

The Curse of Plenty

by Jake Barnes

We have people over for dinner Christmas Day. My wife cooks a crown roast. She brings out her best china. A retired doctor brings his famous hot bean salad.

After dinner we open gifts. I get a book and a flashlight. The book is a novel, which I no longer read. I write short stories; I read short stories. We have a dozen flashlights stashed around the house; we don't really need one more.

Dinner conversation reminds me of the chatter of birds. Happy talk. Nothing real. Oh, well. My wife's efforts in the kitchen are a hit. Everyone sings the praises of the roast.

The next day my wife says no more. Next year she is going to make better use of her time. Go down and help out at a homeless shelter. I give her a high five.

I tell her about the story I read. It was about a family living in their car, driving across town to a shelter where they will join the line, hoping to have a warm place to sleep for the night.

It was good to see our doctor friend. He has bad lungs, among other ailments. He breathes through tubes attached to a small tank of oxygen. He tells us that he is worried because he always gets pneumonia during the winter. He brightens when he recalls that it has been dry and warm this winter in San Francisco where he lives.

Afterwards my wife and I go to bed. I ask her if she wants to cuddle. She says we did that last night. I ask her if she wants to do it again.

