

Tree's *almost wasn't* Christmas Reunion

Diane Connis



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by Diane Connis



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*To my son, Jonathan, who will always
celebrate Christmas with the heart of a child.*



Christmas Celebration Season returned and The Father removed the decorations from the storage place under the stairs. He stood Tree upright in the usual space next to the fireplace.

It had been an entire night and day since he had set the boxes near Tree and opened them for The Mother. But not one ornament had been hung and now The Mother and The Older Girl sat talking on the sofa, just a few feet away.

Bulb, who was tucked inside his special divider slot on the very top of the open box, strained to hear.

“It’s good to have you home. I’ve missed you so much.” The Mother said, sounding as if her eyes might leak.

Understanding when and why The Mother’s eyes leaked was very confusing for Bulb. Sometimes it was when she was sad, other times when she was happy. At the moment, he thought it might be both.

“I’m glad to be home, especially for Christmas,” said The Older Girl, “I can’t wait for brother to get here. Even though it’s only been a few months, I feel like I haven’t seen him in so long; just a few times since the wedding and only once since the baby was born.”

Bulb



“They’ll be arriving in a few days. I bought a high chair and crib for the baby, though she’s too small to need either yet.” The Mother’s voice began to rise with happiness. “It will be so good to have all my family home again. It’s just not the same when you’re not here.”

“But you still have little brother here,” The Older Girl laughed, “Though he’s not so little anymore either, now that he’s learning to drive. And to think you’re a grandmother and I am an aunt now. It’s strange.”

The Mother sighed and smiled. “Your little brother is so busy with school and friends, I barely see him. But it’s as it should be. Children are meant to grow and become adults. Life moves forward and here we are at another Christmas again.”

The Older Girl got up and moved to the box of ornaments. She looked down at them. “It would be nice to have the house all decorated before my brother comes. I’ll be happy to help.”

She leaned down and picked up Bulb, turning him thoughtfully for a moment. Bulb felt he would burst with a thousand rays of Christmas delight as his cursive inscription, “1st Christmas Together - December 25, 1992,” gleamed in the late morning light.

“You know, we’ve been hanging these same ornaments on the tree for

years. They're old and tired. Maybe it's time for a change. Let's do a designer tree this year."

"Oh, I don't know. I like these old ornaments and wouldn't begin to know anything about designing a Christmas tree. What would we do with a designer tree in this old house?" The Mother's voice had amusement in it.

"You go off to college and come home with all these modern ideas."

"Oh come on Mom, let's do it. It'll be fun."

The Older Girl placed Bulb back in his slot, face down. Where he could only see out of one eye before, now he couldn't see at all.

She put me back! What did she say? I'm old and tired? How can I be old and tired? I've been sleeping since last Christmas. Take me out of here. Put me on Tree! Oh please, take me out!

"We'll buy all new ornaments, garland and ribbon. We need to pick coordinating colors and a theme. Let's figure it out and go shopping tomorrow," The Older Girl was very excited with this idea.

The Mother sat quietly looking at the box. Finally she stood up and started walking away and as The Older Girl followed, Bulb heard her say, "You

know, maybe you're right. Maybe it is time for something new. Let's do a search on the internet for ideas and see what we like, then when we go shopping we'll know exactly..."

Bulb listened to their voices fade as they left the room. He began to tremble.

What could this mean? Would there be no Christmas for him and the other ornaments this time?

Or worse, maybe never again!



The Mother and Older Girl were with The Internet most of the afternoon. Bulb had no idea what The Internet was, but it captured their undivided attention and filled him with fear.

