Shhhh... Hear that? Me neither! Isn’t it wonderful? No iPod blaring from Matt’s room; his door no longer visibly pulsates from the pounding backbeat of what passes for music nowadays. Instead, the room is more silent than Cupcake after a heated tiff. This is because, as frequent flyers of this space (A big hello to the Alberta Insomniacs Association) may recall, Matt has vacated his room to go live with buddies in the big city. In fact, I would start referring to his room as “my den” but for the mountains of Matt’s junk that still resides inside. Plus the fact Cupcake keeps calling it “her craft room”.
Neither are there electronic voices or video game sound effects seeping from under the door of my eldest son’s room. No voluble outbursts from his World of Warpedcrap game or whatever it is he plays. The quiet emanating from his “man cave” was a constant reminder that Junior was away at some convention in Alexandria, Virginia. For a whole week it was just Cupcake and me. Together. Alone.
The situation was notable because this was Cupcake’s and my very first experience of having both our children away simultaneously since Junior first split the uprights in 1985. (Cupcake hates this natal-related sports metaphor but I’m hoping the fellas will like it.) Cupcake and I discussed the situation beforehand. She was concerned I might be a victim of “empty nest syndrome” and wanted me to share my feelings on it so we could prepare emotionally for this difficult time.
Pffft.
“Are you kidding?” I looked at her like she had grown another head. “Yes, I think somehow, I’ll be able to manage the psychological trauma and separation anxiety. After all, I’ve only been waiting for two and a half decades to have the house to ourselves. However, given my fragile psyche, I may need some extra special TLC... just to get me through the rough spots, of course.
Cupcake didn’t respond directly to my comment. Either her sarcasm detector was on the fritz or she wasn’t fully engaged in the response, a circumstance not entirely unheard of between us.
“Okay, then is there anything special you wanted to do with the kids gone?” Cupcake asked earnestly. “I have a couple of ideas.”
“Me too!” I enthused, grinning lasciviously. ‘There’s always ‘you know what’.”
Cupcake executed a perfect double-eye-roll with an audible groan thrown in for effect.
“All you think about is ‘you know what’. Well, you know what? I wasn’t even discussing ‘you know what’. I was thinking of painting their rooms, rearranging the furniture, things like that, Must everything be about ‘you know what’? If you nag me about it you can stick ‘you know what’, ‘you know where’!”
“Don’t ask questions you don’t want honest answers to,” I returned defensively. “Besides, painting and stuff are things we can do whether anyone else is home or not. I also think that if we start going through the boys’ stuff while they’re not here, rather than them seeing it as an act of love done by caring parents, they would see it as an outrageous intrusion into ‘their stuff’ and we would never hear the end of it. Frankly, I could hardly blame them. In fact, as far as I can tell, the ONLY thing that we can do differently with the house to ourselves is... well... never mind. I hate to repeat myself.”
“Oh yes,” Cupcake smirked. “You NEVER do THAT.”
The first day of our solitude came on a Tuesday. It was kind of weird having supper with just the two of us. Cupcake took a Santa candle that didn’t make it back into a Christmas tote and placed it on the dining table ‘for a romantic effect’. We made small talk, staring into one another’s eyes. We would have possibly held hands except for the sizzling wokful of stirfry between us. Then, after supper, she watched CSI until, as per usual, she began snoring in the recliner shortly before Horatio got his man (followed closely by his trademark pithy statement and dramatic sunglasses removal).
I spent my time as I normally do on a week night that I don’t have play rehearsal or darts;, surfing news sites, catching up on my online Scrabble games and generally avoiding starting on the Great Canadian Novel I’d resolved to write this year and this was mostly how it went, In other words, it was business as usual. Sure I thought about the boys, particularly Junior. Being influenced by all of Cupcake’s gruesome crime dramas, I see every square inch of the US as a hotbed of murderous mayhem and constant danger; streets teeming with violent, crazed psychopaths (as opposed to normal, run of the mill psychopaths like in good ol’ Canada) looking for visiting plump Canadians to assault, accost, mug, roll and/or steal their kidneys. There is the exception of Wisconsin, of course. (How scary can a place be whose claim to fame revolves around the production of cheese?)
Other than the odd pang of worry immediately dissipated by a quick phone call, empty nest syndrome was an empty threat. Life was largely unchanged. I was disappointed. And relieved!