

Festive News



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Hey {{ contact.FIRSTNAME | default : "there" }}.

How are you? Are you ready for the holidays?

We're not really. We still have gifts to buy and wrap. We still have the Christmas shopping to do. But we know who's coming, we have hampers ordered, and we do have a few gifts. Just not all of them.

Cards have been posted, but we still have family cards to deliver and cards to the neighbours to write.

The year has flown by. It only seems like the other day that we were starting out in 2023, and here we are at the end of it again. Blink, and you miss it. I hope that 2023 was kind to you.

We both break up on the Wednesday before Christmas, giving us just four days to get everything finished. But we're not back at work until 2 January, so it will be a nice break, during which we hope to have at least a couple of wintry days out.

The bit in between Christmas and the New Year is when I do my planning for the coming year. Readers of the blog will already know this. If you'd like to join them, [the link is here](#).

Short n sweet this time, but I did want to quickly touch base before

finishing for the year.

Whatever you're celebrating, I hope it's a good one. See you next year!

Newsletter & magazine archive

[Here's the link](#) to the newsletter archive, where you can also download the pdfs. After 28 December, the magazine pdfs will also start to appear here.

Here's your free short story



Happy Christmas, Santa

It was Christmas Eve and Faye had just been to *Toby's*, an expensive jeweller in town, to pay the last instalment on Billy's Christmas present. It had cost a fortune and he wasn't really into jewellery, but he'd already told her he'd like a nice slide for his tie for when they went out. Faye knew he'd adore the eighteen-carat gold ornament with the diamond-encrusted initials F&B entwined on it. It was something they'd discussed. She couldn't resist it and ordered one straight away on instinct. They didn't keep them in stock as they were classed as personalised.

But now it was ready to take away. The young shop assistant wrapped the gift beautifully, first in a little cardboard box and then with *Toby's* own personalised gift wrap.

Faye clutched the box in her sweaty palm and thrust it deep into the pocket of her old faithful winter coat. Luckily, as she waved goodbye and left the shop, there was a bus just pulling away from her stop. She jumped on it, just in time, and chose a seat about halfway along. It was only a single decker but there weren't many people on it. Most shoppers were probably still in town looking for last-minute presents.

As she sat there on the bus, trundling over the bumpy, uneven

road surface, Faye's mind drifted back to the jewellers. She remembered the chests and windows full of trays of lovely rings, engagement rings. It would be really nice if that was what Billy had in mind this Christmas. After all, they had been together for three years now!

She glanced around the bus at her fellow passengers to see if she recognised anyone.

She didn't know the young mother battling with two very excited, very hyperactive, children. It seemed they'd just been to see Father Christmas. No such thing, of course, but it was such a shame that the children should have to find out one day.

Nor did Faye know the little old lady with the two white poodles. Poor things, they'd just been clipped, and in the winter too! Faye shivered at the thought and snuggled down into her lovely coat.

Two rows in front of her sat a familiar bulk. He was wearing a thick, dark grey woollen overcoat and a very strange red and white furry hat. Oh yes, there were always loads of these around at this time of year, but this one was different somehow, more luxurious, expensive even – and it sparkled too. Must have been the wet air outside making it shine, the atmosphere clinging in droplets to the Santa-hat.

Whoever it was, he was probably drunk, or a Christmas strippagram perhaps, keeping the silly hat on while he travelled on the bus. Maybe he was just cold, for he nestled deep inside the coat and looked half asleep.

When she got up for her stop Faye tried to get a better look, but his collar was turned up against the elements and his already well-hidden face was turned to the window as he stared long and hard at the view outside. Just as she was jumping down from the bus, however, she caught sight of more Santa-hats on the back seat, but it was too late for her to see if she recognised anyone there.

It wasn't until Faye got off the bus, though, and walked a few yards down the road that she noticed the package had gone. On inspection of her well-worn coat pocket she discovered, with dismay, a huge hole.

Not to worry, she thought. It would be in the lining somewhere. She examined the lining but there was a hole in that too. The next step was easy. Faye panicked!

She rifled through her handbag and shopping bag in the vain hope that she might have placed it elsewhere subconsciously whilst dreaming. But no packet. She scoured the pavement and rummaged through the gutter. Fortunately, there had been no snow yet, although it had been forecast. Nevertheless, it still didn't turn up.

The package definitely wasn't in the vicinity, so Faye crossed the road and waited patiently for the return journey of the bus on its way back to town. If it wasn't on the bus, then it must be at the shop.

Presently the bus returned, and Faye climbed on.

“Has anyone handed in a small package?” she asked the driver who simply shrugged his shoulders. “Well do you mind if I check under the seats then?”

“You'll have to pay your fare.”

“But I paid my fare earlier. I only want to see if I dropped a small package, then I'll get off...”

“It's the insurance, see,” grunted the driver. “Ain't insured if you don't pay your fare.”

“But...”

“Rules is rules, sorry.”