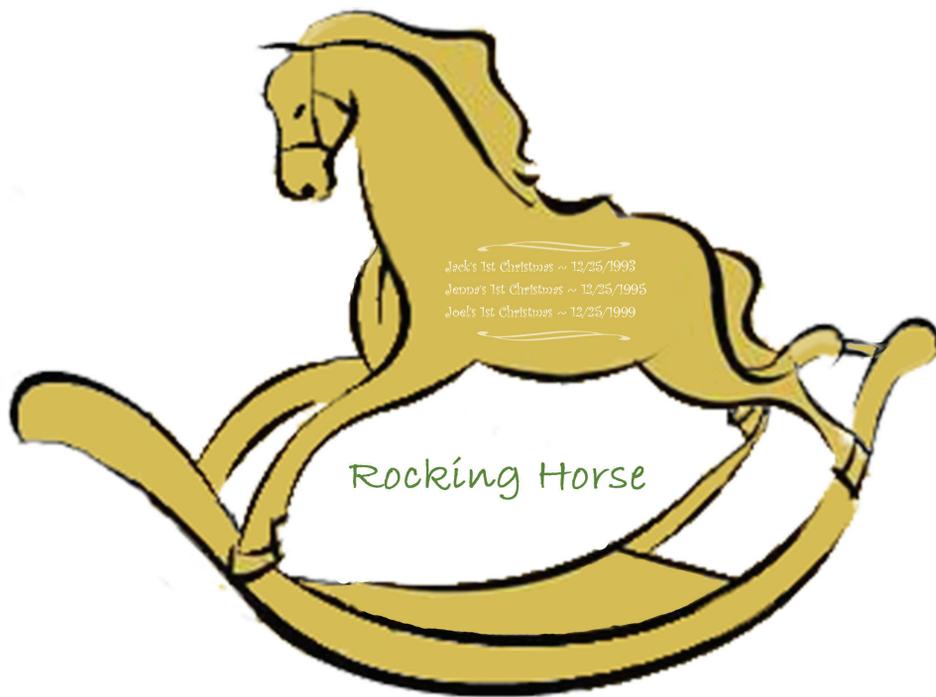
He caught bits of their conversation, as they oohed and aahed in the distance. He heard, “..oh I love that one,” and “..that’s a beautiful color,” and “..we should get one of those.”

The Father, Mother, Older Daughter and Small Boy spent a long evening together around the dinner table, eating, talking and laughing. Finally deep night fell over the house and all was quiet.

It was wonderful to hear the noisy sounds of happiness coming from the family again but Bulb could hardly enjoy it. He had spent the afternoon and evening in emotional turmoil, swinging from overwhelming anxiety to deep despair. The thought of never hanging on Tree again was unbearable.

After he was certain The Humans were asleep, Bulb thought of the others and wondered if they were nearby. He should try to warn them.

“Bell? Rocking Horse? Reindeer? Star? Are you there? Can you hear me? Someone? Anyone?” Bulb whispered as loudly as he dared.



Talking face down into the bottom of his felt lined bed was difficult. He was wedged in and tried rolling upright, but only managed to turn himself sideways enough to peek half of one eye up above the narrow side divider.

“Can anyone hear me?” He asked again. “Where are you?”

“I’m here.” Bulb finally heard Bell, the oldest and most fragile ornament in the storage box, answer from down below. “I believe I’m underneath you. Oh dear, my bow is crushed for sure. I hope The Mother can fix it.”

“And I think I’m next to Bell,” one eyed Reindeer said. “We can barely hear you. They woke us up. Why haven’t they taken us out? My popsicle sticks are so stiff and something is poking my eye.”

Rocking Horse was on top with Bulb, nestled into far a corner. “I’m over this way, Bulb, can you see me? It’s hard to speak. I believe something is on top of me. I hope we can get out soon. I really need to stretch my legs.”

“Where is Star?” asked Bulb.

“I think she’s way at the bottom,” yelled Reindeer. “She can’t hear anything.”

“Shhhh! Not so loud.” Bulb whispered gruffly, “They will hear us.”

“How can they hear us when I can hardly hear us?” Reindeer snorted.

“Be very quiet and listen,” replied Bulb. “I have something important to tell you. I heard The Mother and The Older Girl talking today. They said they are not going to put us on Tree this Christmas.”

“What!!” Reindeer shouted.

