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TWENTY



SOMETHING

BY THOMAS HENNING

**T**is the season. Oh, yes, pumpkins, 'tis the season for unexpected guests, frantic phone calls from family asking you if you are going to do them the service of showing up this year to listen to Aunt Dottie tell the tale of how she delivered three calves in the dead of winter naked and soaking wet, all the while doing her homework when she was a mere ten years old, for the hundredth time. Yes, and just when you think she's finished, she'll throw in how the placenta resembles your mother's gravy — eat up.

Yes pumpkins, 'tis the season for debt and stress. The season for over-extending yourself, physically and mentally exhausting yourself, and for those reoccurring dreams of tying Martha Stewart to a beam, with a festive silk holiday ribbon of course, and hot gluing cranberries all over her body while making your very own special holiday statement. Yes my sugar plums, 'tis the season. Some call it hell, I call it chaotic, you call it what you'd like.

Now don't get me wrong — I love the holidays. Truly, I do. Growing up in rural New England, the holidays were always a very exciting time for me. It was one of the only times during the course of the year that my family spent time together in a non-work setting. We owned restaurants my entire childhood and into my early twenties, and Christmas and Easter were the only two days the business was closed.

My childhood memories are like most kids'. My brothers and I would wait until our parents left for a cocktail/dinner party and then would carefully, with 007 precision, open up our presents to see if they made the grade and then would reseal them so that no one was the wiser.

We would wake early and pester our parents so that we could play with the goodies and once Mother and Father were seated we would present them with our feeble yet heartfelt gifts.

I remember one year, when I was past the Santa craze and in my early teens. I stayed up with my mother to help put out the "secret gifts." That year my brother Michael received the entire He-Man collection. I mean everything! From Castle Grayskull and Beastman's Chamber of Torture to all the different vehicles and cast of characters that went with them.

## Home for the HOLIDAZE

That night is one of my most treasured holiday memories. I was so excited. I anticipated the look on my brother Michael's face the next morning and the gay boy in me spent hours on

this way," pretend that we were just buddies. I gathered that meant downing Natty Lights and crushing the beer cans on our foreheads while watching the game.

*I now spend my holidays questioning how my Greek mother even heard of ambrosia and what fever prompted her to serve it at our table along with three-bean casserole and peach Jell-O mold.*

the presentation. I strategized with agony as to where He-Man should be in comparison to Teera or Evil Lynn and Skeletor. I imagined my brothers and I playing with them all morning long and how happy we would all be.

I have a Polaroid taken of the four siblings that morning. In fact it was my holiday card to the family last year. The picture shows four very happy kids in their pajamas, almost lost in a sea of gifts and wrapping paper, together, beaming and full of love.

Much has changed since then. My brother Sammy, bless his soul, is no longer with us due to a fatal car accident. My parents are divorced and I am openly gay. The childhood fantasies are no longer the reality of adulthood.

Every year I engage in the same debate. Do I go home for the holidays or do I have the holidays in my home with friends and loved ones. It is a painful debate and a source of much stress. I love my family and conversely they love me. I mean, we're good people, but my family gatherings are like a room full of Dr. Luras and Howard Stern,s with Pat Buchanan facilitating the entire event. You think I am joking; oh, pumpkins, if it were that easy.

I have yet to bring a man home for the holidays. Last holiday season, my mother, brother Michael, and I got in a very heated discussion on whether I had the right to bring a man home for Thanksgiving and disrupt the guests. It was a Jerry Springer show.

My brother debated that his heterosexual privilege afforded him the right to bring a woman home and act as he deemed appropriate. His argument went on to say my homosexual responsibility afforded me the duty to, if I insisted "on acting

Ah, the romance of the holidays. Needless to say, I spent that Thanksgiving with my friends. It was nice and I enjoyed myself, but damn, if I didn't miss the dysfunction that are the holidays just a tad.

The bottom line is things are different. The holidays are this magic time for me. I become Martha and Jimmy Stewart, and sweetpeas, anyone who knows me knows that I am no Jimmy Stewart — it would be like Mr. Rogers, naked, in leather chaps, the image is frightening.

I bake the cookies and pick themes for each holiday. Oh yes, I have wrapping presentation-planning committees. What is the theme for my Christmas tree and my holiday card? I even have two separate cards that go to different people and a third card that is a solicitation card for the non-profit I am supporting that year.

I have a mailing list of close to 200 people and am a madman during the holiday quarter as I fondly refer to it. Thanksgiving through Valentine's Day, that is Thomas's official holiday season. I find it stressful and gratifying all in the same instance. I have parties and appreciate the warmth of friends and family a smidge more around this time.

I want the magic that existed, or that I perceived existed, when I was a kid. Instead, I now spend my holidays questioning how my Greek mother even heard of ambrosia and what fever prompted her to serve it at our table along with three-bean casserole and peach Jell-O mold. I want to wake up in the morning and hand my presents to my adult brothers and have that wonderful morning all over again.

Instead, the mornings are spent waiting for everyone to show up with the entourage and hoping that all the different per-