

January News



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Hey {{ contact.FIRSTNAME | default : "there" }}. How are you?
Happy New Year!

This is my first newsletter of the new year and I'm starting as I mean to go on, trying to hit that deadline of the last Thursday of the month.

Much of what's been going on has been documented on the blog, but for those of you who don't visit the blog very often, [here's the link](#).

We had a raving busy Christmas. We too three weeks off and were working solid for two of them getting the house ready for visitors. For the third week, we dossed and chilled. We both went back to work on 3 January, and it's been wall-to-wall work since then.

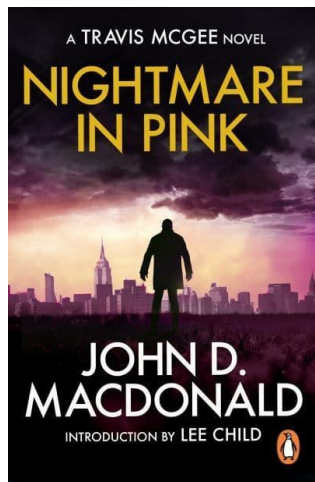
Publishing news

Project Management for Writers: Gate 2 - Who/Where was supposed to be published at the end of January, but it was delayed by the other party a little, so I started to edit the next book in the Diary of... series instead, *Diary of a Pussycat*. This was also due out on Monday 31 January, but as usual, other things got in the way and now it might be a couple of weeks later.

I'm still working on it, though and, hopefully, one or the other – or both – will be released very soon.

Currently reading

I'm currently reading *Nightmare in Pink* by John MacDonald.



This is Book 2 in MacDonald's Travis McGee series. I'm reading it for me, not for NetGalley or anything.

Many of the online writers' workshops I'm doing are with Dean Wesley Smith, and he recommends that all mystery writers read Travis McGee, so that's what I'm doing and, so far, I'm loving it.

What are you currently reading?

2023 Writing Challenge

My challenge to myself last year was to publish 52 books in 52 weeks, but as I'd already started that in October 2021, I didn't want to give myself another challenge on top of that to start in January 2022.

In October 2022 I met my challenge and added another two books to the mix, just so I had a nice round number for the gallery of covers. Since October, I've been chomping at the bit to get on with another challenge, and that finally arrived a week ago.

[Deadlines for Writers](#) is a community that is run out of South Africa. They have lots of hints and tips throughout the year, and they also have these writing challenges: 12 short stories in 12 months; 12 poems in 12 months; and 52 scenes in 52 weeks. These challenges are accompanied by live classes, for those who want to attend them.

That's not all they do, though. Throughout the year they also run things like 30 days of flash fiction, or 30 days of dialogue, or 30 days of show don't tell, and these usually run for a month. In the short stories group alone there are currently more than 2,200 members. Membership is free, but you do have to join in order to take part.

On a whim, I joined the community and had a look around, and I joined the 12 short stories in 12 months challenge. My

first class was Tuesday just gone, and my first submission was the day after. All of my planned work was pushed aside so that I could meet this challenge. I didn't want to fail in the first month, despite having something like 20 days less notice than other people on the challenge.

Anyway, I did it... I might have cheated a little bit by using an existing story I'd already started to work on. But I still had to type up a good draft, proofread it, make any revisions and send it off. *Autumn Fayre* ran to precisely the required word-count of 1,200 words, and it's up there in the stories to read.

We're expected to submit one short story every month and comment on at least least four other stories each month. The prompt for February was released this morning, and that one has to run to 1,250 words.

So far, these are two good lengths for other markets I write for and I'm hoping the feedback will prove useful.

Wish me luck!

Here's your free short story

Wordsworth Shorts



- Diane Wordsworth -

arriverderci roma

Arriverderci Roma

"No wonder this holiday was so cheap," grumbled Gaynor. "We've had the noisiest hotels, the lumpiest beds, and the most limited choice of food. They've already broken one of our lovely new suitcases. And if Roma tells us her Rome story once more, I really do believe I might scream."

Her husband, Keith, nodded his sympathetic agreement.

'This holiday', their second honeymoon now the kids had all grown up, was a Grand Tour of Italy. And it had, indeed, undercut every other tour operator by more than £400. But they'd always wanted a coach touring holiday and it was like a dream come true for Gaynor when she discovered there was a holiday they could actually afford.

"We have seen some nice places, love," said Keith. "And we've had terrific weather so far."

"Yes, we have," she agreed.

"And we have nice travelling companions."

Just then Effie's face appeared at the gap between the two seats in front of them, and she smiled encouragingly.