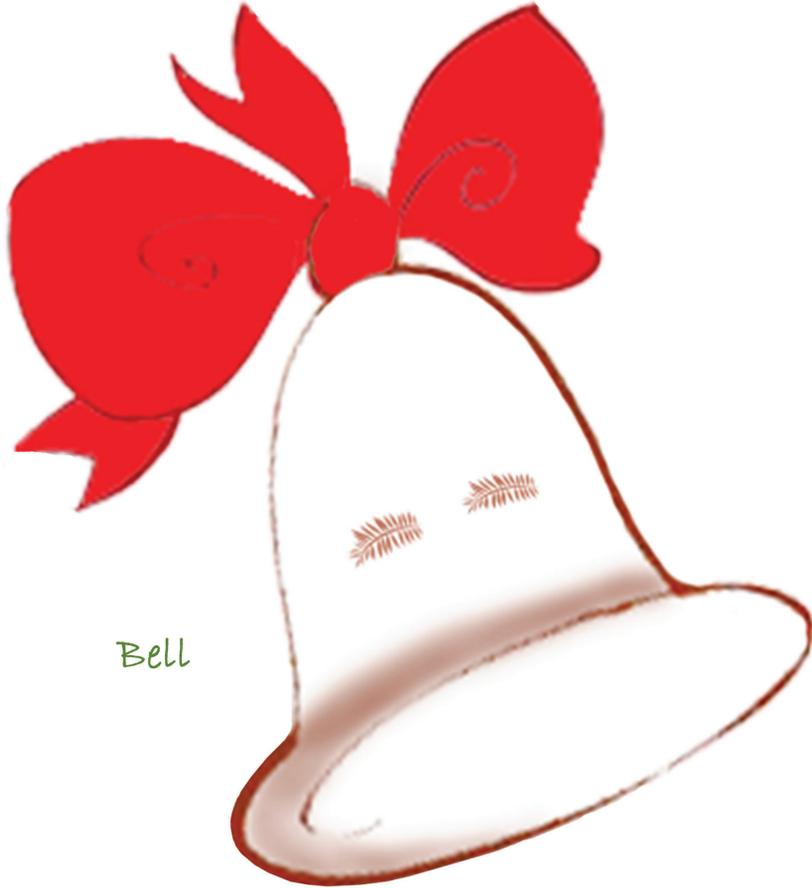
“Oh no!!” Bell began to wail. “My bow will be crushed forever.”

“Why?” asked Rocking Horse. “Why would they not put us on Tree? What have we done?”

“The Older Girl says we are old and tired.” Bulb answered. “She and The Mother are going, when the light comes up again, to look for new, modern design ornaments. Whatever that means. That is what they said.”

As he repeated the words he began to tremble again.

Rocking Horse moaned. “Well, we are old. The time, on me, of The Oldest Boy’s first Christmas goes way back.”



Bell

“So what!” Reindeer was shouting again. “I might be old, but I’m not tired! And I might even be, be...Design!”

“What about Star? They won’t forget about Star will they? Tree needs Star. I wish she could hear us.” Bell was nearly choking with despair.

“Star? Star? Can you hear me? Star?”

When Star didn’t answer, Bell wailed harder.

“Alright everyone, this is bad news indeed. But we must not panic. We must think hard and come up with an idea to make them want you again.”

The ornaments recognized the deep voice of Tree above them.

“Tree! Thank goodness you are up! And you can hear us.” Rocking Horse whispered in relief.

“Tree is here!” Bulb relayed to Bell and Reindeer below. He heard their excited chatter underneath him, but couldn’t understand what they were saying.

Tree, how are you?” Bulb asked. “I’ve missed you. So you also heard The

Mother and Older Girl’s talk? You heard their plan?”

“I have no lights on yet. All my branches are bare. I feel much undressed standing here like this and yes, Bulb, I did hear everything. I was sad to know it, but we must think as we did the time The Father was not going to come home from the war. Remember that? And He did come. So there must be a way. We must think of a way.”

