

Christmas, R. I. P.

by [Armando Simón](#) (January 2024)



Nocturne in Grey and Gold: Chelsea Snow– James McNeill Whistler, 1876

The sky was grey, grey, a monotonous, oppressive, dark grey because of the winter clouds that blocked the sky from horizon to horizon, obscuring one's gaze into the bright blue above, breaking the monotony only by the wrinkles in the corrugated clouds. Making matters worse, the trees, bushes and grass had lost all color, leaving them a brownish, uniform color.

The warehouse closed early on Christmas Eve. The managers told everyone to go home early because there was nothing to do—an

excuse that none of the workers believed—but served its purpose. Just like the comment that tomorrow, on Christmas Day, there would probably be nothing to do, but whoever wanted to come to work could do so, if they wanted to. The warehouse, it was implied, would not be open. Neither “Christmas Eve” nor “Christmas” were mentioned. Those days were supposed to be just another couple of days of the week, of the month. No one wanted to say those words in public for fear of informers and retaliation from the authorities.

Yes, nobody, but nobody, wanted to land in the clutches of D. I. E. —the Ministry of Diversity, Inclusiveness and Equity. The ministry was now in charge of the renamed and enlarged F. B. I, the Federal Bureau of Inclusiveness.

So Tennessee Nelson—Tenny to his friends—got in his pickup truck and drove out of the parking lot. He was thankful for the extra time off. It would give him an opportunity to do a bit of last-minute shopping for some presents at the mall. The idea for these particular presents had popped into his mind last night and would supplement the previous ones he had bought his family. He loved buying them presents.

What a contrast to previous years! he thought after entering the mall. No Christmas decorations whatsoever—none!

And no Christmas music! Tennessee remembered how much he had despised hearing Christmas songs and seeing Christmas decorations in November, even in October. And now ... now he would welcome hearing even one song at the mall. Or a radio station.

He remembered the disc jockey who had played over a dozen holiday songs on Christmas Day last year, everything from “Jingle Bells” to “Baby It’s Cold Outside,” before the authorities rushed over and broke through the barricaded studio. It had made national news. The entire media, from newspapers to television to social media outlets, had been

outraged at this expression of "Christian Nationalism," which supposedly had been the scourge of the country from the very beginning of its existence. What the hell was "Christian Nationalism" nobody ever defined. It was just one of the unending outpourings of jargon, like "whiteness," that saturated society these days, put out by legions of sophists.

Tennessee received a message on his cellphone from Kathy, his wife, asking him to stop by the market and bring home some milk, bread and butter, if there were any available.

He finished his shopping quickly despite the crowds and stopped at the supermarket to buy the groceries. As with the mall, the store was crowded. It appeared that people were still going to celebrate Christmas, albeit secretly, regardless of both the entreaties and threats from the government, the media, and the schools.

He drove towards home, noticing how dark it was. In normal times at this time of the year businesses and homes had been brightly lit with beautiful festive lights and decorations, many of them ingenious and elaborate. Now ... nothing but gloom.

People had been cowed into submission.

"Honey, I'm home!" he announced upon entering his house, then proceeded to the kitchen to set down the groceries, just as Kathy emerged from the bedroom.

"Did you get what I asked you to? Oh, I see you did."

"What's for dinner?"

"Leftovers. I want to make some room in the refrigerator before cooking Christmas dinner tomorrow." On seeing her husband's alarmed expression, she smiled and added. "Don't worry. The television and the laptop have been turned off and unplugged since you left this morning, so we can't be monitored."

"Your cellphone?" he asked, still with that mixed expression of anger and fear.

"I turned it off and put it in your Faraday box, like you told me. Now, relax, Tenny!"

"Sorry. Where are the kids?"

"In their room. They already ate."

"Sounds like everything's ready. John and Evelyn will be here by noon tomorrow."

"Good. I hope you stressed how important it was to say nothing to anybody."

"I did. Let's eat. I'm hungry."

Non-Christmas Day arrived, a beautiful sunshiny day, cold but not too cold. The clouds had apparently decided to go elsewhere. Bright and early, their small children received their presents and were, of course, delighted. Tennessee and Kathy exchanged gifts and they, too, were glad. Throughout, they said, "Merry Christmas!"

Kathy began cooking and by noon the delectable smells of sourdough bread, cinnamon apple pie and turkey saturated the house. The scarce foods had been slowly gathered over weeks just for this holiday.

