

December News



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Hey {{ contact.FIRSTNAME | default : "there" }}. How are you?

I've obviously been really busy since my last newsletter, which was sent out in September (my favourite month). Since then NaNoWriMo has been and gone, for which October was stupidly busy as I tried to clear the decks in advance.

I did get most of the work out of the way in time for NaNo, but I also ended up finalising a book edit too, so that the client could have it back and in production by Christmas.

NaNoWriMo

For NaNo this year, I chose to write Book 2 in the project management series. It should have been Books 2, 3 and 4, but there was enough material to finish a draft of Book 2 and even add a few bits to all the other remaining books in the series.

I still have Chapter 15 to draft of Book 2, but I'm delighted to say that I was a NaNoWriMo winner again this year and I'm proud that I didn't cave in to the pressure of client work.



The book, *Project Management for Writers: Gate 2 - Who/Where*, is due to be published at the end of January, and will be my first publication of the new year. Once Chapter 15 is done the first draft can go to my project management consultant (erm, that'd be Ian...) to see if he wants to add anything.

Exclusive short story

This month's short story is currently exclusive the newsletter. It will be published on 19 December, ahead of Christmas, and is the last book I'm publishing in 2022. I hope you like it. It's a thoughtful tale, also I hope.

Other news

We've both been quite poorly over the past few weeks. We've both had the flu, and I always brag that I never get the flu and always refuse the annual flu jab. Unless it starts to make a regular appearance, though, I think I will still refuse the jab.

Catch up with the blog

There has been lots happening on the blog in between the last newsletter and this one. Follow [this link](#) to see what else I've been up to.

Currently reading

I'm currently reading *Coming Home to Mistletoe Cottage* by Celia Anderson for NetGalley.



I've had to force myself to read this one as it is all in present tense. I'm really not comfortable with anything written in the present tense and just want to hurl it across the room. If it's done well then great, but I still don't like it very much.

I'm also struggling to like most of the main characters. They all seem to be very selfish and I'm hoping they all undergo some sort of transformation as we move further through the story.

What are you currently reading?

A vegan Christmas

I'm well aware that not everyone celebrates Christmas, but we do. Do, however, feel free to skip this section.

We had our first celebratory outing on Wednesday of this week when we went to see Bad Manners in Doncaster. Buster Bloodvessel hasn't been feeling very well this week – I daresay he's had this flu that does seem to be going around – and some of his band felt they had to come out early and give us a few cover songs.

When Buster did come on stage, we could tell he's been struggling with his throat. But he still put on a good show, did one extra song to what people have been reporting so far this tour, and everyone in the audience had a fantastic time.

Before the gig, we went to have a meal at Pizza Express, which is our favourite sit-down eatery.

It was really nice to get out when we've both been busy or poorly, and it was fun to see a band that wasn't Monkey Dust (Ian's band). (Although Monkey Dust, of course, remain my firm favourite.)

For Christmas Day this year, we're definitely being joined by the mother-in-law and Son #2. Son #1 is also expected, and there will be extra chairs, should they be needed, for the sons' partners. Both lads tend to do something different on Christmas Day to what their partners do, but the girls are both welcome at our house as well.

Son #2 is vegan, although he did say that he would just be veggie for Christmas Day so that we wouldn't have to go out of our way. We've told him, though, that we're already looking forward to trying something different, and I've found recipes for vegan bread rolls and a vegan yule log.

His dad has yet to decide what to give him instead of turkey, but we can all have the soup and we may just do a vegetable gravy instead of a meaty one. And... Morrison's, our local supermarket, does vegan pigs in blankets! So we're almost sorted.

Merry Christmas!

All that leaves me to say now is that I hope whatever you do, you have a wonderful time and, for those who do, have a merry Christmas and a happy New Year!

Here's your free short story

Wordsworth Shorts



- Diane Wordsworth -

the little orphan girl

The Little Orphan Girl

December 1950

Peggy opened the door to the cupboard that was built into the wall and felt the heat from the hot water tank. It was so cold everywhere else in the orphanage that the blast of warm air was comforting. She placed the sheets, freshly pressed, onto one of the shelves and closed the door.

“Brrr!” she said out loud as the usual chill in the corridor nipped at her nose.

She quickly checked both ways. If one of the sisters had heard her she would have faced detention and been forced to write one hundred lines: *I will not talk in the corridor.*

Thankfully, none of the nuns was there, but nor was anyone else for that matter. Peggy did not possess a watch. None of the children did. Instead, they all relied on the striking of the clock in the courtyard to tell them the time. Certain that she had a few minutes yet before she was expected at

morning mass, she opened the door again, climbed onto one of the shelves, and pulled the door behind her.

The smell of freshly laundered linen drifted around her with only an ever so faint whiff of mildew. It was the middle of winter so the laundry workers had to dry the sheets on wooden racks suspended from the wide, expansive ceiling. And while the sheets were perhaps not the softest, Peggy snuggled into them in any case, careful not to disturb the pile.

Peggy had been at the orphanage for just over ten years. She had been four years old and her mother had been killed in a summer air-raid in Birmingham when the munitions factory in which she worked suffered a direct hit. For the next two months, Peggy was passed between neighbours, but when the message came through that her father was missing in action, presumed dead, the authorities came and removed her from the people she had known all her life, and they placed her in a cottage home until a more permanent placement could be found. That placement turned out to be an orphanage run by the Sisters of Charity on the outskirts of Coventry. Peggy moved in on 20 November 1940, just three months after the devastating air-raids on Birmingham had changed her life for ever.

