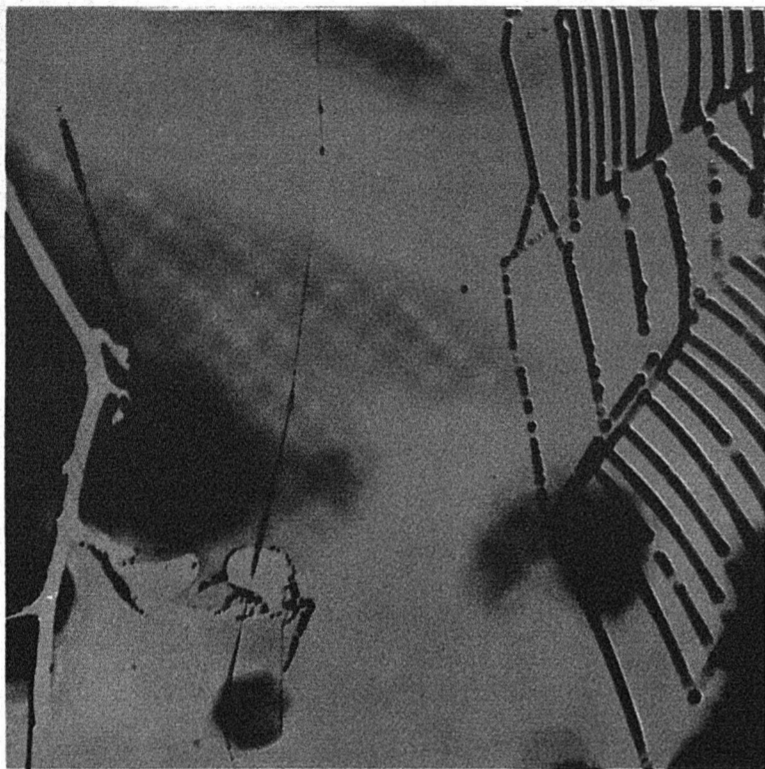


MORGAN'S CHRISTMAS

COFFEE SPOONS

by David Schleich

photo by
George Drohomirecki



Morgan (my pet spider) goes all out at Christmas. He's utterly traditional and utterly festive. Mention any sort of festival or celebration (especially Christmas) and in a flash out come his dancing slippers, his mandolin, his cigars and his unending supply of *Fidelbrant Brandy*. All I said to him yesterday was, --Well, guess I better get my Christmas preparations underway.

And Morgan was off and running! By supper time he had his web tinkling and sparkling with bells and angel hair and icicles and stars and a complex and colourful pattern of lights. And somewhere, dark and far inside his web, his record player chimed *Adeste Fidelis*. When Morgan finally relaxed his pace I noticed that he was wearing the new, red toque I had bought him for Christmas last year. A white ball dangled at the end of it. --So,

he began, puffing proudly on his cigar with one leg, raising his glass of *Fidelbrant Brandy* in cheer with another and sorting his dancing slippers with yet another leg,

--we begin! Top of the season to you, old boy.

I laughed, of course, amused by my little friend's premature exuberance.

--But Morgan, I began, Christmas is still a couple of weeks away!

--Tsk! Tsk! That's no reason to stop celebrating! Not enough festivity in your bones. Come now, have a toast with me.

Not wishing to upset Morgan (he can become very moody when disagreed with) I drank to his health, to the season, to his brother Clive, to his sister Molly, to his Mother and to his Father. Morgan drank toast after toast. Shrewdly, I sipped at my single drink. Slowly Morgan became Maudlin.

He began to reminisce about Christmas "back home" with his family when he was young. As he talked he puffed his cigar, drank heartily and rapidly from his bottle and tapped his slippered feet to *Deck the Halls*. His eyes glistened. His web bounced to the beat.

--I remember, he said, when we all used to string popfly all over the web (sniff); Mon and Dad and all the kids and I. Clive and I'd get to string the lights. We used to stay up for nights gathering fire-flies for the web. And when it was all done Dad'd give us all a chocolate ant or maybe a fruit fly for a treat. Those were the days. We really appreciated our treats then. Then we'd sing songs around the Christmas web, leg in leg, all together. Gosh (sniff) it was wonderful. All together in the old days. And now . . .

At this point Morgan began to cry profusely. Enormous drops of water spilled onto and doused his cigar. In the background *Jingle Bells* echoed as a tear drop dangled from a strand of Morgan's web near my desk. You can well imagine that I was quite upset about my little friend's distress. I decided immediately to contact his family and to arrange a gala Christmas reunion at our place.

When I got back from telephoning telgrams to Morgan's relatives I found him sitting, sobbing, staring blankly at a picture of his Mother and Father. Until yesterday, I had no idea how lonely Morgan really

was, alone in his web by my desk. Somewhat slyly I decided to let him remain sad. I intended the family reunion to be an enormous surprise for him. I set about quickly to plan meals and accomodation. You can also imagine my consternation at having to locate chocolate ants, pecan butterflies, sweet and sour moth wings, seasoned wasp eggs and baked thorax halves at this time of year -- everything being out of season and all.

