

Empty Traditions

By Teri Kistler

CAST: 2 females

Renee: A cheery Betty White-housewife; wears a holiday apron.

Chris: A harried working mom, not at all excited about the holidays.

RUN TIME: 12 minutes

PROPS

- Card table
- Two chairs
- Measuring cup
- Christmas Traditions Handbook, journal
- Wrapping paper, newspaper funnies
- Tape
- Boxes that can fit into one another when wrapped

STORY

Renee comes to Chris for a cup of sugar and displays her fanaticism about the Christmas holiday. Chris, having trouble facing the holiday, can't believe the legalism that she sees controlling Renee and offers a compromise.

THEMES

Christmas. Legalism. Change. Traditions. Friendship.

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES

This sketch works well in secular settings, such as Christmas luncheons for seniors, special programs and community theater.

Empty Traditions

(CHRIS is seated at a card table, putting the last bit of tape on a package. The table is strewn with Christmas bows, boxes, mailing supplies and funny papers, which she uses for wrapping paper. She appears harried and none-too-excited about the season. RENEE enters, a la Betty White, with a measuring cup in her hand. She wears an obnoxiously cheerful Christmas apron over a dress that looks too dressy for baking cookies. She has only one smudge of flour on her otherwise immaculate appearance)

RENEE

Merry, Merry Christmas to my friend Christine! You are a life-saver. I'm at forty-six dozen, with six to go, and I run out of sugar of all things!

CHRIS

That's overkill, Renee. Forty-six dozen?

RENEE

Oh, but I'm aiming for fifty-two. It's symbolic of the fifty-two weeks in the year. Besides, between the school concerts, the cookie exchange, the preschool ballet's Nutcracker reception and the annual Thompson Family Christmas Caroling Marathon, well, one can never be too prepared.

CHRIS

One person making fifty-two dozen cookies is just nuts!

RENEE

Oh, no, I didn't run out of nuts.

CHRIS

Hard to believe you ran out of sugar.

RENEE

It would be a tragedy if it weren't for you.

CHRIS

A tragedy? To come up short on Christmas cookies?

RENEE

To break tradition! My mother did it this way, and her mother's mother's mother. It's time-honored. It's, it's ... tradition.

CHRIS

(Discovering a small wrapped package among the wrapping paper)

Empty!

RENEE

Tradition?

CHRIS

(Picking up the larger, wrapped box)

This box. It's empty. I forgot one of the boxes.

RENEE

Oh, no, you poor thing! You were doing the box-within-a-box gag, weren't you?

(RENEE takes a small book from her apron pocket. This book is her Christmas Traditions Handbook, handed down for generations. She refers to it when necessary throughout the rest of her conversation with CHRIS)

RENEE (cont'd)

Don't tell me.

(Rapid delivery)

It would be for the middle child if he's born on an odd-numbered year. If there's no middle child, the gag reverts to the oldest child if born on an even-numbered year, or the youngest if born on an odd-numbered year. However if the youngest child ...

(Catching CHRIS' astonished expression)

Oooh, I just love that tradition!

(Scolding)

But, isn't it a bit too early to wrap it? It's supposed to be wrapped a full week before Christmas, on the twenty-first, if it falls on a Sunday, which it does this year, so --

CHRIS

-- I'm mailing it to Nathan at the base. He won't be home until New Year's Eve to celebrate.

RENEE

That's, that's just wrong. How are you supposed to follow tradition when --

CHRIS

-- Maybe it's not about tradition.

RENEE

(Appalled)

Not about tradition! Bite your tongue.

CHRIS

I'm sure it's hard to grasp, but there are people who don't quite get into the spirit like you do.

RENEE

(Hurt)

Maybe you could just lend me that sugar now, in the spirit of the season, and I'll be out of your way.

CHRIS

No, no, I can't have you leave like that. I'm just trying to think what would make this feel like a real Christmas this year.

RENEE

Well, for starters you could re-evaluate that wrapping paper.

CHRIS

The funnies make perfectly fine wrapping paper.

RENEE

You asked.

CHRIS

Fine. New wrapping paper, but no baking. Besides, under no circumstance would I ever wear an apron.

RENEE

I'll have you know that I've been wearing this apron since the annual "Donning of the Aprons" ceremony at Aunt Millie's on Thanksgiving Day. ... I could call to get the extra apron for you! We don't have anyone to wear Cousin Gertrude's since she passed over three years ago.

CHRIS

No apron.

RENEE

Let's see if it would be covered in the family bylaws.

CHRIS

Your family has bylaws?

RENEE

Doesn't yours?

CHRIS

Only in-laws.

RENEE

Let's see Shopping Apron, Gift-Wrapping Apron, Baking Apron. Oh, they've updated this. There's actually a cross-reference under "G" ... for Gertrude.

(Reads silently)

Oh! No, sorry, I can't offer you the apron. How could I forget? The family had an Apron-Burning Ceremony when she left us. Bless its soul.

END OF SAMPLE

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