

I SELL CHRISTMAS CARDS

SARAH MURPHY

I sell Christmas cards.

The suburb mall rents out a booth in the centre hall. The booth is brightly painted with the Christmas red, green and white, and clashes with the flaking peach colour of the neighbouring jewellery store. The old man, the owner, the only employee of the jewellery store sets the time of the decorative clocks, the grandfather clocks, the coo-coo clocks, every afternoon at two o'clock according to radio time. I have never witnessed the sale of one of the old man's clocks. He loves them too much, polishes them, whispers to them, speaks of them as progeny, scaring agitated Christmas shoppers away from the display. Instead, townspeople turn to cheap trinkets deprived of value or the less bit interest or allure. The old man is amiable to parting with these. They will take their place beneath the tree, be unwrapped, marvelled at with insincerity, and be returned to their box, set in a dresser drawer and left there between socks and other personal items until they are found and acknowledged, commemorating Holiday Seasons past.

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I sell Christmas cards for charity. Most of the cards I sell are blank. Maybe that explains why the townspeople do not coo at them as they do for the big card company cards. My cards invite thought and sincerity. I think townspeople fear thought and sincerity. It would be sacrilegious to go beyond the polite but insignificant, "Holiday wishes from all of us. . ." or the, "Have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year." What message graced the cover of the first Christmas card? And what if cards were no longer sold with greetings? Children are always so eager to pick out cards for their parents. Husbands are always so undecided when picking out cards for their wives. I like to help them.

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My grandmother keeps every Christmas card she

receives. My grandparents ran a foster home for several years. Almost a hundred children ran through the halls of my grandparents' house at one time or another. My grandmother receives hundreds of cards every Christmas, from her children and from other townspeople's children. She keeps them in shoe boxes in the hallway closet. Most are of similar shape and message, some are even identical, yet to her they are all different, unique, and therefore they are treasured. Together they document part of her and my grandfather's life. They commemorate not only Christmases past, but birthdays, first days of school, Thanksgivings, Halloweens, Valentine Days, broken hearts, scholastic achievement, friendships, and all the other forgotten moments of the lives of these children within the wall of her home. Until recently she replied to every card she received. "Why?," I would ask her. "To thank them for their love, their laughs," she would answer. "To thank them for sharing their childhood with your grandfather and I." Now my mother and I help her with her Christmas Cards.

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I once sent a Christmas card to a boy, a friend. "Big Love" proclaimed the card, opening up to reveal the formulaic season's wishes. I don't remember what I wrote in the card. Its message seemed appropriate at the time, but I don't think the boy understood. Maybe I should have sent a blank card. Maybe I should have written my own, sincere Christmas wish. I still see the boy now and then, but our words are usually as polite and deprived of sincerity as the words in the Christmas cards I sell.

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But I don't think I will be sending Christmas cards this year. I have grown to dislike the taste of the glue on the envelope and on the stamp. I have grown to dislike the after-taste of Christmas wishes.