

Here Come The Holidays

© 2006 Diana Slickman

It's holiday time. Like misery, the holidays love company. The holidays are coming. The holidays are coming and the holidays hate you. The holidays are house guests from hell, arriving early and staying late, drinking up all your good booze and leaving their wet towels on the floor. They're going to make a lot of work for you, and they aren't going to help you clean up. Let's face it: the holidays are trouble.

Every year you see them coming, and you hope that this year will be different. You try to prepare but every year the holidays show up earlier and earlier, ignoring that look on your face, saying they don't CARE that you don't have the decorations up or the beds made, they'll make themselves comfortable any old where.

Protest all you want to; they aren't going anyplace. There is no such thing as bad attention, as far as the holidays are concerned. This makes them the worst kind of publicity hounds, ones who will endorse any damned thing as long as it gets them on TV. Months before they actually arrive at your home, you are embarrassed to run into the holidays on street corners and on the radio, singing and exhorting the people to every kind of excess. "Not this year," you think. "This year, goddamn it, I will not let those assholes into my house" and every year when you are busy doing something else, the doorbell rings and there they are on your doorstep and you're so surprised that you step back and they barge right in before you have time to come to your senses and stop them.

Traveling light is not an option for the holidays; they arrive laden with baggage. They always say their going to bring the cheer, but do they? They breeze in, kissing everyone on both cheeks, making a big show, empty handed. Everyone must be on hand for the festivities or the holidays aren't satisfied. The holidays require that large groups of disparate and often conflicting personalities be on hand to meet them. They don't seem to notice that some of the people in the room aren't speaking to one another, or that some address others in tones vaguely or even distinctly hostile. The holidays are

just thrilled that everyone is gathered for their sake, even if such gathering ends in chaos and shouting and occasionally bloodshed.

They make your sister-in-law so uncomfortable that she gets plastered almost as soon as they arrive. They make a point of mentioning your mother, and what a shame it is that she is no longer around to see them, making everybody cry. The holidays get the kids all whipped up, tickling them too much, sneaking them candy and sips of punch, leaving a trail of tiny hysterics in their glittering wake.

There is something a little creepy about the holidays, have you noticed? There's this fetishistic love of Victoriana, for one thing. I mean, what's with all the candles? It's dangerous. I've never been to the holidays' house (never been invited if you want to know the truth) but I imagine it to be a place completely devoid of electricity, bathed in candlelight, which burns down every couple of years.

Then there's the music! The holidays' taste in music borders on the bizarre. It's obsessive; they can listen to any number of renditions of the same 10 songs over and over again. For some reason they aren't content until everyone is singing along, repeating lyrics the meaning of which is obscure, sometimes in foreign or even dead languages. Their penchant for children's choirs is down right sinister.

The two topics of conversation that persons of good breeding never broach in polite company are the two things the holidays love most: politics and religion. Regardless of their official faith, the holidays are true disciples of the paranormal. They'll believe in anything, so long as it is even remotely magical or mystical. They believe in a flying baby who spreads love with a bow and arrow; they believe in magically refilling oil lamps; they believe in the 8-hour work day and a minimum wage. Spirits of the dead walk the earth; rabbits lay eggs; elves in the arctic make toys for children all over the world – the holidays will swallow anything, apparently. Fairies, pilgrims, leprechauns, lamb's blood, a whole menagerie of animals with superpowers. It's disturbing the way they'll anthropomorphize any inanimate – pumpkins, nutcrackers, presidents. They're boorish history buffs, and will endlessly recount stories of famous victories and defeats,

the founding or destruction of nations.

Sticklers for tradition, the holidays demand that things being done a certain way. They insist that your home be festooned in decorations that - let's be honest - at any other time of year would be considered tacky. The holidays like bling: sparkly things, things that explode, pulsating lights, bunting, banners, balloons. They can render a normally harmless object a thing of horror by animating it, making it revolve or play music or talk. The holidays wear garish color combinations that are best seen only from a great distance on, say, the flag of a developing nation. You may be tired of the same old flash and glitter year after year, but everyone, anxious that there be no trouble in the house, begs you to drag out the dusty box of decorations and put them up or the holidays won't be the same and then god knows what kind of fuss they, the holidays, will kick up. So you go with the devil you know and tart up the place like a cheap whore.

The holidays like to have things their way, but will they step up and do the work themselves? They will not. Tyrants without subtlety or discernment, they boss everyone around and don't care who they impose upon. Especially cruel to women, they employ subtle put downs coupled with impossibly high standards designed to increase the work load while at the same time offering no real rewards. They will only eat certain foods, and they must be the same foods, prepared the same way, every year. "Sit down, sit down and eat! You work too hard!" cry the holidays, before you've even gone shopping for the ingredients to the only meal they will eat. This is immediately followed up with something like "What? No yam venison soufflé this year? Oh, pooh, you know it's my favorite dish!" And an offer to go with you to the grocery store to make sure you get the right kind of yams.

Run into the holidays at a party and you'll find yourself trapped in a corner, the holidays standing way too close to you, speaking much too animatedly, breathing up all your air. It's a good idea to hide the liquor before the holidays arrive, for they are sloppy, maudlin drunks. Lots of "I love you guys, I really do," as something sticky and sweet sloshes from their glass into your cleavage. They cannot be avoided or evaded or turned away. They cannot be insulted - try it sometime. "I hate the holidays" - say it right to their

face. They just laugh and hug you too hard.

In fact, tell other people that you hate the holidays and 9 times out of 10 they'll try to talk you out of it. Of course, some people love the holidays, just as some people re-enact civil war battles for fun. There's no accounting for it. A break in the routine, I suppose. The holidays do take you out of your everyday for a while. But just when you're getting used to having them around, getting used to the noise and the smell of them, you wake up one morning and the house is quiet. No clattering in the kitchen, no music, no tinkling of bells. You feel a chill draft coming from somewhere and so you get up and go close the front door, left wide open by the holidays in their flight. And even as you stand there, barefoot and bleary-eyed, surveying the mess they've left behind, you start to miss them a little bit. The fuckers.