
February 2026 News



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To Diane <diane@dianewordsworth.com>
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Hello friends! How is everyone? Welcome to the February newsletter.

apology...

First of all an apology to everyone who received the January newsletter twice.

My interface kept showing it as December 2025 (copy), even though I'd changed it to January 2026 and sent the one headed January 2026. However, when I went back to it, it was still saying December 2025 (copy). I tried to change it again, but it sent itself again.

Actually, it probably didn't send itself, it's more likely I hit the wrong button. But you get my drift!

It seems to be correct now, so again, apologies to everyone who received it twice.

news...

I've been hinting at some news on the blog but I've not gone into detail on there yet as it's too public, I actually have 2 lots of

news to share this time...

home...

The house hunt is progressing and we've had an offer accepted. But I don't want to jinx it before all the necessary searches have been carried out. I'm really superstitious about getting excited about something that may still never happen. BUT...if this one falls through, we're still house-hunting.

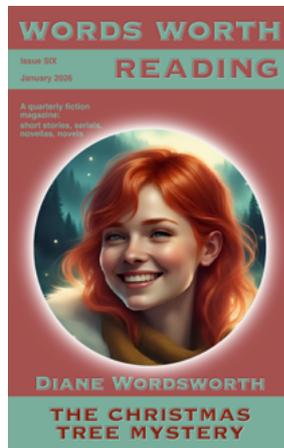
dogs...

We still have both dogs, but it's very likely Hawley will be going back to his previous human at the end of the month. As with everything else, though, he's still ours for as long as he's here.

publications...

In January, I published *Words Worth Reading: Issue SIX* and the standalone short story featuring Marcie Craig, *A Day at the Races*.

Coming in February are another Mavis Braithwaite adventure, *Deadly Deeds in Morecambe Bay*, and a very short story, *Valentine's Date*.



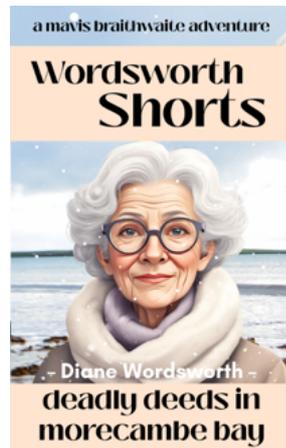
A Day at the Races was completed for 12 stories in 12 months, but *Deadly Deeds in Morecambe Bay* was originally done as an assignment for one of my WMG workshops.

Valentine's Date was a reworking of a short story I first sold back in the 1980s to *True Romance* magazine, back when the *Argus* magazines monopolised our newsagent racks.

Who else remembers the Argus publications?

When I submitted the original story, it was to a magazine called *Just Seventeen*, which had only recently come out and was paying a lot more than all the other magazines at the time, £100 per 1,000 words. NUJ rates.

Oh, the heady days of £100 per 1,000 words!



I'd been bombarding the poor fiction editor at least every week, and when she actually rang me up at work, I thought it was to beg me not to darken her in tray ever again.

In fact, she wanted my permission to submit it to a different magazine.

Just because it wasn't suitable for *Just Seventeen* (later *J17*) didn't mean it wasn't a good story. But because the story would be going via her, they would pay the same rate as *Just Seventeen*.

And I got £135 for it. Back in about 1987.

A few years later, I reworked the story for the first time and sold a different version of it to *Guide Patrol* magazine, for about £100...but that's a whole new story for another time...

Now the story has been reworked again and it did appear back in *Twee Tales Twee* and *Twee Tales More*. I have no idea why I didn't publish it as part of my publishing challenge in 2022.

publishing rights...

I only offered what was then known as First British Serial Rights, meaning they were only buying the right to publish it for the first time in Britain.

Back then I'd also offer First North American Serial Rights for stories that were doing the rounds. In fact, we just changed the name of the

country or the continent we were sending them to.

Once I'd been in the business for a few years, I learned to offer First Serial Rights instead, meaning markets were only buying the right to publish my stories for the first time anywhere in the world.

