

## I'm Dreaming of a Pink Christmas

My question 'Are you sure?' hung between us.

Alex, my nineteen year old son had come home from university the day before. Duvet, pillows and black bin liners full of dirty washing strewn down the hallway like skittles, signalling the start of the Christmas break. I issued the ultimatum,

"Get this stinking pile in the washing basket by tomorrow or you'll miss the festive washing deadline and you'll have to spend Christmas in your pyjamas!"

"Now you know that won't happen Mum." He smiled "You'd be worried what the neighbours might say when they pop in for a sherry!" I teased him about his new blonde highlights and told him how much I'd missed him, trying not to sound like a neurotic mother.

Dropping Alex at the halls of residence for his first term in September was worse than his first day at school. After unloading and settling him in, I bravely said goodbye, then driving home alone, I cried the length of the M2. I worried about everything; would he make friends, eat properly, study more than party?

Now he was home for three weeks, the house would be noisy and messy again. I was happy. Christmas had been a really tough time since Paul, my husband, had passed away three years before. Alex missed his Dad. We had no real desire to celebrate, but kept up the pretence of a tree, presents and the turkey dinner.

I'd waited for Alex to come home before putting the decorations up. The day after his return, I suggested we went to the garden centre to pick a tree, once I'd got the first load of washing in. My head disappeared in the vast laundry basket of the great unwashed, sorting the coloureds from the lighter coloureds, formally known as whites! Meanwhile Alex retrieved the baubles and Christmas lights stored on top of the cupboard.

Tossing black tops, blue jeans and brown jumpers to one side, grey socks, grey T shirts and grey bedding went into another pile, then the 'miscellaneous pile'. I noticed there were two pink shirts and some other items in similar hues that could make up one load.

"Good God Alex, is pink the new black or something?"

"Err, yea, I guess so." Alex dropped a box with a thud.

Still immersed in the basket I joked, "Well I wonder if we should discuss your sexuality?"

"Go on then."

With my back to him I waved a pair of pink boxer shorts in each hand,

"Are you gay or something?"

"Yes." His voice trembled.

I stopped flapping my arms like a demented windmill, without looking at him I whispered "Are you sure?"

I turned, he looked crestfallen, his face ash white. Putting my arms around him, I felt him shaking.

"Sorry darling, I don't know why I said that, you know I'll always love you."

"Mum, please!"

"What is it love?" I sniffed.

"You're wiping your nose on my boxers."