

## BOAS FESTAS, AMIGOS!

I, too, have had my swim on Christmas Day, have watched the leaves of the Royal palm arch overhead and have felt the heat beat in upon me.

When I flew in to Rio de Janeiro, it was two weeks before Christmas. A time to be together - with friends - preferably in one's own home. The Brazilian cost of living made an apartment unthinkable and I went to hunt for a room with a Canadian friend from the Embassy who spoke Portuguese. At least, I thought she did!

The second place we visited was an apartment on Avenida Atlantica, the street that follows Copacabana beach for so many blocks. The room had heavy dark furniture, a small verandah door instead of a window and the boom of the surf outside was enticing. We understood there would be three girls in the apartment and felt that living with "Cariocas" would help us to learn the Portuguese language and might provide opportunities for meeting Brazilians. I moved from the hotel the afternoon of December 24.

### ADAGIO

When I arrived the apartment seemed to be full of people - an elderly lady flitting back and forth across the living-room, a fat young man in bathing trunks, a cadaverous young man in the kitchen, two or three girls including Annamaria my land-lady.

On Christmas Eve I attended my first midnight mass in Brazil in the famous old church of Nossa Senhora da Gloria. We presented a more sober-looking group than the Brazilian women, so festively chic were their hats. High up in a little balcony the violins played solemnly then gaily. White flowers were massed at the altar and spread around the church. After the service we walked carefully down the steep cobblestone road to look for a community taxi.

In the early hours, while it was yet dark, Canadians from the Embassy or on scholarship joined in a *reveillon* and thought of home - Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto.

Through the courtesy of a Canadian, I was included in a Christmas luncheon party at the home of the U.K. Chargé d'Affaires. We had been invited to come and have a swim before

lunch. Somehow in the water one forgot the heat and remembered the friends from External Affairs who had written about their Christmas swims. I felt like a Roman.

The group invited for lunch was mainly British. A few gathered around a piano and tried out the familiar carols. Their white dresses softened the heat of the room. Outside someone was talking of India, someone knew someone who knew someone. We were all being frightfully, frightfully - and I felt as if I were in the wings of a Noel Coward play.

The main course for Christmas lunch included large mounds of rice, surrounded by shrimps in a special sauce. On top of the rice were little slivers of turkey. A reminder?

### ANDANTE CANTABILE

Brazilians do not celebrate Christmas as we do, but I had thought perhaps, for my second Christmas in Rio, we could have a Canadian Christmas. I had a brave paper tree, tinned Canadian fruit pudding and a French demi-tasse coffee cup for the friends with whom I shared an apartment. I explained how we liked to decorate our trees and when we opened our presents. There was a strange air of waiting and unease. The little tree stood in fancy trappings on the sideboard but no one seem to care.

Many well brought up young Brazilian ladies attended the convent school of Notre Dame de la Sion. Through a cousin, we were all invited to the midnight mass there on Christmas Eve. I shall never forget the golden glow from the altar in the chapel where so many candles were lit, nor the girlish voices singing. Two Canadian Nuns had been with this school for over forty years. I had met them previously when they came in to our Embassy to enquire about passports. They had come to Brazil before there was any need of a passport. I felt their work must have been inspiring in such a place.

As we came home from Midnight mass the velvety black surrounded us, circlets of pearly lights surrounded the still-awake bays in the city, a breeze touched the tops of the palm trees and a new moon was in the sky. I thought of Bethlehem and wondered if palm trees waved when Christ was born.

On Christmas Day I was told that my Brazilian friends had lost a very close relative. My cup was put with great acclaim in the china cupboard, among the better cups. I noticed that it was