

Merry and bright?

by SHERALYN ROMAN

Spoiler Alerts: Santa, reindeer, elves

At this time of year, we're surrounded by all things 'merry' and 'bright.' Whether it's the relentless jingle of Christmas music in stores, or from that Toronto radio station playing holiday music 24/7, Christmas music is everywhere. How is it then, every store I enter or every time I tune in, the only song I hear over, and over, and over again is by Mariah Carey? After the 300th time hearing it, there's nothing merry about it, I can assure you! As for 'bright,' the barrage of mostly beautiful, but sometimes bombastic, displays of Christmas lights can be lovely, but when they are visible to passing pilots cruising at an altitude of 35,000 feet it might be a bit much. For these, and plenty of other reasons, and in not so shocking news to most mothers, not all of us are actually feeling so merry and bright by the time Christmas Day finally arrives.

It's hard to maintain the 'spirit' of Christmas when advertisers start with the red and green coloured flyers as soon as 'back to school' sales end. When green garlands, green witches and green bedecked Christmas gnomes each line the aisle side by side and school has only just started, you know it's going to be a loooooong holiday season. Worst of all, when the Halloween candy and the candy canes are in equal abundance at your local 'Buck-A-Rama,' and you're tripping over tinsel even before the day honouring veterans and fallen soldiers, you'd be forgiven for feeling a little less than holly and jolly by the time Christmas comes around.

Finding 'joy' at this time of year is merely a ploy, employed by the executives at Hallmark who seem to think their so-called target market actually believes every big time, successful, professional city gal is just pining for the opportunity to return to her hometown at Christmas and fall hopelessly in love with some hapless, handsome hunk. The 'plots' of these movies are harder to believe than the 'fact' Santa and eight reindeer (nine with Rudolph) can make it around the entire world in one night while dispensing gifts to one and all. I guess some folks find these movies 'merry,' but they sure aren't 'bright.' I'm not saying they are formulaic, but they are banal, hackneyed and routine. Thesaurus users that last line was for you.

Ask any Mom of your acquaintance how 'merry' she's feeling as she treks through snow to stores in search of whatever this year's version of the Cabbage Patch craze is. Follow that question with whether she wants a glass (or three) of wine when she gets home and you might be forgiven for asking such a silly question in the first place! Ask the neighbour who once felt 'bright' (as in smart) for skipping the holiday traffic and shopping Mr. Bezo's online empire instead, how bright they're feeling at midnight, as they post pictures of front doors on Facebook asking, 'did anyone receive my package because it says delivered but this isn't my front door?'

Spoiler alert ? you're never getting that package.

Remind me who actually has 'visions of sugar plums' dancing in their heads? What IS a sugar plum? Does anyone even know? Unless you're Martha Stewart, most of us have likely never come into contact with said plum and baking at this time of year is more of an endurance sport, not something done for pleasure. Pressure is a better word. Baking is done under pressure. Pressure to reproduce that treasured recipe of Great Aunt Clara's, pressure to find a recipe that can accommodate allergies, vegans, and the gluten-free all while still tasting like actual food, or pressure to bake Christmassy delights not just for your own family, but also the school pot-luck, your co-workers, Santa Claus, your book club and as if all that wasn't enough, for the annual neighbourhood cookie exchange, too! Whoever thought it was a good idea to expect someone to bake 12-dozen cookies to then exchange with a multitude of others similarly tasked must have been a sadist right? My mixer was running from 2 p.m. til about midnight the other day and when I turned my back for just one second the dog had absconded with about a half dozen cookies which, I now know, were left far too close to the edge of the counter top! Folks, he's not that tall. Apparently where there's a will there's a way. As for me, I had no will left, and there was no way I'd be baking any more that day.

No need to even get me started on that evil little elf on the shelf. They are a menace to mankind and frankly, should freak out even the most well-adjusted seven-year-old. The wicked stepmother in Snow White freaked me out enough as a kid, if we'd also had to

contend with knowing there was a creature that came to life in the middle of the night to spy on us AND which reported back to another mythical creature who already 'sees you when you're sleeping and knows when you're awake,' we'd all be in therapy! Not to mention, although I may have mentioned it last year, talk about putting yet more pressure on parents (moms) at this time of year. Coming up with a gift for your kid and maybe some stocking stuffers too is hard enough. But now, thanks to some marketing genius (who was, no doubt a childless 32-year-old male) now you have to stay awake long past your kids bedtime and not just on Christmas Eve but for every, freaking night in December, just so can move that little \$*%&&%*! Even worse, likely driven by the same folks who thought a cookie exchange was a good idea, there's an entire cult of creative types devoted to stage-managing entire elaborate scenes of manufactured elf mischief and then posting pictures about it online. They say their 'sharing' ideas for the benefit of other parents, but I think they're just bragging.

Between all the various countdown Christmas calendars (chocolate, wooden, gilt-edged or otherwise) and sales flyers relentlessly reminding us there's only 'X' days left 'til Christmas, (aren't there only supposed to be 12) the pressure of Christmas can feel overwhelming.

Everything is 'merry' and 'bright' at first and you may even catch me singing Christmas carols, and not while drinking near a karaoke machine either! But after a while, the constant rush to do everything 'right,' results in Christmas losing a bit of its lustre. Factor in a set of Christmas lights hung from the rooftop during a mid-November warm spell (bright thinking) that worked just fine until December 1 and not a day since (I kid you not) followed quickly by a failed outing to cut down a real Christmas tree that turned into 'shopping' for a pre-cut tree in the barn because the farm had none to cut down, and you might finally be getting a sense of why I'm feeling less than 'merry and bright.'

Christmas can be a lot. Expectations are high and in many households it's the moms who make the magic happen. For everyone else, you better make sure you know what's on HER list and that you've checked it twice ' because she deserves it!