christmas tree. “I think I do see one for you right over there.”

“Really?” George set down his coffee and retrieved the gift, bringing it back over to the sofa with him. Jessica scooted a bit closer to him and watched expectantly as he removed the wrapping paper, revealing an advanced copy of her latest book.

“Oh, Jessie!” he exclaimed. “Thank you! I was hoping for this but wasn’t sure when it was going to be released.” He opened the front cover, and smiled at the inscription Jessica had written on the end leaf to him, and flipped through the pages. As he did, a separate piece of loose paper fluttered out.

“What’s this?” he asked as he picked it up.

“Oh,” said Jessica, averting her eyes and shifting self-consciously. “It’s just a little something extra I wrote for you. For Christmas.”

“Poetry?” he asked in surprise. “I never knew you were a poet.”

“I’m not!” she said emphatically. “This is ... well, it’s more of an homage. I think you’ll understand when you read it.”

“All right, then,” George said. He retrieved his glasses and began to read.

’Twas the night before Christmas and all through the Yard ...

George paused and looked up at Jessica. “I think I see where this is going already,” he said.

*... Only one man was stirring, still working quite hard.
His paperwork had to be finished with care
And tonight was the only free time he could spare.
At last he had it completed just right*

*And could think about heading home for the night.
He rose from his desk with warm thoughts of his flat,
Shrugged on his coat and reached for his hat,
When out in the hallway there arose a disturbance;
He flung open his office door with annoyance,
And said to the crowd that was gathered without,
“What the bloody hell is this racket about?”
“Sorry, Inspector,” a constable spoke,
“There’s report of a break-in - we’re after the bloke.”
The Inspector sighed. “All right, all right.”
And he followed the bobbies out into the night.*

George sighed. “Isn’t that always the way?” he said, thinking back to many a previous Christmas Eve when duty had called at the last minute.

Jessica patted him on the arm - she had been well aware of this fact when she had come up with those lines.

*It was well after midnight, near as he could guess,
By the time they arrived at the crime scene address.
Nothing was moving anywhere on the street,
At least from his vantage point in the backseat.
One of the constables stifled a yawn:
“It looks like our man has already gone.”
The Inspector got out and saw tracks in the snow:
“Based on the clues, I don’t think that is so.”
Pointing to a sleigh hitched up to some deer,
He said, “I think our perp’s ride is still here.”*

“Jessica,” George chided, “‘perp’ and ‘ride’ are American terms. You’d never hear anyone in the UK use those words, least of all British law enforcement.”

“I know,” Jessica said sheepishly, “but I needed them to make the meter work.”

He shook his head, smiled, and continued reading where he had left off.

*They went up the walkway up to the front porch
And examined the front door by the light of a torch.
“Inspector, there’s no sign of forced entry.”
“Very good,” he said, “I want you here as a sentry.”
The constable balked - “You’re going in there alone?”
“Yes,” he replied, “I think I’ll do best on my own.”
He made his way slowly into the front parlor*

And there he finally laid eyes on the burglar.

“He’s not going to be the usual sort of fingersmith, am I right?” George asked.
Jessica took another sip of her tea. “Well, it wouldn’t be much of a Christmas story if he were.”

*His cheeks and his nose were florid and rosy
Betraying a fondness, most likely, for whiskey.
He held an old pipe clenched tight in his teeth,
Smoking, he guessed, low-grade crack or hashish.
The white hair informed him that he was quite old;
As for his fashion sense, it was unusually bold:
He wore red and white clothing from head to foot,
Though he had camouflaged them with ashes and soot.
The Inspector guessed he’d come in through the chimney -
As a method of entry, it seemed rather dodgy.
He wasn’t quite sure how he’d managed to fit:
He wasn’t thin, and then there was his kit -
Dozens of toys stuffed into a sack,
Which he carried with ease slung over his back.*

“It’s a less than flattering description of Father Christmas,” observed George.
“Moving on ...”

*As he quietly watched him, silenced by wonder,
The man opened his bag to distribute the plunder,
Into hung stockings and under the tree,
Chuckling as he did so with innocent glee.
For a robber, this seemed both stupid and daft;
It was all the Inspector could do not to laugh.
And then, to his everlasting amazement,
The man smiled, and up the chimney he went.
He ran back outside, but his quarry was gone,
Sleigh and the deer vanishing into the predawn.
And they heard him exclaim, as he peeled out of sight,
“Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good night.”*

George folded the paper and set it down on the coffee table. “Jess, that was wonderful,” he said, putting his arm around her and drawing her close. “Thank you.”
She settled into his embrace with a sigh. “I know it doesn’t make up for being

snowed in and missing Christmas dinner,” she said.

“On the contrary - it more than makes up for it. Now,” he said as he tipped her face up towards his, “let’s celebrate Christmas.”

The End