Tree and his ornaments talked deep into the night until they were very tired of thinking.

They could not get out of the box by themselves. If The Humans did not hang them up they were doomed. Doomed to remain in the dark place forever. Doomed to never celebrate Christmas again. Doomed to miss the only thing for which they existed.

The thought of it, was enough to make Bulb want to throw himself over the side of the storage box and smash into tiny pieces all over the floor.



Several days passed and Tree was dressed in brand new coordinating colors of silver, white, teal and purple.

The Nativity had been placed and sleek stockings with embroidered names, in colors to match Tree's new look, had been hung on the mantle.

The Older Girl, stood back and cheered as the final decoration was hung.

She had forgotten to purchase a new Tree topper, so Star, who was fortunate to still fit into Tree's new design, was rescued from the bottom of the old decoration box and set in place by The Small Boy.

He was now almost tall enough to reach Tree's top by himself so his name had to be changed, Tree decided, to The Youngest Boy.

The old decoration box had been shoved out of the way behind the sofa. Bulb lay in his divider in such hopeless rejection, he was barely aware of the growing excitement of Christmas around him. He buried his face deep into the felt lining trying not to think of what would happen to them when Christmas was over.

Tree and the others tried talking to him in the late night hours but he

refused to hear. Even Star, who had always served as watcher from her high lookout and talked only to announce The Human's arrival, softly called Bulb's name, but he did not answer.

On Christmas Eve, The Mother was in the kitchen, preparing for the following day's Christmas Dinner.

"It's late. Big day tomorrow." The Father said, as he came from behind and wrapped his arms around her. "We can all help you finish this in the morning you know?"

"Yes, I know." She stopped her work and relaxed against him, so grateful he was here, remembering the times she thought he might never be home for Christmas again.

"So what do you think of our daughter's designer tree this year?" The Father asked.

The Mother laughed as they turned to look at Tree shining in the corner of the family room next to the fireplace.

"It is beautiful, I'll give her that, but it looks like it belongs in a New York City, Times Square store window, not in our old country home. I let her do it for fun, something we could enjoy together. In a few years she'll

have her own place and her own tree and she can have it all. I love my old ornaments. Every single one is a memory.”

“The things we do for our children, huh?” The Father smiled. “Even when they are grown.”

He kissed The Mother. “Don’t work all night. Come to bed soon. ”

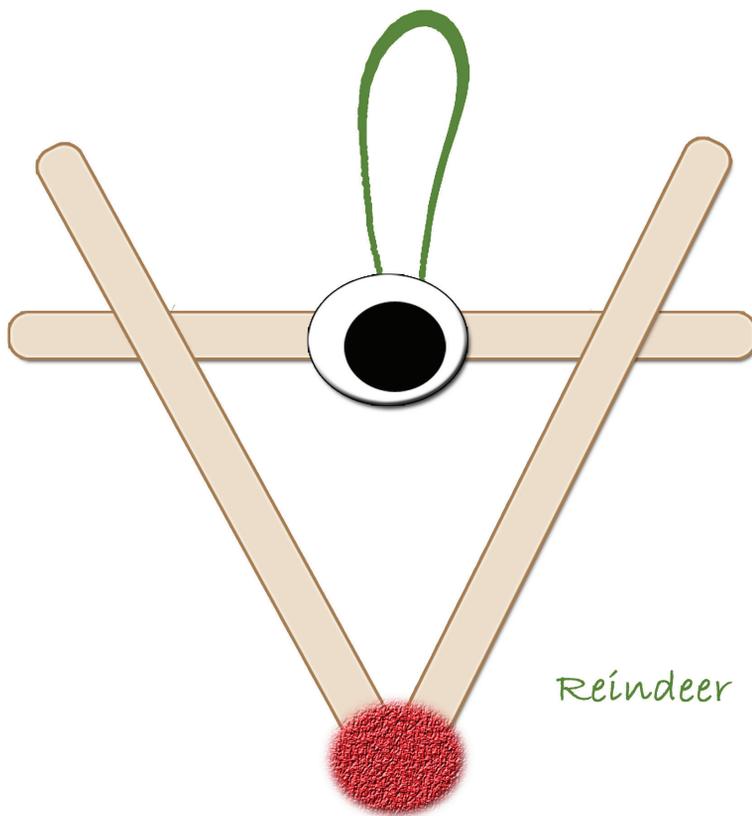
“I will,” she said, “as soon as I clean up this mess.”