A couple like their hosts in their forties, John and Evelyn arrived. The first words out of their mouths were, "Merry Christmas, guys! God, it smells good!"

"Merry Christmas!" Tennessee and Evelyn answered back. Immediately, Tennessee's demeanor changed. "Where are your cellphones?"

"Don't worry, Tenny! We turned them off and left them at

home." Their host's mood resumed its festive outlook.

"Come in! Come in!"

"And these are for you," Evelyn said, handing them presents.

"Oh, thank you! And over here are yours," Kathy led them to a small table where their presents were. Since Christmas wrapping paper was nonexistent, they had all opted for Happy Birthday ones.

"No Christmas tree, I see," said John, but not in a spirit of chastisement.

"No," Kathy responded. "We thought about it and talked it over and we finally decided it was just too risky."

"In too many ways," added Tennessee.

"Yeah, us too," John said, "especially with Billy home from college now the semester's over. Where are the kiddos?"

"They're in their room, playing with their toys."

Men being men, they immediately plunged into politics.

"You hear Sweden, Holland and Germany also cancelled Christmas? The authorities said celebrating Christmas was 'offensive.' It was not 'Inclusive' towards the Muslim immigrants."

"Yeah, I heard," John said. "Also, Ireland and Britain. Same reason. Oh, and Canada. But the Canadian government is using the name 'dangerous Christian Nationalism' rallying cry from here." The men spoke hurriedly, trying to exchange bottled up information.

"Castro was ahead of his time. The Communists outlawed Christmas in Cuba back in the 1970s," said Tennessee.

"Really? I didn't know that," John admitted.

"Guys, let's not talk politics today. It's Christmas," pleaded Kathy to no avail. The men were on a roll.

"They're talking now about outlawing Valentine's Day," said John.

"What!" Kathy and Evelyn shouted at the same time.

"You hadn't heard? Yeah. They're saying that since Valentine's Day has traditionally been between heterosexual couples, fags and dykes were excluded for all these years, same with the trannies, so it should be eliminated since it has never been ... 'Inclusive.'"

Now, it was the women who were livid, and they expressed themselves at length.

"Hey, why not?" Tennessee finally interjected. "They did away with Columbus Day, they said Columbus carried out genocide against the Indians from Florida to Maine and all the way into Texas and Canada." He had a smile on his face since he thought it the funniest thing he had ever heard.

"And they did eliminate the Fourth of July," said John, "since we ended up with a Constitution that guaranteed freedom of speech, and anyone could now utter 'hate speech' and promote 'fascism' -whatever the hell that is."

"Say! Did you see that TV special on Thanksgiving?" Tennessee asked them, still grinning.

"Which one?"

"The one where the Pilgrims invited the Indians to Thanksgiving dinner and the Pilgrims whipped out—are you ready for this? —their machine guns—machine guns, mind you! —and killed all the Indians."

"Are you serious?" Evelyn asked, flabbergasted.

"And you *know* there are people stupid enough to believe that," Tennessee added.

"OK, enough!" Kathy imperiously declared. "No more! I won't have today soured because of those people. I won't stand for it! I won't! Please!"

Well, naturally, everyone felt sheepish and apologized. The conversation was immediately dropped and steered towards neutral topics, whereupon the temperature in the room went down.

"I think I might be able to get tickets for the Superbowl that won't cost me an arm and a leg," said Tennessee.

"Be sure it's from a legitimate source. I know someone who got scammed," countered John.

"Can I help you with anything in the kitchen?" Evelyn volunteered.

"Yes. You can help me set the table," Kathy answered.

Soon, the two couples, along with the hosts' two children were seated at the table enjoying a delicious meal. At one point, Kathy raised her wine glass.

"Happy birthday, Jesus," she said smiling. Everyone raised their glass.

"And happy birthday—" said John but was interrupted by a very loud banging on the front door. Not a knocking, but a banging.

Banging at one one's front door is never a good sign.

Tennessee got up from the table. He looked back at them. "Stay cool!" he admonished. The door banged louder. The others timidly followed him at a distance.

"Open up! FBI!"

"I'm coming! I'm coming! Hold your damn horses! And stop banging on my door!"

He opened up and half a dozen FBI agents, dressed in combat gear and brandishing deadly weapons as if they were about to face a battalion from an invading army rushed in.

"You're all under arrest!"

Tennessee was the only one who did not raise his hands. "For what!" Tennyson yelled back, arms akimbo, to the anonymous man who seemed to be in charge.