That night, Peggy's first with the Sisters of Charity, the German Luftwaffe dropped at least five hundred tons of high explosives on the city of Coventry. None of the children went to bed that night, instead hiding under tables in the mixed dining room. As thirty thousand incendiaries landed, children screamed and cried at the noise. Peggy didn't know any of the nuns' names yet but one, who she later discovered was Sister John the Baptist, lifted Peggy onto her knee and soothed and rocked her from side to side. Hot tears streamed down the child's face, but at least she had stopped howling with fear now.

There was an almighty crash that shook the building, immediately followed by another.

"If we can hear the bombs," said Sister John the Baptist in her soft, Irish brogue, "then they haven't got us yet."

She smiled down at Peggy and wiped the girl's tears from her face.

After a while, one of the boys crawled out from under a table. "I've had enough of this!" he shouted in a Brummie accent that warmed Peggy's heart. "Who fancies a song?"

Amid cheers of agreement, the boy, who was aged about twelve, went to the old piano and opened the lid. Then he bashed away at the keys, some of which were slightly out of tune.

"Pack up yer troubles in yer ol' kit bag!" he sang. "And smile, smile, smile."

Soon everyone in the room was joining in, even the nuns, and the younger children gradually calmed down.

The following morning, after eleven hours of relentless bombing, the nuns took their charges outside to survey the

damage. The home itself had taken two hits during the night. One in the girls' exercise yard, which left a huge crater and had scarred the tarmac, the other on a home where some nurses lived. Other than that, they'd all come off unscathed and with no injuries whatsoever. The nurses in particular had been very lucky.

The children and the nuns could feel the heat on their faces from the city as it continued to burn. It was only a couple of miles away. What should have been a cold, damp autumn day instead felt like a balmy day in spring. The only thing to spoil the illusion was a thick pall of black smoke that hung over the city, turning day into night.

Peggy slipped her hand into that of the nun closest to her. Sister John the Baptist, who had looked after her the night before, pulled Peggy towards her into a hug. Then they continued to watch the city of Coventry burn. When they went back inside, everyone attended a mass of thanksgiving that they had been spared and were all still alive.

Peggy's father did not return after the end of the war, so here she was, ten years later, preparing to leave the orphanage in January, when she would be fifteen, to start the next phase of her life.

Suddenly, the clock in the courtyard started to strike eleven o'clock, startling Peggy from her reverie. She knew she was already late for mass. Nevertheless, she slid out of her hiding place and walked as quickly as she could towards the chapel. Another thing she did not want to do was write out a hundred times *I will not run in the corridor*.

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The next day was Christmas Day, a day that all the children adored because once they'd finished their chores they could take the rest of the day off. In the summer, Peggy worked in the orchard, picking apples. In the winter, she worked in the laundry. Some of the children scrubbed the floors; others bathed the younger ones or helped to teach them how to read. Apart from their early finish, there were small gifts as well. Perhaps a scarf or a warm pair of socks or mittens.

During the war they had each received a handkerchief, made from old sheets too worn to go on beds, and an orange. The boys also received a table-tennis ball or some jack-stones. The girls received marbles, or dolly pegs along with scraps of fabric they could make clothes for the pegs with. Sometimes, the girls and boys would swap their gifts. Peggy never swapped her dolly pegs, and she practised her embroidery by adding a 'P' to her handkerchief in chain-stitch. For nostalgia sake, and to remind them, the children still received those same gifts along with their small item of clothing.

Once the gifts had been opened and the Christmas meal had been eaten in the mixed dining room, everyone gathered around the old piano - now retuned - and sang Christmas hymns and carols. The rest of the day was their own, and this year it was Peggy's last at the home. She returned to her bed

in the older girls' dormitory and added her new dolly peg to the nine that 'slept' in her bedside drawer.

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Once they reached the age of fifteen, the children moved away from the children's home, usually to a boys' home on the outskirts of Birmingham or to a convent to continue their education. Some went back to family, now that they could earn their keep and contribute to the household coffers. Others entered a life of servitude or perhaps an apprenticeship where living quarters were included.

Over the years, all of the children gradually left and all of the nuns gradually retired until eventually the home was closed down completely. It re-opened temporarily, as a hostel for unmarried mothers, closed down again, then re-opened as a residential home for the elderly, with some of the current residents returning to the place where they'd grown up.

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### December 2022

Sister Margaret walked briskly along the corridor despite her years, holding a pile of newly pressed sheets under one arm and clutching a walking stick with her other hand. She would be eighty-seven in January and they had finally convinced her to retire to a nursing home built especially for retired nuns. She opened the old cupboard door to reveal an opening built into the wall where a hot water tank used to live. These days the central heating and a combi-boiler made the old hot water tanks redundant and they were all eventually removed.

As she started to close the door, Sister Margaret paused, looked one way then the other, then opened the door wide again and crept into the space that used to house the tank. Her old bones would not allow her to climb up onto one of the shelves as she had done when she was a child. She breathed in to smell the freshly laundered linen.

Peggy would miss the place that had been her home for such a long time. As one of the girls who went to the convent for further education, she decided to stay and become a nun, completing her training before gaining experience all around the world. Then she had returned to the Sisters of Charity Home for the Elderly, both to live and to work. Even her family of ten dolly pegs had accompanied her everywhere she had been.

"And they will come with me now," she said out loud. She clapped a hand over her mouth. *I will not talk in the corridor*, she thought to herself. Then she laughed, adding, "I certainly won't be running in the corridor either."

the end

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## Diane Wordsworth

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