

BARBWIRE

By Barb Lumley

A NIGHT TO REMEMBER

I could hear the clock chiming the eleventh hour as I wrapped the warm scarf around my neck, pulled on my heavy denim coat, my boots, toboggan and mittens. As I stepped outside and quickly closed the basement door, keeping in the warmth of the wood burner, I was met by huge snowflakes falling softly to the ground.

As I looked up at the stars the flakes fell on my face and quickly melted. There was a crunching sound from the ice and frozen ground as I made my way to the barn for the last check of things on this winter night. The light of the moon created a sparkle on the snow that looked like diamonds.

As I opened the door and flicked on the light I was greeted by all the normal scents that come from a dairy barn. The familiar odors are welcome ones, as they are the first sign that all is well. There is a warmth in the barn, as we like it that way and keep everything well ventilated. A visit to the hay mow located over the cows would find the moist warm air rising by way of the air shafts and hay chutes. Keeping the barn comfortable has never caused any health problems. A check of the various thermometers shows the temperature to be right where we want it. I can remove my heavy coat and work comfortably in my flannel shirt. I grab a fork and go to work putting hay back in the mangers and shaking some straw under the cows.

There is a quietness here in the barn at night in spite of some of the movement from the animals. There is an occasional cough or the sound of a neck tag or ear tag bumping steel bars. There is the sound of running water as a cow gets thirsty. Many of the cows are lying down, chewing their cud and taking advantage of this time to rest. A few are on their feet and munching on bright green hay. A handful of that hay smells so good! One of those munching away is "Mama-Red". She likes to do her eating while the other cows rest and let her be. She has such a sweet, quiet disposition and doesn't like to have to fight her way in or be bothered by the other cows. Doing things her way will keep her a part of the herd for eighteen years!

Curled up in the straw in a corner is a pile of cats, cuddling close together to keep warm and cozy. The pile is filled with different colors, calico, tiger, brown, black and white, yellow, grey.... all blended together. A couple of them raise their heads to look but there is no offer to rise and greet me. The mice will be safe for a few hours!

In a box stall a new baby is found sleeping soundly in the straw under the mother's watchful eye. Tomorrow will be soon enough to separate them. We cannot help but wonder about the effect that baby could have on our lives in the future. There is no way of knowing, we can only hope there will be good things to come from this birth. The pedigree is a good one.

The last few days have been filled with the hustle and bustle of the season. So many things to get done, so many places to run. Decorating, shopping, baking, wrapping, parties, company coming, practice for programs at church. Last minute details! It has been non-stop! Tomorrow will be a day filled with happiness, fun, laughter, reliving old memories and making new memories to be treasured in the future, as family and friends gather for the occasion. On this late night there is a need to just sit down on a bale of that green hay, a need to just breathe deep and forget about the worries and problems of the world. It is a good time to reflect on the pleasure and joy that comes from the life that has been chosen. This is a special place where peace and tranquility surrounds you. It is Christmas Eve on a dairy farm.