

Festive Fare

Festive Fare

Here we are in the great buildup to Christmas. The lights have gone up around the town and every other vacant shop front has suddenly sprouted Christmas trees. Well, I must say, it's nice to be in the land where Cadbury makes the Advent calendars. They're nifty too--not just molded chocolate with a little picture behind. The chocolate is molded in one shape, the picture behind is something different, and then the little flap has another picture tucked behind! Cadbury is so serious about their chocolate that they have a foil coating inside each square as well. Actually, I kind of miss the cardboard taste of the ones that came from Germany. It made you KNOW you were eating Advent chocolate.

I knew it was time to get our Christmas tree when I received a call from Dan on his way home from work. He was at the shop and having a look at trees on his way to getting tickets to Narnia. He wanted to know which kind I liked. Have you ever tried to hunt for a tree over the phone? Well, we attempted... for about 5 minutes. Then we agreed to put it on hold for the weekend. In the interim, I received a tip from Marian (cousin) that there were some good trees, "Round about 20 euro, out on the bypass by the greyhound track." So, on Saturday, we parked off the bypass at what seemed to be the stables. There was certainly enough good, honest, Irish muck around! It was a stone building, built around a center courtyard, which was just open earth. I loved watching the ladies tiptoeing around the yard trying not to sink right in with their dainty shoes. I overheard a little girl dressed in riding gear announcing happily that she was lucky to be wearing wellies. Dan and I cautiously stomped right in and had a look at the lovely trees. These were the freshest, untrimmed, perkier trees you've ever seen. We decided on one about 5'10", with a perfect tall top for the angel, and no big gaps anywhere. It was 30 euro, rather reasonable for early in the season actually. Marian told me the longer you wait the better the deals get. The men working at the tree lot packed it up for us in a sort of a net bag, which made it very easy to get into the car. Luckily, we brought a tree stand with all of our stuff from the States. We've set it up in front of the right bookshelf and it's been gobbling water ever since. I re-filled it completely yesterday and again today. I love the smell of a Christmas tree. So far, the cats are leaving the ornaments alone. We put them about 3 ft up just to be on the safe side.

So, we went to see Narnia on Friday night. It was good--even great in some parts. They could've used more of Lewis' dialogue and the soundtrack was very disappointing, but the costumes and scenery were terrific. It's interesting that they filmed it in NZ though, as the research shows that we are actually living in Lewis' idea of Narnia here. The Cooley mountains and some of the castles and dolmens around here inspired Narnia, Cair Paravel, and the Stone Table respectively. These sites are only about 15 minutes drive from where we are now. Lewis grew up in Belfast. I think the movie was trying to be the Lord of the Rings instead of just being Narnia at its best.

Our last yoga class will be this Wednesday. Last week, we did a more challenging class, and it must've been showing on our faces. As Jackie looked around at us attempting yet another pose, she ginned at us: "Give it a try. God loves a try!" After class, I went out with one of the girls who sits next to me. Her name is Tina, and she and I had chatted on & off about how COLD it gets in the studio. We're fine as long as we're moving, but when we lie down for meditation afterward, not even the blankets we bring can keep out the chill. We walked down to the cafe and had a cup of coffee and a bit to eat. We talked for over an hour until she had to go to an appointment. She was born in Liverpool, but grew up in Ennis. She's taking a year off from work to settle her and her husband into their new house and to figure out what she wants to do in life. Tina has two stepsons, and has a wide range of interests. We had a lot to talk about. Hopefully, we can get together more often. She lives over in Lordship, which is on the Dundalk/Carlingford road. Irene, who invited me to tea the week before, wasn't there last week. It'll be interesting to see where I'll go after this week's class!

Malkin, our black cat, has taken to fetching lately. Often in the past, she would bring us one of her toys, mewling pitifully, but we were never sure what she wanted, as she'd look blankly at us when we tried throwing it for her. Now, she'd been bringing me twisty ties or hair bands, and when I throw them, she fetches them back! If she brings us a toy though, she seems to want to play with the cat dancer or rainbow wand. The cats are a little bored now they're inside always. Malkin will beat up Tumnus if she thinks he's butting in on her playtime.

We had a special Farmer's Market this weekend, with "Festive Fare" promised, and a 2.50 off coupon in the mail. Sure enough, we were served mulled wine (always a good thing) with a choice of Christmas Cake (the traditional, sticky fruitcake--you love it or you hate it) or mini mince pies. Jana was selling lebkuchen again and had made some special, highly addictive cookies in little packets with straw ornaments. My favorite are the vanilla/almond ones. They taste a little like the Danish sugar cookies that come in tins, but have chopped almonds on top instead of sugar. YUM! Naomi the Muffins has started up an espresso service, and we reminisced about Peet's Coffee. As of last week, she still hadn't celebrated Thanksgiving! She's got two young ones at home and is very busy. She said she's still determined to fit it in before Christmas.

OK--a last story to get in before I let you go. I was feeling restless on Friday, so I decided to ring up Jean to see if she wanted to go for a walk. (She's the American who has the two kids, Peter & Grace, that we had for dinner weeks ago.) Here's how the conversation went:

"Hi Jean, it's Heather. How are you?"

"Oh, hi Heather, I'm fine, you?"

We made some usual comments about the weather, etc.

"Great, Listen, I was just wondering if you wanted to go for a walk."

There was a pause. A rather loong pause.

"Um, well..."

"Hey, it's ok--sounds like you're busy"

"Yeah, I have things to do before I pick up the kids. Are you sure?"

"Yes, of course! You don't have to come out if you've got things to do."

"Well, I'm in Ireland. Where are you?"

At this, I Paused. And thought. And said, 'Uh, I'm in Ireland too.'

She said, "1 Rockfield Court."

I said, "I'm at 23 Rockfield Court."

Then things started to get really weird. I said, "Remember--you came to dinner here? Grace lost it?" I figured she couldn't have forgotten THAT. I really thought Jean had completely cracked up. It was definitely her American accent, though, so I couldn't have the wrong number.

She said, "Grace lost it?"

I said, "Yessss?"

She said, "I wasn't here then."

Suddenly it hit me. This could NOT be Jean. I said, "Who is this?"

She said, "Peggy. I'm staying here with Grace and Peter while Jean and Jeff are..."

"In America." I finished. Now I remembered hearing about their trip. Peggy hadn't heard my "Hi Jean" at the start of the conversation. Turns out they have a friend Heather who lives in Scotland, who's also American. We laughed and laughed and laughed about the mixup. Today, we did end up going for that walk. She invited us to look her up if we ever come to Glasgow.

I have included the picture link again, as Dada and I posted more pictures. As requested, there are some of us, also some of our trip to Newgrange & Knowth and my trip to London with Kathleen. Sorry they're all mixed up with the old pics, but for some reason, they're going alphabetically. Enjoy!

<http://becketts.ws/heather/ireland/frameset.htm>

Love,

Heather