That was back in the day when writers were valued as much as any other contributor to a magazine or market. The internet and the world wide web changed all of that.

Plus too many writers too eager to give their work away just for the kudos of appearing in a magazine.

Because I held onto my rights, I can publish as many versions of this story as I want. And I can get paid for it every single time. These days, writers seem to be too happy with a one-off payment of £25.

If they're lucky.

Here endeth today's lesson.

health...

Readers of the blog will know I've been having light therapy treatment for my skin three times a week. Most of the time it seems to be working, sometimes it seems to take a couple of steps backwards.

We extended the original eight weeks to ten, and those come to an end around the middle of the month. At my currently last session, the nurses will assess my skin and decide if they want to offer me further treatment or not.

The most important thing is they're certain there's nothing sinister going on. They just don't know what to call it or what's causing it. I think they have it down as 'psoriasis and eczema', but I think there's also a big question mark there.

that's it for now...

That's all for now. Until next time...

Diane

links...

Don't forget, you can read my (week) daily blog [here](#), access the full newsletter archive to date [here](#), and *Words Worth Reading* magazine [here](#). Follow me on Patreon [here](#). And all of my books can be bought [here](#).

here's your next story...



As with all Aces in the Tarot, the Ace of Wands is all about initiating a new venture or the excitement of starting something fresh. But the suit of Wands signifies energy and action, it signifies doing. Therefore, the Ace of Wands isn't just about dreaming, it's about doing too. It's about doing something about it.

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Rebecca Stevens was certain there would be some junk inside this old shed worth selling. Naturally, she'd seen the dilapidated outbuilding when they first moved in, surprised it hadn't been cleared out properly. But then the previous resident, sadly deceased, had apparently been quite an elderly lady. Perhaps she'd simply not had the time or the energy to clear out the shed before it became too much for her. Then again, Rebecca hadn't felt so inclined either and she'd been there long enough now herself.

It made Rebecca wonder about the loft too, another space they'd not really explored. Heck, they still had packing boxes lying around unopened and some that were regularly dipped into but still left half-unpacked. They simply hadn't had the time to investigate all of the dark and dusty tucked-away corners. There could be treasures all over the old house, treasures she could quietly sell, behind her abusive partner Martin's back, and add to her slowly increasing escape fund.

Mind you, her life couldn't be that bad she reasoned, having been reminded of that often enough by her neighbour Cathy, who she had very quickly made friends with. Like her, Cathy was tied to the house, though not because she too had a husband who didn't like her to go anywhere, but because she was a young mother of three children all under the age of four. The kids were far too young for Cathy to make new friends at

the school gate, but she had been very happy when Rebecca moved in next door, and even happier when she realised Rebecca didn't have a job to go to either.

So the two unlikely women had formed an equally unlikely friendship, each providing a lifeline to the other for completely different reasons.

"If it's really that bad," Cathy had argued once again, "how come you haven't left him so far?"

"Because I can't afford it," Rebecca had replied.

"Then it isn't that bad, yet."

And perhaps Cathy was right. But it really wasn't that easy when you honestly had no place to go and not even a bank account of your own.

Martin had very quickly taken advantage of Rebecca's previous debt status, first encouraging her to add her name to his existing account and then to close her own once she'd cleared her debts. She did still have one bank account left, though. A basic account the NatWest had given her when she hit rock-bottom that she'd never used in the end and totally slipped her mind until they'd started packing. It didn't have anything in it, though.

Martin had supported her while she did clear the debt, but he made sure she never forgot. And when she lost her job at the steelworks, he got used to having her at home doing all the cooking and cleaning, where he could keep an eye on her. And he got steadily worse, steadily more controlling.

On another occasion, Cathy had said, "In our mums' days, you'd go to a hostel and have done with it."

"Or they just tolerated it and suffered in silence," agreed Rebecca.

"But they don't seem to have hostels any more, or not for single childless women."

"No, Cathy, they don't. Single mothers get given houses these days, and they have hostels and refuges for battered wives."

