

THE LAST MINUTE

A Christmas monologue

(For everyone who hates Christmas)

BY JANE CAFARELLA

TIME: Christmas Eve, the present. MARY, mid-50s, unpacks groceries in her kitchen - jars of curry, basmati rice, pappadams, nothing Christmassy – as she explains to her husband why she won't be sticking around this Christmas.

Around September I start collecting things...throw away remarks, wistful looks.

Little hints about what people like...

Like when your fountain pen broke...

and when your mother said she liked that jewellery – what's it called? Pandora!

Then I start making lists... shopping in my lunch hour for specials, ticking things off...planning the menu.

But this year, September and October came and went. I meant to start, but, somehow, I never found the time.

Then the stores were full of people and decorations - and I realised... I hadn't done anything!

I felt sick...like when you haven't studied for an exam.

You kept asking, "When are you going to put up the tree?"

There are 27 pictures of the kids unwrapping presents under that tree. I just couldn't contemplate 28.

A week went by...Christmas Eve. The Last Minute.

I've never done that before – gone at The Last Minute.

It took me 20 minutes to find a parking space. I couldn't figure it out.

Men. Everywhere! And then I realised...The Last Minute!

Perfume. Jewellery. Slow cookers. Gift-wrapped. Wham, bam, thank you, Ma'am! That's all it is to them.

I didn't know where to start. Everything looked so...picked over.

I went generic. Calendars - puppies, kittens, Audrey Hepburn. I was about to pop into the supermarket for a turkey when I saw it – a three-sided cardboard castle with fake snow dripping from the roof. Santa's Workshop.

A skinny Santa was sitting on a red velvet throne. Anyone could see that his beard was fake. You could see the elastic.

A six-foot-tall pixie with plastic pointy ears, blonde hair and black roots was packing up photos.

Near the entrance was a woman with a little boy of about six, clinging to her legs.

She assumes the attitude and lisp of the child looking up at its mother.

“Is that the real Thanta?” the boy asked.

“Of course,” the mother said, and she went to pay the pixie.

The boy waited. Then he saw me, and stared with his big truthful eyes.

So, I called him over.

She kneels down and whispers, as if speaking to a child.

“Hey, kid!” (*She beckons.*) “You wanna see the real Santa?”

“Yeth,” he said.

So, I told him.

Beat.

I’m the real Santa Claus! The one and only.

(She speaks quickly, conspiratorially, on a roll.) I’m the one that makes the list and checks it twice and buys all that crap made by children in China who don’t even know what Christmas is.

And then I hide it in the bedroom closet and stay up every night for weeks, wrapping and writing, writing and wrapping... “with love from Santa”.

On Christmas Eve, when everyone’s asleep, I put it all under the tree.

In the morning, they rip it all open. “Wow! Look what Santa brought me!”

But it’s just me.

Me!

The kid starts to cry. His Mom rushes over, screaming. “Pervert! Get away from my son! Security!! Security!”

A crowd gathers. But I can’t stop. I’m screaming back, pointing to all the women watching.

“I’m Santa Claus and so is SHE and HER and HER! With our empty pockets and our empty lives, buying and wrapping and giving, giving, GIVING!

Until there’s nothing left.

What for? Tell me! What’s it all for? What the hell are we all doing?

Go home! Write a book! Invent a cure for cancer, malaria or Covid-19.

Because while we’re planning, cooking, buying and wrapping, that’s what the men are doing.

They’re taking over the world or blowing it up, inventing the iPad, or looking for life on Mars – while we’re playing Santa Claus, Easter Bunny and the Tooth Fairy.

Assuming the voice of a male announcer.

“Security to Zone 2! Security to Zone 2!”

Her own voice:

The security guard threw me out.

So, we’re not having turkey this year...

Beat.

I’m going there.

Coz they don’t celebrate Christmas in Turkey.

She takes a carry-on case from under the table and exits.

ENDS

Approx. 700 words

jane.cafarella@gmail.com

+61 408 880 185

© Jane Cafarella

Free use on the condition that the author is fully credited and notified of when and how the work will be used and your location (city and country), so she can keep track of her work.