



www.aseasonofhappiness.com

NEW YEAR – NEW LEAF

New Year's Eve was always fun and rather noisy at Dillberry Lodge. Usually there were just the three of them – Rupert and his two sisters Marsha and Priscilla – but at such a festive time they always invited their friends over, lots of them. The little cottage was packed and they had a great party that went on until the early hours. Needless to say, the three of them were pretty tired and didn't wake until late morning. By then all of the guests had left. Priscilla was the first to stir and had to pick her way to the kitchen, weaving around a litter of plates, snack packets and drinking glasses. Normally she wouldn't have worried because she was one of those people who left mess behind her, rarely putting anything away after using it. Even her bedroom carpet was invisible beneath piles of clothes strewn around the floor. On this occasion, however, for some reason the untidiness annoyed her.

She was sitting at the table drinking a cup of tea when Marsha came in looking a bit the worse for wear. "I feel awful," she groaned as she slumped on a chair across from her sister. "It's my own fault, I know. I eat too much of all the wrong things, especially at party time. I really have to get out of the habit of doing the same old same old – it's boring and I'm getting fat."

"Find something to take your mind off eating – a distraction," advised Rupert on entering. "Do what I'm going to do - turn over a new leaf." Scuffing over to the cupboard he pulled out a box of cornflakes. "After I've had breakfast, of course."

Marsha watched her brother pouring cereal into a bowl and felt sick. "I don't know how you can eat anything after what you put away last night. As for the new-leaf bit, you're a creature of habit, Rupert, like me; the difference is you're the leopard who will never change his spots."

"Well, Miss Smartypants, I'm going to prove you wrong." Opening the fridge door he frowned. "Where's the milk?"

"I used it on my thick shake last night," confessed Marsha, "And what was left of the sugar."

"I can't have cornflakes without milk and sugar!" complained Rupert.

"There - what did Marsha tell you?" Priscilla pointed out. "Same breakfast every morning, followed by a bag of crisps; then straight onto video games. Say what you like, but people like you can't change."

Rupert stared dismally at his dry cornflakes, until Priscilla got up and took the bowl away. "Hey, where are you going with my cornflakes?"

"Returning them to the packet, little brother," Priscilla explained. "Then I'm going to seal it up so they won't go stale, and finally put the packet back in the cupboard where it came from."

Marsha seemed shocked. "Am I hearing right – you of all people putting things away?"

Closing the cupboard door, Priscilla walked to the table, looked down at Marsha's now-empty cup and took it to the sink. "I'll wash this up, shall I?"

"Don't bother – I'm going to have another tea," Marsha commented.

"No bother," said Priscilla. "After I've washed and dried your cup, then you can have more tea. And if you're wondering what this is all about, I've been thinking. Rupert was right – New Year, new leaf. We should all make resolutions. Mine is to be neater and tidier."

“Yeah, right,” snorted Marsha. “I can see that lasting – *not* ! It’s the same every year – we make New-Year resolutions to do things differently that we absolutely hate and are back to our old ways in less than a week.”

“We’ll just have to try harder,” declared Rupert thoughtfully. “Anyway, it could be very rewarding. Priss has resolved to do something totally radical, so I think you and I should too.”

“Like what?” asked Marsha, clearly in disbelief.

“I am going to...” He hesitated uncertainly, rolling his eyes up to stare at the ceiling. “...Think about it.” Pausing in the doorway, he turned back to face Marsha. “And what brilliant resolution are you going to come up with?”

Marsha pondered for a moment. “I might take up music, perhaps be an opera singer.”

Priscilla sniggered. “Aside from the fact that you don’t know Italian, you can’t even sing in tune.”

“Neither can you,” challenged Marsha defensively.

“Doesn’t matter,” said Priscilla. “I’m not the one taking up music.”

Marsha scowled in silence until she had an idea that brightened her up. “Okay, I accept I’m not much good at singing, but I can still do music – I’ll learn to play an instrument. I might even join a band.” Turning to face her brother, she narrowed her eyes at him. “Well, Rupert, what’s your plan of action – stop playing video games all day and train for the Olympics?”

“Nothing so energetic,” said her brother with a wry grin. “However, I do intend being more creative. Maybe I’ll try my hand at art; but first I fancy writing a book.”

Priscilla sniggered. “Do you reckon you’ll live that long? You’ve never even *read* one cover to cover; except for ‘Where’s Spot?’ and that took you two days!”

“O ye of little faith,” sneered Rupert, pushing up from his chair to head out of the kitchen. “Laugh all you like. I shall now repair to the study to work on my book.” With that, he strutted off, head held high.

True to their word, each of them launched into their individual resolutions; at least the two girls did. Priscilla started on cleaning up after last night’s party; and seeing as there was so much mess she was hoping the others might help. “Sorry,” Marsha apologised, “But I have to go and buy an instrument. Ask Rupert to give you a hand.”

