**“The Italian Family Christmas Tree Challenge” by Rita Watson (2014)**

The upside down wedding cake chandelier adorned the entrance parlor in Gram and Grandpa’s house on the water. Each year on the first week of December, Grandma would send us to the attic to bring down boxes of Christmas ornaments so she could decide how many new snowflakes to crochet for the tree, which was always under the chandelier. Then she would sigh, “Watch how Papa is going to say, “Annunziata, it’s in everyone’s way.”

By the second week of December, Grandma sent Grandpa and his brothers to cut down a tree so it could “settle” into the parlor. One snowy afternoon we waited for the tree to arrive, but Grandpa pulled the car into the side garage. Then we heard him on the stairs stamping snow from his boots. When Gram opened the door, he said, “Nancy, before we bring in the tree, I have something to say. The tree farm would not allow any cutting down of small trees, just one big tree.”

Gram suspiciously went to the windows to catch a glimpse of what Grandpa’s brothers were bringing into the house. “Mamma Mia,” she cried out. “That tree belongs to ‘Jack and Beanstalk.’ How will it fit under the chandelier?”

As his brothers set to work fitting the tree onto the stand, they moved directly to the semi-circle of window seats. Gram cried out, “No, not there.” But Grandpa surprised and stopped her. “Look. I bought you a beautiful white tree with bubbling candle lights to put on your table in the center of the parlor.”

Before she could say a word, a white tree with attached tiny candlestick lights replaced the vase of flowers. Then Grandpa went under the table to the central floor plug, and with a flip of the switch, colors danced on chandelier crystals.

Grandma was so overwhelmed that she said nothing. Then there came another surprise. Onto the tree that touched the ceiling the men strung white snowball bulbs made by the Sylvania Company. Once plugged in, the snowballs changed into an array of pastel shades. “These are the future,” Grandpa said.

“Nancy, you always tell the children that every problem has a solution. This is our Christmas solution — one tree for you and one for me.” Then he went over to her, pinched her cheeks into a smile, and gave her big kisses.

Grandma grinned saying, “Now, enough kisses, Anthony. I’ll have to get busy crocheting. Our first floor-to-ceiling tree will need twice as many snowflakes.”

Then to us she said, “You see, just when you think your husband never listens, one day you find that he hears you after all. You just need to be patient.”  \*