Yeah, thought Faye snatching at her purse. You really look sorry. “And a Merry Christmas to you too, pal!” she said. But the

driver just shrugged and pulled away.

Faye felt a complete idiot crawling around the dirty floor and up the aisle, searching beneath the seats. She was certainly getting some weird looks from the festive passengers on the now full bus. But still no package.

Faye was certain she had the box with her when she left the shop earlier, but just to make sure, when they got to town she went in. "Did I drop my package in here earlier?" she asked the young lad.

"Not that I know of." Seeing Faye's disappointment, he continued. "Or at least no one handed it in."

"Oh," said Faye.

"You're welcome to have a quick look around if you want."

Faye smiled bravely and proceeded to search the floor, behind the door, under the mat...

"You bought the diamond initial tie slide, didn't you?" Faye nodded. "Been very popular that particular range. Your diamonds were insured..."

"Does that mean I can get another one?" she asked brightening briefly, but the lad shook his head.

"Sorry, but even if you could, you'd have to order it. We don't keep the personalised stuff in stock I'm afraid, except for the display ones. No, you'll have to fill in a form." He handed Faye the piece of paper. "And you'll get a full refund once they've processed it."

Well, that was something at least.

"Would you like to buy anything else instead, for now?"

"Sorry, no money."

"Oh well, have a Happy Christmas anyway," said the lad. Faye knew that she wouldn't. She didn't even have enough money to buy Billy a box of chocolates.

Faye thanked the young assistant for his help rather dejectedly and plodded homeward in the fast-receding daylight.

As she reached their house the promised snow began to fall and a soft, warm glow welcomed her through the front window from the dancing living room fire.

Billy had put the tree up, decorated it and built the fire, and then fallen asleep in the armchair. Faye took in the scene. As she removed her coat, Billy stirred, and some soot tumbled down the chimney.

"You're home then?" he asked.

"Mmm."

"Where you been? I was starting to get worried."

"You really looked worried," she snapped but then reminded herself that wasn't fair as it wasn't Billy's fault she'd lost his present. She was about to apologise when she noticed the tiny gift-wrapped box in *Toby's* own wrapping paper suspended from a branch on the tree. Then she noticed the dark overcoat and Santa-hat strewn across the settee.

"You were on the bus!" she accused.

Billy gave her a sheepish grin. "I didn't think you'd noticed, you were in such a dream, thought I'd got away with it."

"But..."

"I couldn't believe it when I saw you go into *Toby's*. I didn't want to spoil your surprise so dived into the nearest open doorway so I could make my getaway before you emerged. Unfortunately, the old bloke thought I looked a bit suspicious so I had to buy one of those silly hats.

"I escaped just as the bus pulled up outside. Thought I'd missed you too till you climbed on at the last minute. But, like I say, you were in a dream. Thought you'd seen me as you got off, though. I

was sitting at the back.”

“But the present...” she pointed to the parcel on the tree and noticed there was an identical one hanging next to it.

“Yes, fancy us going to the same place.”

“But I lost it.”

“Yes, yes, 'course you did. Where you been anyway.”

“Looking for the present.”

“But it was here, on the table.”

“It couldn't have been.”

“Well it was.”

Faye must have dropped the package and Billy picked it up, but he didn't want her knowing it.

“Why didn't you get off at our stop then?” asked Faye.

“Cos I didn't want you to see me.”

Faye remembered the matching packages from the jewellers and grinned.

“Can we open our presents now?” she asked, excited about trying on her new ring.

“If you like,” he replied, retrieving them both from the tree. “It is Christmas Eve. Hope you like it.”

“You too.”

As Billy opened his parcel a wide grin spread across his face.

“D'you like it?”

“Just what I wanted. Come on, it's your turn.”

Faye tore frantically at her own present, eager to see if the ring would fit.

It wasn't a ring but something much nicer. There, on a soft nest of white cotton wool, lay a beautiful eighteen carat gold chain with the diamond-encrusted initials F&B entwined on it. They could wear the matching pair later on in the evening at the Christmas party they were going to.

“I was going to buy you a ring,” said Billy. “But I didn't think you'd like that as much, and you always said what a nice idea the initials were.” Okay, so he still didn't know her as well as he liked to think, but the necklace was lovely.

“This is perfect,” she said running into his arms. “Happy Christmas, Billy.” As Faye hugged him tightly she glanced over his shoulder through the window.

Standing beneath a streetlight, in the softly falling snow, was an old, grey-bewhiskered, slightly plump man. He was wearing a dark grey woollen overcoat and a very strange red and white furry hat. There were always loads of these around at this time of year, but this one was different somehow, more luxurious, expensive even – and it sparkled too. His hands were stuffed into the pockets of a red suit he wore beneath the overcoat.

His withered features crinkled into a big, beaming smile and he winked before turning and walking into the night.

“And a Happy Christmas to you too, Santa,” whispered Faye.

the end

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