"Most of them," whispered Gaynor when Effie turned to face the front again. Her husband was right. "But when we still couldn't get any sleep in that pretty Swiss chalet because of that blummin cockerel, seeing that broken luggage strap this morning made me so cross."

The suitcases were brand-new, but someone, probably a hotel porter, hadn't taken as much care as perhaps he should.

"The case can still be secured," soothed Keith. "And we'll get it changed on the guarantee when we get home. Relax. Enjoy the holiday." He squeezed her hand and she smiled back at him.

"You're right," Gaynor agreed. She snuggled down in her seat and watched the Italian countryside speed by. This was definitely the life.

The coach microphone crackled into life and there was an audible sigh from practically all of the holidaymakers. The peace was about to be shattered. Roma, their tour guide, was about to display her complete lack of local knowledge once again.

"So," she said. She always started with an enthusiastic 'so'. "Wasn't Florence lovely?" They all knew that she would wait forever for everyone to agree with her, so they did, without conviction. "Did we all buy some leatherware at those fantastically low prices?"

"Yes," they lied.

Every shop they had been to so far was allegedly offering huge discounts to everyone on *this* coach tour. It didn't take anyone long to see that the prices had in fact been inflated. And heavily too. A simple visit to a similar shop in the same street solved that one for them.

"We are now travelling through some of the Italian countryside," continued Roma, unnecessarily. This was probably the limit to her expertise. "On the right you can see vineyards. Aren't they lovely?" She waited for the required response. "The Italians grow grapes in vineyards like these all across the country. Then the grapes are made into wine. So, on the right," she paused for impact, "Italian vineyards."

"That girl's wisdom is astounding," said Effie, dryly. Effie had 'attached' herself to Gaynor and Keith on the very first day.

The microphone thudded into silence, and again there was a coach-sized sigh. Roma had decided not to go into her story, they concluded...

...They were mistaken.

The microphone was switched back on again. "Roberto, our driver..."

"I think we know he's our driver by now," hissed Gaynor, more to herself than anyone else. There were some stifled sniggers in the seats closest to her and Keith.

"...has asked me to put some music on..."

Effie's face appeared at the gap. "I do hope it isn't the Wandering Italianos again," she said.

It wasn't Effie's lucky day.

"You all know the words to this one," said Roma. "And you'll meet the Wandering Italianos on our last night in *Roma*." She rolled the 'r' and pronounced the name with a flourish, just like a real Italian. "*Roma* really is a beautiful place," she continued. "My parents honeymooned there and I was conceived. So they named me after the city to remind them."

Roma switched the microphone off and the tape on and the coach filled with the too-familiar music.

Arrivederci Roma, sang the trio. 'Goodbye Rome.'

Effie's face reappeared at the gap. "I don't know how my poor ears will cope with this loud music," she said. "It's my tinnitus, you know."

Keith and Gaynor exchanged a look and then both stared out of the window at the vineyards.

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"So, wasn't Sorrento lovely?" asked Roma, pronouncing the name dramatically. She waited for everyone to say yes. "And wasn't Capri beautiful?"

"Yes!"

"The beautiful *Isola di Capri*. So there we had the lovely Sorrento and the beautiful Capri."

The coach sighed.

"If you look straight ahead you can see Mount Vesuvius, or *Vesuvio*. Everyone thought that *Vesuvio* was a dead volcano, and then one day it erupted, burying the ancient cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum for centuries. So, straight ahead, the peak," she paused, "of Mount Vesuvius."

"Wasn't Capri lovely?" asked Gaynor of her husband.

"Don't you start," laughed Keith.

"Oh, but it was. I wish we could have stayed on the island overnight, instead of that nasty, noisy hotel in Sorrento."

"It would have been nice," agreed Keith.

Roma was putting on a tape. "You all know the words to this one," she began.

"Oh God!" groaned Keith.

"*Roma* really is a beautiful place..."

"Can't she learn a new script?" hissed Gaynor.

"My parents honeymooned there..."

*Arrivederci Roma*, sang the Wandering Italianos when she'd finished.

Effie's face appeared at the gap. "I don't know how I'm going to sleep with this racket," she said. "That hotel last night was so noisy. If I don't have a good eight hours sleep I shall get one of my headaches."

Keith and Gaynor looked at each other and then looked out of the window at the long-dead Vesuvius.

"We have an hour in Pompeii this morning," said Roma a

short while later.

"Only an hour?" asked Hugh from the back. Hugh and Della were on their honeymoon.

"I thought we had a tour of Pompeii," added his bride.

"You do. The tour lasts about forty minutes and then you have leisure time."

"Twenty minutes' leisure time?" scoffed Hugh. "We won't have time to do anything."