But Rebecca wasn't a battered wife. In the first place, she wasn't a wife, and in the second, Martin was much too sly and clever and calculating to do anything so physically obvious. He preferred to inflict mental torture, a secret oppression, one that was difficult to prove.

"They call it domestic mental abuse you know, Rebecca. There

is a legal term for it now."

But Cathy was right. Maybe it wasn't bad enough yet for her to leave, regardless of the money situation. And yes, many other women did have it worse than her. Far worse.

However, Rebecca wanted to make sure that when it did get bad enough, and she was sure that it would, that she wouldn't have to worry about money or the lack of it. The escape fund was building up ever so slowly and was automatically paid into the previously forgotten bank account.

Now Rebecca was tackling the shed at the bottom of the garden to see if there was anything she could salvage or do up and sell on Ebay. Cathy let her use next door's broadband on an old laptop she didn't use any more, and she'd bought her a cheap mobile phone that she topped up for her too. Everything was done via email so Rebecca didn't need to worry about letters coming to the house and giving her away if Martin saw them first.

The shed was so old that the door was already almost off its hinges, taking Rebecca by surprise and grazing her shoulder when it fell onto her. It was light enough for her to prop out of the way against the fence. Then she had to negotiate several heavy-duty cardboard boxes filled with empty flowerpots and trays, laced with cobwebs and coated with dust. The flowerpots could go into the plastics recycling bin, she thought.

There were stacks of boxes, all coated in a thick layer of dust, so she methodically started to rummage through them each in turn.

The first 'treasure' she stumbled upon in a sealed cardboard box were some old sepia photographs in plain and ornate plastic frames, just like the ones her own great-grandma used to have. She watched enough daytime television to know that if the frames were Bakelite, they might be worth a few bob.

Then she found an old telephone made from the same material, but black, still with the original twisted cord attached. If that could be adapted to fit a modern BT outlet, and if it still worked, that might be worth a few quid too.

Every little helps! sang the supermarket jingle inside her head.

There was also what her great-grandma would have called a wireless, with a knob missing and no plug on the end of the frayed cable. And right at the bottom of the box she found an old biscuit tin with some bangles and buttons in and an old toffee tin with some dice and some tiddly winks. And there was the missing knob from the radio. All Bakelite.

Someone had known to keep all of these gems together. Even the tins were probably worth something.

Under an old bench was another box, but this one was purpose-made to hold seven-inch singles, with a little carry-handle on the lid. The catch was rusty, but Rebecca could tell by the weight that there were records inside. She'd fetch some WD40 next time.

The record box was on top of another larger cardboard box, and this one contained seventy-eights, of all things. Wow! Would she find an ancient gramophone in here too? Or a television? She doubted it, the shed wasn't that big. But it was fun fantasising anyway.

When she placed this last box to one side and stood up stretching, she noticed an old briefcase on the bench beneath a broken window. There was no glass in the pane and no shards to be seen. And this briefcase was relatively clean. There was no dust, there were no cobwebs, but it was rain-splattered. It was also quite modern, with combination locks.

"That's interesting," she muttered. "You can't have been here for very long."

She sat back on an old galvanised bucket, hoping it wouldn't give beneath her weight, and placed the briefcase on her knee.

"What if it's drugs?" she wondered out loud, trying the catches. Hmm, it was locked. But Rebecca knew that if she pressed the outside of the combination lock in, she could change the code. The locks snapped open and she lifted the lid, revealing bundles of scruffy twenty-pound notes.

"Wow!" she said for the second time, this time out loud, feeling the weight of one of the bundles in her hand. She flicked through the notes with the tips of her fingers, as if assuring herself it was all money and not paper in between. Checking several bundles, she was shocked to see it was indeed all money.

She sat staring at the cash for several minutes when the church clock interrupted her. It was five o'clock. Martin would be home in half-an-hour and he'd expect his dinner on the table. Rebecca glanced down at herself. She was filthy dirty and her hands and fingers were smudged and grubby. She didn't have long to clean herself up, so she quickly arranged the shed back to how she hoped she'd found it, propped the door back against the door frame, and dashed inside.

