

The Unnecessary Day

By Viki Rife

The chair Andrea was standing on tottered precariously as she tried to maneuver the big box down from the top shelf. She should have asked Dan to take it down before he left this morning. She gave another tug, and the chair crashed to the ground, carrying her with it.



The searing pain in her right shoulder was instantaneous. It was hard to think clearly, but she somehow managed to reach in her pocket for her phone, feeling a wave of relief when she found it undamaged. It was a good thing Dan was on speed-dial.

The next few hours were a blur of Dan's worried face, the emergency room, x-rays, and finally a sober-faced surgeon. "We're going to have to operate on that shoulder," he informed her. He talked on about pins and metal plates, but she was in too much pain to care.

Eventually it sunk in. "Surgery? Oh, no, I've ruined Christmas!" she exclaimed. Dan turned to her in surprise. "Is that what worries you the most?" he asked. "Christmas is almost two months away. I can't believe you were trying to get that big box of decorations down already."

Andrea suddenly thought of the precious keepsakes handed down through her family. "Are any of them broken?" She felt panic rising inside her.

"I'm sorry, Andrea, I didn't notice. When I saw you on the floor..." He shook his head. "They want you to stay here in the hospital overnight and do the surgery in the morning. I need to run home before the bus drops the kids off. We'll be back to see you later."

In the days after Andrea got home from surgery, life felt like a blur. But whenever the pain meds wore off enough for her to think, all she could think about was Christmas. How could she disappoint her children, her parents, her siblings? She was the only one who knew where all the decorations should go and how to set everything up just right. She wasn't even done with her Christmas shopping! And no one could prepare the wonderful home recipes she had spent most of her adult life perfecting.

One day Andrea got a call from her childhood friend, Belinda. "I'm going to be coming to town to have Thanksgiving with my parents, and would love to get together," Belinda told her. "Why don't you and your family join us for the day?"

"I'm not sure," Andrea hesitated. She had concluded as a teen that celebrating Thanksgiving was an unnecessary distraction from preparations for Christmas. "A whole day wasted, plus wasted time to prepare for it," was her summary of the holiday. Her childhood memories involved a tense, tiring day with relatives that didn't get along. So she and Dan used the extra time when the family was off work and school to focus on special Christmas projects.

But there would be no special Christmas projects this year. With her arm immobilized, she'd be lucky to just be able to buy the presents and wrap them somehow. Dan had gone out of the way to get Christmas decorations up because he understood how much it stressed her. She was tired of staying

home all the time. And it would be nice to see Belinda again. Finally, hesitantly, she called back and told Belinda they would come.

A slight bit of snow was swirling around as they arrived Thanksgiving Day at Belinda's parents house. The time with her childhood friend flew by, and before Andrea knew it, her family was saying their goodbyes and settling into their SUV.

"That was so cool!" exclaimed 8-year-old Ivan. "They are such nice people. No one seemed stressed or mad when things went wrong."

"Yeah," added 10-year-old Diana, "It was fun to be with such happy people. It was the best holiday of my life."

Andrea looked back at them in astonishment. "But it wasn't a big deal. The house was hardly decorated. The food wasn't even that great, and the turkey was really dry. And didn't you feel awkward when we had to think of things we were thankful for?"

"That was my favorite," said Diana. "When I started thinking about things I was thankful for, I started realizing how good my life is. They seemed to really enjoy having us there. I felt so loved by these people I hardly knew!"

"Why don't we ever celebrate Thanksgiving like that?" asked Ivan.

Andrea felt her defenses rising. "I can't, Ivan, not with all there is to do for Christmas. It's just too much. I wouldn't be able to get my Christmas decorations up in time, or get presents ready. It's just a religious holiday celebrated by some of the early people to come to America. It has nothing to do with us."

"Christmas is a religious holiday, too. But we go all out for that," Ivan argued.

Andrea didn't respond. She had never really thought before about why Christmas was a big deal. Could it be that the way Belinda and her family celebrated holidays was better than her frantic efforts to make the best possible holiday for her kids each year? She had to admit that everyone seemed relaxed, just enjoying each other's company. Suddenly, she was seeing through her children's eyes how her efforts to make Christmas special were instead putting the whole family on edge.

Dan glanced over at Andrea. "Honey, these people have something I've never experienced even on the best holiday. Do you think their belief in God could have something to do with it?"

Andrea's tense face softened wistfully. "I don't know. But I'll ask Belinda to help me figure it out, and maybe next year we'll make Thanksgiving our best holiday ever."