Needless to say, I had immense difficulty locating the pecan butterflies. The sweet and sour moth wings were simply not in season nor were the baked thorax halves. I had to settle for sugared cicada, powdered mantis antlers and diced housefly legs. It was immeasurably difficult to hide those festive treats from Morgan. Most of them had to be refrigerated and Morgan is and incessantly compulsive midnight snacker. And Clive, Morgan's brother, almost ruined everything when he called one day to say he couldn't make it Christmas Eve. Morgan had just picked up the receiver when I got to the phone. I took it from him rather brusquely, just in time to hear Clive's raspy voice on the other end.

Soon Morgan quit wearing his dancing slippers. Then he stopped smoking his festive cigars. Finally he stopped drinking evening toasts of *Fidelbrant Brandy*. Two days before Christmas, the music from somewhere deep inside his web stopped. Morgan sat glumly near my desk reading *Playbug*.

--Aren't you going to hang up your stocking? I asked him, setting down my book.

--No, came his terse reply.

I knew right away that Morgan was still upset. But I also knew that any minute now his family, if they'd followed my instructions carefully, would come bounding and dancing under the door to cheer up their lonely Morgan and to help celebrate Christmas 1971. And sure enough, just then the doorbell rang.

--Would you get the door please, Morgan, I asked, feigning works at my books.

He glared at me. Dropped his magazine and grumbled all the way to the doormat.

But in they streamed. Molly, his sister, tripped on the doormat. But in a few minutes everybody but Clive was spinning around Morgan showering him with gifts, chiming Christmas cheer, hugging him and taking off their boots toques, scarves and ear muffs. Sister Molly had brought her new beau, Melvin. And Melvin had brought six fifths of *Fidelbrant Brandy*.

Instantly the celebrations began. Morgan dashed into his web. Suddenly *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* bellowed out from Morgan's record player. Melvin poured drinks for everyone. Even Morgan's Mother had a toast. We all drank to Morgan, to each other, to the Queen, to her husband, to her son, to her daughter, to Premier Loughheed, to Margaret Trudeau, to Jean Genet and to the three Wise Men. We sang carols, ate treats, made wishes, danced, put up our stockings carefully at the fire place, watched a small fire dancing and sparkling up the chimney and finally, just after nine o'clock, far past Morgan's bed time, we all retired, happy, exhausted, anxious for Christmas morning. The fire hummed low and glowing in the fireplace. Morgan was immeasurable happy. Except for Clive's not being able to make it, the evening was a complete success. Morgan thanked me, tears in his eyes.

We would have slept, I think, until morning easily except that near midnight Morgan woke me. He claimed he had heard thumping sounds on the roof. I laughed, of course, and told him to go back to web. But suddenly an enormous crash emanated from the fireplace. Dust, ashes, cinders, stockings flew everywhere. Molly screamed. Melvin cursed and reached bravely for a pencil on my desk. The dust and din slowly cleared. We watched, terrified, breathless, confused, half asleep.

--CLIVE!! shrieked Morgan.

Suddenly the whole family raced toward the fireplace. There was Clive, Morgan's belated brother, dressed from cephalothorx to abdomen in red. On his spinnerets he wore fur-topped black boots. On his back he carried what appeared to be an enormous sack. His red toque hung unevenly over his eye.

He was rubbing at his eyes to clear cinders and dust. By then we were all around him, laughing, excited, almost dancing with the activity. It was then I noticed Clive's wry, sagging grin. Even I could detect the unmistakable odor of *Fidelbrant Brandy* on his breath. Clive's Mother frowned. Clive looked up at her and then to his Father. Then he stood up. He swayed under the heavy load. He was smiling from leg to leg. He raised a half-full bottle of *Fidelbrant* above his head, did a little jig, and shouted,

-- MERRY CHRISTMAS, EVERYBODY!

Tricky little Devils

Ken Russell's film of *The Devils* opens with an elaborately "decadent masque, in which the bisexual King of France portrays the birth of Venus for the benefit of a bored but courteous Cardinal Richilieu (played, interestingly enough, by the English poet Christopher Logue.) A good deal of the film looks like this masque: seeking a style in excell, being visually exotic and dramatically extreme. But by the time one has survived through plague victims being "cured" by hornets, hunchbacked nuns being exorcised with vast syringes, and a bravura performance by the makeup man on Oliver Reed's burning face, one's reaction is rather like Richilieu's - a yawn. "Boring" is scarcely the word to apply to a film where so many startling things happen so quickly; "tedious" is perhaps closer to it.

But beyond this level, Russell has about two other films going on as well, and since they demand a more naturalistic style than the grand and deliberate excess of the rest, the film splits down the middle. There is what looks like a character study of the central character, Grandier, and Oliver Reed's excellent acting almost carries this off. But Russell doesn't give him enough time, and soon we're back among the cavorting nuns and the gleeful priests finding carrots in unexpected places. The character of Grandier finally gets completely lost among a string of heavy platitudes about the freedom of the individual and some incredibly bad cigarette-commercial footage of his ladylove walking through fields of yellow flowers.

Basically, Russell doesn't know what he's doing. Is this supposed to be a stylised masque of Hell? - if so, it's a tedious idea realised. Is it supposed to be a character study of an individual man? - if so, it's a good idea vitiated by the total unreality of the style. Is it supposed to be a political film about church, state, the use of power, the freedom of the individual? - if so, it's a cliched idea ineptly handled. Is it supposed to be a mixture of all three? - if so, that's an absurd idea and maybe, just maybe, Godard might have handled it, but Ken baby, you ain't no Jean-Luc.

by Stephen Scobie.

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