In The Oldest Boy’s old bedroom, his wife was trying to quiet the tiny baby.

“I’ll take the baby, you get some sleep.” He kissed his wife. “Merry Christmas. I love you.”

Her eyes closed in exhaustion as he picked up the child, held her gently against his chest and took her out next to Tree. He walked her back and forth. Back and forth. Back and forth.

The Mother hung up her apron at last, turned off the kitchen light and came to where her son paced with the tiny baby, in front of Tree. She smiled as she watched, remembering long ago when she did the same with this grown son, now calming his own fussy child.



Reindeer

“Would you like me to take her?” The Mother asked.

“No. Thanks though. She is settling down. Her mother get’s so tired. I just wanted to let her sleep.” The Oldest Boy answered.

“You are a good father, just like your dad. I’m very proud of you, you know.”

She leaned forward, placed her hand on his forearm and gently kissed the tiny baby’s head, then sat on the sofa. The Mother was tired too. But in a good, contented way. She stretched her arm out behind her and her hand touched the top of the old decorations box.

“Oh!” She exclaimed.

Getting up on her knees and bending over the back of the sofa she picked up Bulb, then Rocking Horse and slowly rubbed her finger over the inscriptions on each of them.

Then she searched deeper inside the box to find her grandmother’s Bell and saw Reindeer. The Mother held him up to her son.

“Remember when you made this one eyed deer? You were so proud of it.”

They laughed together. “We’ll need to show it to your daughter in a few years, when she is old enough to understand.” The Mother said.

The Mother carried Bulb, Bell, Reindeer and Rocking Horse to Tree.

“It’s just not the same without these,” she said, as she hung them each on a branch and adjusted Bell’s crushed bow.

“What will my sister say?” The Oldest Boy asked in mock alarm. “You are ruining her design.”

The peaceful baby cooed softly in his arms.

“A beautiful memory never ruins anything,” replied The Mother.

He smiled. “Well, the baby is asleep so I’m going to bed now. Merry Christmas, Mom.”

“Merry Christmas, Son.” She turned off Tree’s Lights as they left the room and the house settled into quiet darkness.

Bulb was trembling again but this time with uncontainable joy. He barely waited for the bedroom doors to close.



The Nativity

“Hey, what just happen? We are back on Tree, in his modern design!” He laughed and wiggled so excitedly on the end of his hanger, Tree had to remind him to be careful.

“Did you hear her? Didn’t you hear what The Mother said?” asked Rocking Horse. “We are a Memory. What is a Memory?”

“I don’t know,” answered Bell, “but it must be better than being a Design. I’m so happy to have my bow straight again.”

“And I will have the most important job of making the tiny baby laugh when she’s bigger,” boasted Reindeer, rolling his one eye around and around.

“I prayed.” Tree finally spoke. “I prayed and asked Jesus of The Nativity to rescue you. And He did. He did the miracle again.”

“You prayed? For me? For us?” Bulb was suddenly overwhelmed by Tree’s true friendship. “Thank you so much Tree. Thank you Friend.”

“It was my honor,” Tree replied. “Now, how are things looking from up there Star? Is everything alright?”

“No Humans coming now but it will be Merry Christmas time when the

light comes again,” Star reported back as she glowed softly from Tree’s top.

Then whispers from up and down Tree echoed around the room.

“Thank you, Jesus, for saving us”

“Merry Christmas everyone!”

“Yes, Merry, Merry Christmas to all of us!”



Star