

What's a Silent Night?

My parents are creatures of habit, bless their hearts. They eat dinner at the same time every day, they have a strict prime time TV schedule, and it really upsets my father when I visit them and try to load the dishwasher without rinsing first. I'm not sure if their love of routine and order comes to each of them naturally (they met while they were auditors for the federal government – hot stuff!), or if it is a result of trying to corral me, my two brothers, and my sister. There are a lot of us and we ain't quiet.

It's no wonder then the Title Family is pretty big on holiday traditions. We did the advent calendar and the cookies, and my Nanny made the most amazing gingerbread houses. On Christmas morning my parents would line the four of us up at the top of the stairs—in age order—and make us wait for their signal before we charged into the family room to destroy Santa's careful gift wrapping.

Naturally, parents who are creatures of habit will pass some of that on, so it took a long time for us to abandon the top-of-the-stairs Christmas tradition. I might have been the one to put my foot down when I was in college. I mean, we were all practically adults; we didn't need to be stomping down the stairs like kids, plus, my little brother (the youngest) grew taller than my sister and me, so it was totally not fair he got to go first.

My childhood was...let's say boisterous. With four kids, plus friends and neighbors, my house was always full. It amazes me when I meet an only child. They grew up with this thing called "privacy," and they could go into their closet without finding someone younger-and-the-same-size (I'm looking at you, Sister) took their favorite Gap® Factory Outlet sweatshirt to wear to school, or that they got to shop at the actual Gap®, not just the Factory Outlet!

It was challenging writing about Billie Monroe, a holiday-obsessed vet tech and only child. With her dad frequently working late at the vet clinic and her mom out of the picture, how did this natural people-person deal with coming home to an empty house every night, and what would holiday festivities look like with only one person to trim the tree?

I figured she would fill that lonely void by sticking to tradition, even when that homemade macaroni ornament is falling apart. I just knew that big heart of hers would be open wide to every creature that needed her...two-legged and otherwise.

I had such a fun time creating Billie's misfit menagerie full of dogs and cats that nobody else seemed to want. And then I thought I should reward Billie for all of her good deeds, so I sent her a special Christmas present in the form of a cute guy with glasses who could use a dose of holiday cheer. Because that's what the holidays are about—tradition, family, and most of all, love.