"Will we see the amphitheatre?" asked Della.

"No," said Roma, exasperated. "We have a very long drive this afternoon, because tonight we will be in *Roma*." Her voice took on a nostalgic tone. "*Roma* really is -"

"Yes, yes," said several people all at once.

"If we all go to the amphitheatre after the tour," said Gaynor quietly, "Roma and Roberto will *have* to wait for us."

"That's a good idea," whispered a voice from the seat behind. "I'll pass it on."

As the coach trundled to a standstill outside the ancient city of Pompeii, Roma started again.

"Please make sure you use plenty of sun cream in Pompeii. There is nowhere to shelter from the hot, midday sun."

Effie's face appeared at the gap. "I don't know how my skin will cope with this sun if there's no shade," she said. "It's my skin cancer, you know."

Keith and Gaynor didn't bother with the look this time. They simply gathered together their things for this morning's visit.

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"So, wasn't Pompeii lovely?" asked Roma, awaiting the obligatory reply. "But you were all very naughty going off like that. We could have lost our departure slot."

"It's a blinkin' coach not a plane," grumbled Keith.

Roma continued. "Thousands of years ago *Vesuvio* erupted, covering Pompeii, and Herculaneum, with dust. So, that was the historic city of Pompeii, buried," she paused, "when Mount Vesuvius," another pause, "erupted."

The whole coach didn't sigh this time. They'd stopped listening.

"And now, to get you in the mood for *Roma*..."

Arrivederci Roma...

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"Three nights are definitely enough," said Gaynor as they got ready for their last night in Rome. It was very hot.

"Yes," agreed her husband. "And it was just our luck to get a room overlooking the late night piano bar."

"Mind you," said Gaynor, "I was so exhausted last night I slept anyway."

"I would have slept better if the air conditioning unit wasn't broken," said Keith.

In the coach on the way to the restaurant, Roma gave everyone a rundown on the next few hours. "The Wandering

Italianos will serenade us throughout our meal. Then there will be a chance to buy their tape or CD. At the end of our evening, the trio will escort us to our coach.

"As we always come here on our last night in Rome... er... *Roma*, they sing us a special rendition of *Arrivederci Roma*, because we are saying our own goodbye to *Roma*."

"In our dreams," muttered Keith, to the handful of now-customary sniggers from the closest seats.

"And the Wandering Italianos are also saying goodbye to *me*," gushed Roma. "It always brings a tear to my eye. So, to get you in the mood..."

"She's not playing it again?" exclaimed Gaynor.

"Maybe she's on royalties," mused Keith.

*Arrivederci Roma*, sang the group.

Effie's face appeared at the gap. "I don't know how I shall manage with all of this rich food tonight," she said. "It's my hiatus hernia, you know."

Keith and Gaynor simply looked at the blackness outside their coach window.

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"So," said Roma the following morning. "Wasn't *Roma* lovely?"

"Oh do change the record, love." That was Hugh.

"Now you know you're all supposed to say yes," she replied. "We'll try again, shall we? Wasn't *Roma* lovely?"

"I've had enough," said Gaynor.

"Me too," replied Della.

"Shall we take a vote?" asked Keith.

"Roberto!" called Hugh. "Stop the coach, there's a mate."

Surprisingly Roberto did exactly as he was asked.

Moments later the coach pulled away again, but Effie cried out with indignation: "I don't know that we should have done that," she whined. "I'm not sure my heart will cope." She turned to Gaynor. "It's my heart murmur, you know."

"Stop the coach!" shouted Gaynor.

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Roma could not believe that they had abandoned her. On the roadside, for heaven's sake. In the middle of nowhere. Oh, all right. Perhaps it wasn't the middle of nowhere. They'd not long been on the road and there were plenty of shops and cafés she could call into. Nevertheless, she started to cry anyway. But then she noticed that Roberto was slowing down again.

It was a joke. A silly prank. Of course they wouldn't *really* leave her. She wiped away her tears with the back of her hand, picked up her luggage and ran towards the now-stationary bus, still some distance away.

A woman climbed down onto the road, followed by Roberto, who dashed around to the side locker. He retrieved a suitcase, dropped it on the tarmac, and made his way back to his seat.

Just as Roma reached the coach, he closed and locked



the door behind him.

“I don’t know that I shall be able to walk very far,” said Effie to Roma. “It’s my varicose veins, you know.”

They’d left her with the tour hypochondriac. How could Roberto do that to her?

“Come back this instant,” yelled Roma as Roberto slowly drove away. The two women could hear the rest of the coach singing.

*Arrivederci Roma ...they sang.*

the end

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## **Diane Wordsworth**

Rotherham, England

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