

Party Lights

I'd just finished mowing the lawn, when my missus called out to me from the back door, 'I've been on the phone to Margie,' she said, 'and I've invited her and Reg over tomorrow night.'

'You've invited who?' I asked, closing the shed door.

'Margie and Reg.'

'But I wanted to watch the footy.' I grumbled. Why did you want invite them?

'It's for Reg's birthday. Anyway I thought you'd stopped watching footy since the six again rule.'

'I have but anything's better than listening to endless, boring stories about Reg's FJ.'

'Oh, he's not that bad.'

'Yes he is.' I said, as we went back into the kitchen. 'It's all right for you; you get the chat to Margie, I always end up with boring Reg.'

Reg is a retired mechanic, whose life had consisted of being a mechanic, having mechanical hobbies and when not involved in either of the above, reading mechanical magazines,

My missus handed me a mug of tea, with a smile. 'Maybe he thinks you're boring,' she laughed, 'and keeps talking just to shut you up.'

'Me?' 'Boring?' I challenged, with mock indignation, 'I'm the life and soul of any party.'

'Oh, right, I'll try to remember that.'

I threw a tea towel at her.

Actually to be fair, Reg is not a bad bloke but he does rabbit on and he's got one of those droning voices, which makes even interesting stories hard to listen to. The poor sod has had a bit of a rough trot over the last couple of years with his prostate; and what with Chemo, radio therapy or whatever they call it and numerous invasive ops, he's a shell of what he used to be; not that he was ever Mr Personality. He's not at all like his wife Margie, who is a giggling bundle of fun, who sees the funny side of everything and to be quite honest, although I don't tell my missus this; I reckon is bit of all right. She must have been a corker in her day. My missus met her at the craft club about a dozen years ago and they have both been regularly attending ever since. I met Reg for the first time at a Craft Open Day where the ladies display their wares and put on a bit of a morning tea for their spouses. I had hardly managed get more than a half cuppa down me, before Reg had regaled me with the story of how he'd overhauled the cylinder head of his FJ Holden, on his back porch in a howling westerly.

'So, when's his birthday?' I asked.

'It's tomorrow,' she said. 'I thought we might be able to cheer him up, help take his mind off things. Margie says the last treatment really took it out of him and all he does is sit and look sad.'

'Yeah, he looked pretty rough the other day.' I agreed.

‘OK.’ She said, ‘Why not make it a bit of a party? I’ll knock up some gourmet fare; you produce a couple of bottles of good stuff, find some sixties CD’s...and...’ She gave me one of her cheeky smiles. ‘And let’s dig out the party lights!’

‘Oh, please! Not party lights. You know I hate them. It’s bad enough at Christmas, the darn things dangle all over the place. It’s all right for you,’ I moaned. ‘You’re short; I keep banging my head on them, I’ll be electrocuted one day.’

She gave me a look. ‘So duck!’ She said.

I knew I wasn’t going to win, so I headed for the shed.

As I went through the door she called out, ‘Grinch!’

I couldn’t think of anything smart to say, so I gave a meaningful grunt.

I have to admit that my shed is not the tidiest in the world. When we moved here fifteen years ago I dumped stuff in the middle of the floor and it’s still there. I’ve forgotten what most of it is and when I die; I reckon the kids will take it all to the tip. I have to sort of manoeuvre around it, or sometimes over it to get at stuff on the shelves at the back, which is where the party lights were put or possibly thrown after Christmas.

Of course they were a tangled mess and as I took them off the shelf, one of the cables caught around a flagon that I’d used once for ginger beer and pulled it onto the floor, where it smashed into a million pieces. I said one of the words that I’d learnt in the army, before staggering around the heap in the middle of the floor, stepping over the mower and out of the door, where I dropped the lot on the ground and tried to sort them out. That’s when it started to rain.

It fairly bucketed down and within seconds yours truly and the lights were soaked. So I had to gather up the now dripping wet, scrambled mass of wet wires and globes into my wet and dripping arms and drag it around to the carport, where I paused to utter yet another word from my army days.

The trouble was you see these were the old 240v party lights; not the new, swish 12v LED type, so plugging them in when they are on the damp side isn’t a very good idea.

Anyway, I spent the rest of the day untangling, cleaning and drying them out and spraying WD 40 all over the place and when I was quite satisfied, I plugged them in and switched on.

That’s when I heard the missus call from the house, ‘Hey! The power’s gone off!’

Brilliant!

I’d had enough for the day, so I reset the safety switch, went into the house cracked a beer and told the missus I’d buy some new ones tomorrow.

Have you ever tried to buy party lights when it’s not Christmas? There are hardly any to be found and those that you do find, cost you an arm and a leg. After searching for hours, I eventually came across some in a hardware store; they were right down the back and covered in dust and although I suggested they might give me a discount because of that, all they gave me was a blank stare.

By the time I got home the missus was in a right state. 'Where've you been?' she cried. 'They'll be here in a couple of hours.'

'Don't panic,' I said, 'It's not like the Queen's coming or anything. I'll fix these lights up and then I'll give you a hand.'

Actually things went well after that, I hung the lights around the veranda where I must admit they looked pretty snazzy and the missus produced one her beef whatsits with stir fried veges and rice, which tasted awesome.

Margie and Reg really seemed to enjoy themselves, polishing off a fair bit of tucker and a few glasses of good stuff and chatting away, sharing stories about old times and how good life was then. It was a top evening, Reg never even mention his FJ.

When it was time for them to leave, Reg came over to me and said. 'You know, I really didn't feel like coming tonight. I told Margie; I don't think I can handle an evening sitting around discussing footy and the six more tackles rule.'

The missus made a noise which sounded very much like a suppressed laugh pretending to be cough. 'But we've had a marvellous time,' he continued, 'and I wouldn't have missed it for the world!'

Then hugged me and got all emotional and said, 'And let me tell you what topped the evening off for me? The party lights! I've never really liked all that kind of thing but d'you know what? They really cheered me up and after what I've been through over the last year or so and they were icing on the cake.'

Then with tears in his eyes, he hugged me again and said, 'You're real mate!'

After they'd gone and we were clearing up, the missus said, 'Why don't we leave the lights up until Christmas?'

'Yeah, they don't look too bad,' I said, 'and I suppose I'll learn to duck.'

'Come here, Mr Six Again Grinch,' she said and gave me my second hug for the night.