Defiance! This defiance was intolerable! This was a feeling among the agents, rather than a voiced thought. They were used to people instantly groveling in fear of them.

"For celebrating a racist holiday!"

"Oh, my birthday is a racist holiday, is it? Is that what you're saying?" Tennessee asked loudly and with scorn.

"Don't play games with me, sir! I'm talking about a Christian Nationalism holiday!"

"And *I'm* talking about my birthday, which my friends and family were celebrating and which you and your flunkies are intent on ruining for me!"

"Today's not your birthday!" the leader declared, beginning to have doubts.

"Yeah? You wanna tell that to my mother? Oh, wait," Tennessee changed to a mocking tone, "you can't. Cause she's dead and buried. So let me show you my ID." He started to reach to his back pocket but froze when the FBI death squad pointed their guns at him. For an instant, his courage left him, but with a tremendous effort he recovered.

"Relax people. Stop being trigger happy. I'm going to turn

around now, see?" he reassured them in a calm voice now as he slowly did so with his arms extended outward.

"Now ... " with his back turned to them, he slowly removed his wallet and held it above him. "See ... ? This is called a wallet. It holds money, credit cards and my ID. It doesn't kill anything, except my credit rating." He turned around. "Now, I'm opening this highly dangerous wallet and taking out my highly dangerous ID."

Some of the FBI agents were irritated at his scorn and felt like shooting him on the spot for mocking their authority, while others were amused. Still others realized they had erred and were feeling deeply embarrassed. Tennessee's friends and family desperately wished for him to tone it down but were too petrified by the whole scenario to mumble anything.

Tennessee took out his ID and handed it to the leader of the home invasion.

It was true. The man, Tennessee Nelson, had been born on December 25.

"Not the date that I would have picked to be born, but I had no choice in the matter," he now spoke in a normal tone of voice. "Now, will you please leave and stop pointing your guns at my family and friends? You're scaring the hell out of them." Most of them actually lowered their guns. "We'd like to go back and finish dinner, which is probably cold by now, and I want to get around to opening my presents," he pointed to the table behind him where the adults' presents were stacked. The Happy Birthday writing on the wrapping paper was clearly visible.

Tennessee should have stopped there after seeing the squad leader lose his determined aggressiveness, but he could not help himself and asked, "By the way, what made you come here?"

"We had a report that there would be a Christian Nationalism

meeting here today.”

“A report? From who?”

The leader knew he was not supposed to reveal the source, but he was angry at the obvious fiasco caused by the stupid snitch and said, pointing to Evelyn and John, “Their son made the report.”

They were floored at the revelation, too stunned for words. But, as before, Tennessee was the first to recover. He looked over his shoulder at the couple.

“John, your son, Billy, is A MORON!!”

He turned back to look at the agents. “When he was born, the doctors threw away the baby and gave them the placenta to raise. You can see the results.”

A guffaw erupted from several of the agents and even the leader smiled at this joke.

“Look, I know it’s hard to admit, but you guys made a mistake. Or, rather, your supervisor made the mistake. Now, guys ... will you please ... just go. You’ve done enough.”

The leader nodded and motioned to his minions. “Let’s go.” They began to leave. Just before closing the door, the leader turned, smiled, and said, “Happy birthday,” then closed the door behind him.

For several seconds nobody moved or said anything. Then Kathy walked to the window and slightly parted the curtain to look out, as Tennessee dropped to the sofa, drained.

“Tenny,” said Evelyn in a hushed, awed voice while approaching him, “that was an Oscar winning performance.”

“Tenny, my man,” said John, “you have definitely got the biggest pair of b— ” His face began to have spasms, whereupon

he rushed to the bathroom and vomited.

Tennessee just sat there, emotionally exhausted. He would tell them later he had for days considered the remote possibility of what had happened happening, and far from his performance being spontaneous, he had rehearsed in his mind what to say and do.

After all, being paranoid these days was a survival advantage.

But now he was thinking that perhaps later that day he should go over to John and Evelyn's home and punch Billy in the face. As a Christmas present.

Kathy kept standing by the window looking out. She finally turned around.

"They're all gone." She managed to smile. "Merry Christmas, everyone."

[Table of Contents](#)

Armando Simón is a trilingual native of Cuba, a retired psychologist and author of *When Evolution [Stops](#)* and *A Cuban from [Kansas](#)*.

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