

We are the miserable

by Nonnie Augustine

We are the miserable, annoyed, dismayed sick. We slouch on black naugahyde chairs too pathetic to reach for magazines. The computer is down the young receptionist has explained to each of us in young, florid style, complete with “I called them” hand gestures. When it was my turn to listen to her enthusiastic spiel I have no trouble tuning her out. Both of my ears are clogged, the left hurts like hell and I am, I hope temporarily, deaf. None of us care about the computer problems. We just need help. The waiting room is cramped and chilly and boasts a beige and walnut-stained woodwork decor. Where are the mint greens, peachy/melony colors we are used to getting in our Florida doctors' offices? Nary a seashell in sight. But this is a walk-in clinic for the desperate on this New Year's Eve. We are here on a sunless, dismal late morning. There is a Christmas tree in the corner. Not a bad green for synthetic. Small, round, silver and gold ornaments, half a dozen red bells, and a restrained weaving of tinsel hang from the branches. Underneath is an eight inch Santa Claus in a delicate sleigh. His grin is so cheery it is impossible not to smile back at him. The blond lady coughs again and blows her nose again. The middle-aged man turns in the six pages of paperwork he has filled out for his son, who is being brave despite the bloody bandage on one bare foot. Santa eyes me with a twinkle. Maybe there is a doctor back there who will fix my damn ear, the earnest young woman will smooth her speech about the computers so that it finally becomes intelligible, and we will all feel well enough by tomorrow to welcome the new year. The petite, impossibly charming Santa under the tastefully bedecked tree shoots his rays of good-will, aims well, and pierces my dreary heart. Bulls-eye! Happy New Year, after all.

