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Diary of an Ageing Art Slut
from London, the Montmartre of the Millennium

End of January 2001

Why does one have such romantic expectations about Christmas?? Come that time of year and I still revert to childhood expectations regarding presents. Nothing to do with reality. Bet’s present to me this year was a lovely tablecloth and matching napkins but no washing instructions were included. In her attempt to help the third world economy she buys strange but unusual and totally useless gifts from Oxfam catalogues. So the end result is that the present got washed in a low temperature wash but not low enough. We had stern words regarding this when she came over and saw a greenish plaidish table cloth with matching napkins that sort of looked like it might have been the blue and white plaidish one she gave me for Xmas. I was called such names as "domestic slut" which I did not deny.

G. never managed to buy me a present this year instead she took nearest and I out for a meal at a rather nice local bistro that cooks organic food in a sort of French manner with modern English influences. The wine was good. Em bless her socks bought me a 1950s handbag with a contemporary hat that matched it. N & D was really off sorts this year. I got flowers on Xmas Eve and a book and lots of chocolates the next day under the tree. His heart just wasn’t in it. I am a bit worried about him - so I was really nice to him and we went down to the country to his employer’s big estate house on the coast. They had gone somewhere warm so we had the whole huge place to ourselves. Well almost, the aged mother was in her wing. I played cards with her at night before we went out to the pub.

The twelfth night celebrations were at the local and only pub in the village and were great; complete with fireworks shooting off into a wonderful night sky filled to
the bursting point with stars and constellations. We had serious thoughts – for about five nano seconds – about living out in the country.

Now about the present from my parents. My mum can be one of the tightest skinflints ever known in the evolutionary scale of civilization. N & D and myself for years only ever got a money order that did not change in value for eighteen years. I finally called a halt because it was now only worth, after the bank charges for cashing it, a gin and tonic for the both of us. My aged parents reasoning behind all this was they didn’t want the government to get all that money in postage from sending presents??!!? So instead of not sending anything, we got magazine subscriptions for a few years. Which was nice if not a tad obscure:- such titles as The Contemporary Canadian History Journal covering all 150 years of it were not well received. Well that stopped and we went back to money orders for a year or two again. Then this year after an subtle hint like ‘Mum, let’s call it quits on your presents’. We got a piece of paper saying that our names had been etched on the TransCanada Trail, a hiking and biking trail that goes right across the country. When I phoned up my brother and told him what I got he said:

‘I can just see it. Your name etched on a privy, miles from nowhere and someone has put a telephone number beside it with the message “Good party girl”.’

‘I don’t think that is very funny.’

‘Well you could put the piece of paper to some creative use.’

‘It’s too shiny for that.’

‘I used mine to light my Christmas cigar from the Yule log.’

When I tried to quizz my aged mum on why we were sent such an interesting gift. She went quiet and then said. ‘Well I bought you those running shoes this year so I sort of used up my budget on you.’ What does one say!

Bet says it’s because that generation has what is known as the Depression Syndrome!

‘The what?’ I asked.

“They grew up in the great depression you know the Dirty 1930s and now even though they have got money and your parents do have it coming out of their ears, they can’t spend it. It has to be something practical.’

Nice theory but somehow I don’t know...The strange thing is they get real upset if I don’t send my traditional Xmas parcel to them. If it doesn’t get there in time, life is not worth living til Easter!

Anyways, a good opening at the Camden Arts Centre coming up soon. Studio work is driving me crazy. It is so cold in my studio that I have started to work from home on digital images out of sheer fright from the cold. To top it off the studios have outdoor loos which means that I get into a vicious circle of drinking hot tea to keep warm then having to go to the loo. I try to put off going outside to the loo but there’s only so much your bladder can hold. The outcome is that I get really chilled in the most vital of places and have constant colds during the winter. What one suffers for ones art!
The annual cocktail party went well this year with some newer neighbours being initiated into the ritual of staggering home from my strong but delicious dry martinis.

**End of February**

Just as I was getting into my stride again in going to openings and checking out recent exhibitions my mother-in-law goes and dies. Death always catches one on the hop. She had broken her arm at Xmas but unfortunately I couldn’t get the dearest to go up and see her. We found out later the fall was caused by her blacking out which was caused by her heart. Then it just gave up one day. So now we had to go and see her dead. It was all very family this and family that which I like. My nieces, the police woman and all the others were as great as they always are. There was a bit of argy bargy between his brother and him regarding Nearest and dearest not visiting his mother very much of late i.e. in five years. And all in the usual suppressed way that the family deals with such issues. But generally it was very emotional as funerals are. It took a good three weeks out of February helping to sort things out and the will etc. But the really weird thing that came out of the whole process was the lifting of nearest and dearest’s depression.

I like my in-laws and liked my mother-in-law especially but my husband and her had a strained relationship to say the least. They were very much alike. Later when I met Bet and the others at Maison Bertaux and they all had a slant on this issue. Bet started with openers on the subject of men and their mothers and their weird relationships.

‘All of them do. There’s no exceptions.’ she pronounced.

Emm was more prosaic.

‘I am glad he’s not so blue anymore. He has changed since Art School when I first met you two. He really has just got more and more miserable over the years. I hope things do get better.’

G. who still was smarting from the last unsuccessful attempt to find sperm donor of the year just snorted and ate more cake.

‘Really you guys, it’s been much nicer now that he’s been resurrected from the living dead. I saw him smile for the first time in years.’

