

Irish Skies Are Smiling

I know, terrible, isn't it? But they really are. We're having some of the most beautiful sunsets on offer here: fire opals, every one. We've had barely a drop of rain, and it looks as though a White Christmas is right out. Oh well. It was a white Thanksgiving! We've been a bit busy here, between Christmas shopping and Dan's parents, Cathy & Michael arriving on Thursday last, so the update was not forthcoming this Monday. This'll be a dual one for this coming Monday and last.

Dan is in the kitchen making his (well, Mama's) deadly Tiramisu for Christmas Eve in Belfast. It was touch & go there for awhile. We could find mascarpone in nearly every shop & store around--Ireland is certainly a cheese capital of the world. However, the ladyfingers were proving elusive. I spent long minutes carefully scrutinizing the "biscuit" (cookie) aisle of first Tesco's, then SuperQuinns. I tried to think what kind of tea biscuit might substitute, but they all seemed wrong. Finally, as a last resort, I walked over to the new Dunnes store today. Again, I scanned the long aisle of biscuits, retreating in disgust by the time I got to the "bar" section (candy disguised as snack bars.) I scanned it twice more, then turning to go, saw the cracker and tea sections across from me and right there, nestled between, what looked like ladyfingers! I grabbed them hastily and checked the label: "Boudoir Lange Vingers 'Party Fingers.'" They looked right, but weren't the brand I was familiar with. These were made in the Netherlands and listed among their ingredients, "chickens egg." Which makes you wonder...

We also attempted to celebrate in the recent Beckett tradition of crab & fondue feasting at this time of year. The fondue pot was no problem. We found a nice one for cheap at the Argos catalogue and Dan picked it up on his way home from work. Crabs were a little more work. I found a fish & poultry shop on the main street that could get them in for us. The man first warned me that crabs would be 40 euro EACH (about \$50!) I found that hard to believe and sure enough, the lady who called to confirm the order told me they'd be 5 euro each, and that the other guy must've gotten mixed up between them & lobsters. Unfortunately, she couldn't get them for me for Christmas Eve, as "the boats don't go out then." She was unsure about getting them any later than the 17th, so we agreed on the 17th, for five crabs. She rang me to tell me they were ready, and I went down to the store to pick them up. There wasn't a tank or anything; they were just in a box in the salmon case. The shop girl, when I told her I was there for the crabs, squealed a little and said, "I just KNEW it would be me had to deal with them!" She shuddered as she cracked the box lid for me to see five sluggish crabs, and then pulled it gingerly out of the case. She was just going to hand them over, but then tied the box closed for me, giggling & skitterish the whole time. We got them home and Cathy warned me they would scream when they went into the pot, but they didn't.:) Dan manned the pot lid for me, so we didn't have a repeat of the Lyme disaster when the ones we caught went clattering all over the floor. We had a merry crab cracking party, with Dan and Michael and me, a mallet, 2 picks, and a cracker. I made some tasty little crab cakes which we had with the fondue & salad.

I sent off another belated package tonight at our local wee post office. Only one person ahead of me and friendly faces at the desk. Ah, Ireland. They crossed out the return address, and when I inquired, they said I wouldn't believe how many times the postmen don't look at the word "From" and just deliver to the first address they see. By crossing it out, it makes them take another look and try to find the word "To!" I am still mystified as to why everything at the P.O. can be paid for with cards except packages--the most expensive things you usually buy! Cash only, please.

HAPPY CHRISTMAS, EVERYONE!

There's quite a debate going on about how to wish someone Happy Holidays here, and it's not a PC question. The traditional greeting here is "Happy Christmas" but "Merry Christmas" is slowly percolating through. It's hard to find cards that actually say "Happy Christmas" anymore. We received a little lecture from our landlord, who says his brother is a relentless campaigner for retaining the old ways of saying things. Apparently, if you were so unwise as to wish him or

anyone a "Merry Christmas" in his hearing, he would hand you a little tract explaining how to wish someone "Happy" and why! It's quite common to wish everyone everywhere "Happy Christmas" in the whole leadup to the day. Today, a construction worker from Poland or Latvia greeted us with that wish on our walk! It's as if no other holidays exist here.

All for now.. have a Happy and a safe one!

Love,
Heather