

Christa Arnet

A Splendid Christmas

Thirteen Quirky Stories
from Switzerland

Second Edition



Sincere thanks to my family, my friends and allies for
having inspired me to write these tales.

Very special thanks to Järvi Kotkas for the skilful
translations and technical support.

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Christmas All-Year Round

My sister Susanne is a wonderful lady. She is a perfect wife, perfect mother, child-raiser, host, organiser, bookkeeper, piano player and cook. Her ironed tablecloths are silky smooth, her garden paths are spotlessly clean and her kids, of course, are the best in the class. On top of that, she is punctual to a T. As long as I can remember, she has never been one minute late. She has never postponed a job from today to tomorrow, quite the opposite: whatever could be done tomorrow, is more often done yesterday. Her tireless discipline allows her to be done with the washing one day ahead of the official washing day, pack the bags a week ahead of holidays and lay the table a day before hosting.

Hence, it is fully understandable that she used to celebrate Christmas already on the 19th of December in order to – as she said – „be ahead in the race“ and be able to spend the actual holidays in a more relaxed atmosphere. In the same vein, we found it completely reasonable to bring the celebration forward to the first Advent. In the beginning, some of the elderly aunts were taken aback and shook their heads, but soon they also recognised that this would help avoid the usual clashes of the year-end wrap-up and parties as well as the related headaches and upset tummies. Additionally, this brought along an upside that the gifts could be exchanged well ahead of the 24th.

However, the idea to start the celebrations already in November was novel and somewhat surprising even for us pragmatists. What brought everybody onside was Susanne's argument that there is a much bigger choice of gifts in the autumn and the prices are also much lower. In the end, isn't

tinsel already glittering in every shopwindow by that time, isn't the house inundated with Christmas flyers and aren't streetlights done up as a starlight show? If it is OK for a department store or street lighting, it is also alright for my sister: on 10th of November, the Christmas tree lights went on.

Having said that, it did not stay at November for long. The following year we were told that the celebration would be in September. My sister's family planned to head south for the autumn holidays and therefore would have no time to take on the Christmas preparations in October. We should respectfully understand this and appreciate that this little advance will increase the headstart for the official Christmas by another two months, which would certainly please all family members.

In spite of these undoubtedly noteworthy reasons we were a little bit disappointed at the beginning. The aunties were not the only ones looking forward to the 10th of November. Still, there was some comfort in the prospect of the forthcoming Advent season with its oldie afternoons, anniversaries in nursing homes, jumble sales, bowling nights and club meetings. So everyone arrived on the 14th of September at Susanne's beautiful home, to attend a fancy little party that was only disturbed by the noise of the roller-coasters, merry-go-rounds and shooting ranges from the nearby village fête happening at the same time.

For my sister, September remained the preferred Christmas season for some years. However, all of a sudden she replaced it with June. The advance was necessary, she explained, because it is best to buy the gifts in the summer sale and it makes no sense to hide them for weeks. It makes much more sense to celebrate shortly before the summer

holidays and then recover from the Christmas stress at the seaside.

These arguments were of course convincing. What careful planning and perceptive thinking! Now we could admit that we always did buy a towel for Susanne and rubber fins for the lovely kids in June when bargain bins and discounted prices screamed for attention.

The June parties were consequently a big success, at least in the beginning. As time passed, it became clear that this arrangement had also certain disadvantages. Above all, it was difficult to get hold of marzipan angels, let alone snowflakes. Oddly enough, the self-made gingerbreads tasted a bit gluey as well. Most unpleasant of all however, was the rude laughter of the neighbours as we sat on the balcony decorated with candles during mild evenings and sang Silent Night.