‘Anything to do with the money she’s left him?’

‘A £1,000 is not much. She lived in a council flat and has been widowed since 1954.’ We all just sat there silent and ate our cake for a moment which is serious work mind you.

‘You never know’, piped up G suddenly, ‘You might just strike it lucky and have sex again. Now that would be something to celebrate!’

If my mouth wasn’t so full of cake I would have said something sarcastic about her sex life or the lack of it.

‘Perhaps you all would like to come over for a meal?’ said Emm. Then just as casually said ‘and the wedding is on August 25. We’re having a wedding breakfast...’
with intimate friends and family and a bop in the evening for everyone else. Do come. Invites are in the mail.’

There was a deep and profound silence. ‘Why?’

‘Stop it Bet’ and I kicked her under the table. I meant to ask why August?

‘It seemed a good time that suited everybody’

‘Not me.’

‘Is there ever a good time for you Bet?’

Just before G. and Bet could started in on another traditional G. and Bet argument, I butted in and asked about wedding arrangements. They sat and just glowered at each other like opposing nuclear power stations. So the story goes that Em is actually getting married at 40 to her 10th fiance or is it the 13th? The other 9 or 12 being not the right one(s) for her. Not only that but she is determined to become a mature mother with or without IVF treatment. Which has left G. somewhat pissed off at being 39, unattached and not pregnant. Bet and I being the mature section of this foursome friendship and now past childbearing age say nothing. We are happy now that we have sorted the menopause out. Sort of.

Later at home when I told near and dearest he was very happy for Em and he actually got up and called to congratulate her. Next thing he’ll be going to openings with me again.

**Mid March**

Tube strike messed up my plans with Bet to go to champagne opening at the Museum of London. A big show on the artistic quarters in London. The East End featured prominently and Acme Housing and Studios for artists especially. Driving a car was out of the question. I could have walked but Bet was stuck in deep south London with the ticket so that was that. Been trying to hustle up a show with a gallery for my computer work but it’s really hard work. Went to discuss a show at another gallery and was having an uphill battle with the wet limpet that manages the place. In the end I got worn out. As I was leaving the place I bumped into my old mate K. who I hadn’t seen for yonks. He’s moving two streets over from me and I found myself volunteering to help him for a morning! But in exchange for him helping me with my digital imagery. He asked if I still had that obnoxious dog - the one who used to leave its artistic comments in front of his paintings!! That dog knew more people in the art world than I did. He was the best networking aid I ever had. Unfortunately he moved to Paris. I know this sounds absurd but it is true. I originally said I would look after him for two weeks and two years later he was still with us. However he eventually left and resettled in Paris. Em hated him which is now very strange because she now is completely dotty about dogs as well as cats and babies and ironing. Which just goes to show you not only is life very strange but hormones can bring about weird shifts in women’s lives.

AND THEN I went to New York for a week as part of a field study trip!!!

IT WAS ABSOLUTELY FABULOUS.
I saw every museum and art gallery - public and private including all the Soho ones as well. The thing I have to give the Americans credit for is not just their enthusiasm for culture but the way they go about being so open about it. Now I know this only applies to a certain segment of society as it does in England but there are overriding national personalities. The English are just so eccentric and open in a wacky non-conformist way while the Americans are equally but differently open about the future and doing things that haven’t been done before and trying ideas that haven’t been done before and yet still manage to be just as conformist in a very peculiarly American way.

You can gather I really enjoyed it all and we just walked our feet off. We stayed at the YMCA. Spartan and to the point, as you would expect Hostel-like standards, but clean and just what you needed as we didn’t want to relax there. Also we could use the pool etc so I landed up losing weight from all the walking, rested from going to bed early and watching TV at 8 every night and fit from getting up at 6 and going for a swim every day. I think I should do it more often!!! I bought N & D a golf game for his computer and a duty free bottle of whisky which made him purrr. It stopped him from thinking it was all fun. It was not! Art is really hard work. I have the blisters to show for it.

April somewhere in the first week

Okay. I finally made it to one of the many openings that the Whitechapel Gallery is having through the month to celebrate its birthday for 100 years. I think. I just know that there was work chosen by a selected artist who had shows there at some time in the past. Lovely lovely old friends were on the walls. Frida Kahlo in all her glory shone out. That was a good show but then Nick Serota was a curator and he was a hard act to follow. The usual suspects were there. G and Bet had both gone to more prestigious private views for those who are “in the know” whereas I just got the ordinary artists invite to come with all the other artists. Neither of them thought to ask me but then both are either avoiding me. G is so busy cramming too much into her life with her new man, work, her new man and more of her new man.

Studio-wise this year has been a disaster. I’m not too sure about this part time PhD lark, I started. I find it confusing having supervisors talking to me about the work. Usually one just works away and thinks about stuff, throws out some things about stuff, talks to other artists and does more work. Themes and ideas evolve in an illogical way and gradually threads emerge but actually talking about it and defending it to strangers is so unsettling. I have to work out a plan of defence to cope with it...

Private views... ahhh there lies a tale. With all the extra reading and writing on such interesting subjects as French Feminist Thinking, one just doesn’t have the time or shall I say one forgets to go to as many private views as one should or would like. I have been getting the razzle from G and Bet and even Em about my lack of
appearance of late. Bet wondered if by chance dearest and dearest since the demise of his mother had a revival of the libido. I had to warn her that it was still early days yet. But I wonder if there is a lost and found department for libidos. It would be great to find it... that is if it existed???

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