Priscilla did just that. Rupert, however, was busy; at least he claimed he was: “I’m waiting on inspiration,” he mused, dipping into a packet for some more crisps.

“You’re staring at a blank page on the computer screen,” said Priscilla. “And you’ve been doing that for half an hour.”

“Writer’s block,” confessed Rupert with a sigh. “Such is an author’s life, but it will surely pass.” Dipping in for a refill of crisps, he smiled. “Sometime soon... maybe.”

Priscilla scowled. “At least put that packet in the bin when you’ve finished.”

“I wouldn’t dare be so selfish.” His smile broadened. “No, I’ll chuck it on the floor – give you something else to clean up. Isn’t that thoughtful of me?”

By mid-afternoon Priscilla had finished the cleaning and was exhausted, so she went for a nap. Marsha returned shortly after and paused as she was passing Rupert. “I see you’ve started,” she said with a chuckle as she read the few words on the computer screen: “Once upon a time... Very original, although I think it might have been used before.”

Rupert scowled but made no comment, groaning inwardly when he recognised the familiar shape of the case his sister was carrying as she went to her room. Returning his attention to the screen, he frowned at the words and decided to change them; well, the first one anyway. Yes, that was better he thought as he read them aloud: “Twice upon a time. Much better. Now, what comes next?” Eyes closed and a second bag of crisps later he was still struggling to write something more when a strange sound drifted through the house.

Priscilla heard it too. In fact, it woke her up. Rolling off the bed she went to investigate. The weird sounds were coming from Marsha’s room and she called out through the closed door: “What’s that awful noise? Have you got a cat in there?”

The wailing stopped followed by footsteps as Marsha thumped to the door, opened it and showed Priscilla the instrument. “It’s a violin and I’ve only just started learning to play. You can’t expect me to master it straight away.”

“Well, I hope you don’t take too long. My ears won’t take it,” said Priscilla. In a huff, Marsha closed the door on her and returned to her practice.

There was no way Priscilla would get back to sleep, not with her sister’s attempt to play what sounded like Twinkle Twinkle Little Star grating through the house; so she went into the lounge room. It had been tidy before she left; now there were there two empty crisp packets on the floor, plus a number of screwed-up balls of paper. “Rupert!” she chided, “What’s all this?”

“Temporary failure,” her brother admitted. “The computer wasn’t working for me, so I tried pen and paper instead. I think I was almost getting there when Marsha started sawing it off in lumps; and that was that.”

With a sigh and a tut, Priscilla went to the kitchen. At least it was still tidy; there was, however, something she had thought about that needed sorting. A quick check in the fridge found the problem – much of the stuff in there was either past or close to its use-by date, plus there were a few bowls and plates of leftovers. Ten minutes later the shelves were nearly empty and the rubbish bin was full. Next, it was off to the supermarket for fresh supplies.

She returned some time later to be greeted by a complete disaster – the kitchen looked like a bomb had hit it. There was food everywhere: on the table, splattered on the cupboards; and pinned to one wall was a plastic table cloth smeared with the leftovers she’d thrown in the bin. Rupert was standing back admiring it. “Writing wasn’t doing for me,” he explained, “So I had a dabble in modern art. I saw a famous artist once using food instead of paint, and your chuck-outs were just what I needed. Trouble is, a lot of stuff keeps sliding off onto the floor. Mind you, the custard and spaghetti clung on and add a nice touch. Good, eh? I call it Dinner in Motion.”

“I call it disgusting,” growled Priscilla, “Just don’t expect me to clean up your mess! And what’s that terrible blaring sound?”

“Marsha,” he said. “She reckoned the strings on the violin made her fingers sore, so she swapped it for a trombone.”

“I don’t believe it,” moaned Priscilla. “This New-Year resolution thing is turning into a nightmare. Go and fetch Marsha. We need to talk.”

The three of them gathered in the lounge room. Marsha was carrying the trombone case and was mumbling: “The mouthpiece gave me a fat lip. I’m thinking of trying drums – they should be easier...”

“No way!” declared Priscilla. “Enough is enough! I propose we make a new resolution.”

“I don’t know I could think of something other than what I’ve already tried,” said Rupert.

“You won’t have to, none of us will,” she told the others. “We should make a resolution not to make New-Year resolutions ever again.”

“Does that mean we can go back to being what we were before?” asked Marsha hopefully.

“That’s exactly what I mean,” said Priscilla. “You can work on getting fatter – quietly; I’ll become a messy slob again; and Rupert should have no trouble going back to being his old on-line-video slug-boy self.”

Starting that very minute, she went to her bedroom to change, tossing the clothes she was wearing on the floor, and dragged some out of drawers to cover the rest of the carpet. Meanwhile, Marsha began bingeing on the food her sister had bought; and Rupert grabbed two bags of crisps then went off to play video games. So they all returned to living slobbily, piggishly, and losing-ever-afterly, without even having to think about it.