

## **Uncle Winston Entertains**

By Betty Castleberry

I shoved a pillow over my head hoping the persistent caller would give up. Finally, I spit the cotton out of my mouth and answered. "Hullo?"

"Gina, dear, could you come over and help me clean?"

"Uncle Winston, it's four in the morning."

"Is it dear?" Uncle Winston was a bachelor and never cared much about his house, so I was surprised at the request. "I've met a lovely lady at church and want to have her over for lunch."

"Okay, but give me awhile." Then I called my sister Gloria and put a guilt trip on her. "He's your uncle, too. Come and help."

She argued that he called me and not her, but I reminded her that Uncle Winston could probably only remember one phone number.

Gloria sighed. "I'll meet you at his house."

Uncle Winston greeted us at the door, wearing a faded polyester suit. Half of his moustache was missing.

I kissed his cheek. "Did we interrupt your shaving?"

"Oh no. I finished hours ago." Gloria rolled her eyes. I gave her my Big Sister scowl as Uncle Winston ushered us in. His living room was cluttered with newspapers and mail, along with a lot of other things.

Gloria started picking up, and I got out the vacuum. It didn't seem to have much suction, and there was a peculiar odor coming from it. I flipped the switch a couple of times, but it still wouldn't work properly. "Uncle Winston, does the bag need changing?"

"No, dear. There's a salami in the hose."

"Salami?"

"Yes, you see, I dropped it and ..."

"Never mind. Why don't you see if you can get it out?"

"All right." He shuffled out of the room and reappeared with a toilet plunger and a piece of bread. I prayed he wasn't going to tell me what his intentions were.

A few minutes later, he met me in the hall. "What are we having for lunch? Martha will be here soon."

"Lunch? She's coming today?"

"Yes dear, of course."

"You didn't tell me."

"Perhaps you forgot." One of us did forget, but it wasn't me.

He had his back to Gloria. She rolled her eyes again.

"I'd like to give Martha a gift. What do you think of this?"

He handed me a denture cup. "You want to give her a denture cup?"

"No, the gift is inside. I thought the denture cup would make a nice gift box. A red bow would be pretty on it, don't you think? I rinsed it real well this morning."

I very gingerly opened the cup and found a discount coupon for panty hose. "I don't know, Uncle Winston, it doesn't seem appropriate to me."

"I won't use it, and it would save her money. You young people don't understand what it's like living on a fixed income."

"If you want to give her a gift, why don't you pick some of your roses for her?"

"Okay, but they won't save her any money."

At some point, he had put on a ragged green smoking jacket. "That's quite a jacket you're wearing."

"I know ladies like a gentleman to look sophisticated." He held a pipe up for my approval.

"I've never seen you smoke."

"Oh, I don't. I found this at the coffee shop. It was just lying on the table. Finders keepers, you know." He stuck the end of the pipe in his mouth.

I was tempted to tell him that it wasn't sanitary, but after looking around his living room, decided that wasn't an issue. Instead, I steered him toward the kitchen.

"Let's go see what we can make for lunch."

Gloria and I rummaged through the refrigerator. We found pickles, orange juice, and a pair of boxer shorts.

I sent Gloria to the delicatessen while I straightened the kitchen. By the time she returned, it was time to dish up the food.

Uncle Winston was singing "Stardust" in his shaky baritone when the doorbell rang. He went to answer it, and we heard him offer a cheery greeting. A little bird-like voice answered him. He came into the kitchen with a tiny lady by his side. "Girls, this is Martha."

Martha was wearing a blue plaid jumper with orange knee socks. A quirky little beaded hat sat on her head. She had shaven off her eyebrows and painted one back on. Just one.

I smiled. She and Uncle Winston were going to get along very well.

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