

## THE CHRISTMAS GIFT (Christmas 1999)

The afternoon before Christmas Eve we had completed buying the gifts: one gift for each nephew or niece, so six gifts. The next morning I packed them, each one in a different coloured paper, and fixed to them the own greeting card for identification (Christmas 99: from Santa Claus to ...). As the packets were ready I put them temporarily under the decorated tree, where I had always found mine when I was a child. As become a tradition in the last years, we would have spent Christmas Eve with the whole tribe by the tribe leader - my father in law. So in the afternoon I collected the gifts in the on purpose jute sack, while my husband provided for what else necessary to the small trip. We wouldn't have gone far, but we would have spent a couple of nights outside home, uncomfortably crowded but happy. The important task of letting the gifts in on the sly would have been my duty, so as to put them under the tree during the night with the other gifts, in secret and without the children knowing. I found this duty, to which I was used to and expert for years of practice, very pleasant and exciting.

Christmas was cosy and joyful as always. For me also the unavoidable chain of sad and sorrowful thoughts, connected to my little team of nephews or nieces: why just we, married from the longest time, hadn't yet been cheered by the joy of a new life? Well, that's enough, I will stop it: my husband says he hates hearing these whimperings of mine. And this is not what I want to tell you.

It happened that, as soon as we came back home after Christmas, my husband noticed at once that a packet had been left under our Christmas tree.

"Did we forget somebody's gift, my dear?", he asked me.

I considered all the gifts received by the children, and each of ours had reached the expected recipient. But no doubt that that pack was there, I saw it too.

"From Santa Claus to Nicholas; Christmas 99", said the attached card.

My mind moved fast in a sequence of happy thoughts, and led me to a conclusion which then revealed to be wrong. With tears in my eyes I hugged my husband, filling him with kisses. So happy I was, that hardly I could speak: "Thank you, my love, for having changed your mind. You will see, I am sure we won't regret for having adopted a child." And what else could I think, since neither of us new anyone, really nobody, called Nicholas?

He needed some seconds to understand what was happening. "But ... This packet and this card, aren't they from you?"

My disillusionment was evident and true, not less than his surprise.

"But ... didn't you put it there?"

We unpacked the packet. Inside there was a complete pap set for a male baby, with a baby bottle and other linked objects. And there was "Nicholas" written on one of the bibs.

After that time my husband was almost persuaded to adopt a child, but for a number of reasons then we didn't.

Now it's Christmas again; but this time he is preparing the packets, so he is sure that nothing will be forgotten, and there won't be strange surprises. And he has looked after the luggage too. More luggage and more packets this year: seven packets.

Because I have to look after this little puppy arrived ten months after being announced by Santa Claus.

But I am allowed to nose around the seventh packet, the same famous packet of the previous Christmas. My husband was able to use for it the same paper, and the same greeting card of the previous year.

"I expect you had to correct the date on the card, didn't you?"

"What? Are you joking? I found it correct. I thought you had provided to it!"