Someone had been in that shed more recently than she'd

originally thought and she didn't want to arouse any unnecessary suspicion.

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The next morning, as soon as Martin left for work, Rebecca was back in the shed counting money.

The notes had paper bands around them in one-thousand-pound bundles. Every five bundles had another paper wrapper around them but in a different colour. There was no writing on the bands, just a different colour for each of the two sums – red for one thousand pounds, and white for five thousand-pound bundles. There were four five thousand-pound bundles and three loose one thousand-pound bundles, plus a few loose notes left over.

"Twenty-three thousand pounds!" exclaimed Rebecca. "Thank you, Cosmos!" That would do the escape fund a world of good and was the answer to one of her prayers at least.

Where did the money come from? Who did it belong to? It couldn't be Martin's. He wouldn't have let her scrimp and scrape to clear her debts if he had thousands of pounds lying around, wouldn't have been able to resist having something else over her.

Perhaps it was from a bank robbery, and they'd left it here and planned to claim it at a later date. Or maybe it belonged to the little old lady's estate and no one knew it was there. Whichever, it was Rebecca's money now, and she had every intention of using it.

Next to a pot-bellied stove she found an old-fashioned footstool with a lift-up lid and a single pull-out drawer. The upholstered top had cigarette burns in it and a few of the buttons were missing. She emptied out the cash and stuffed it into the top of the footstool, placing the briefcase back in its original place beneath the broken window.

The pull-out drawer in the footstool had just a key hole in it and no key. But it wasn't locked. She found the key inside alongside some scraps of cloth, a couple of thimbles – cheap metal ones – and some cotton-reels with rusty sewing needles stuck into the thread.

One of the scraps of cloth was actually a deep red velvet and, on closer inspection, turned out to be a small bag with a drawstring at the top. It felt as though there was another bundle of cash inside, and Rebecca pulled out another little bundle wrapped in deep red silk. But it wasn't money, it was a pack of cards – a deck of large, old-fashioned playing cards. However, when Rebecca turned the pack over they weren't playing cards at all, and a shiver went down her spine.

"Tarot cards," she whispered.

In her imagination, the Tarot cards whispered back at her, causing pin-pricks of sweat to tingle on her arms and in the small of her back.

The facing card depicted a disembodied hand sticking out of a cloud holding on to a wooden stick with leaves growing out of the top. Along the bottom it said: 'ACE of WANDS'.

Rebecca quickly wrapped the cards up in their red silk, pushed them back into the velvet bag and pulled the drawstring tightly. Then she shoved the bundle back into the drawer and slammed it shut. Piling boxes of flowerpots in front of the dralon footstool, she told herself to forget about the cards.

As she made her way back to the house, Cathy's words once again rang in her head: "It isn't that bad, yet." Cathy was right, and it certainly wasn't bad at all now that she had the money. She'd register with a letting agency, look for a job, and hopefully have a bolt-hole to escape to already in place when the time finally did come, all ready and with furniture in place. Then the next time he had a go at her she'd just leave, straight into her readymade new home. Where he'd never find her.

And so went the best laid plans of mice and men...and Rebecca...

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The Ebay work went considerably better than Rebecca even hoped it would.

When she did the weekly shop – on Martin's debit card while he waited in the car (shopping being 'women's work') – she asked for cashback on any offers she'd received. It wasn't much, but every little helped and she called it her own payback for being such a savvy shopper.

Even the escape fund in her secret bank account was starting to swell. But she hadn't had any chance at all to do anything about her personal situation.

"Never mind," she reminded herself one night when Martin quietly picked her up on a pile of washing-up still in the kitchen sink when he got home from work. "It isn't that bad, yet."

On mischief night, Rebecca went out to the shed and disturbed some kids who were loitering in the back alley where some people parked their cars. As she went back into the house, she told her husband about them.

"I hope they haven't been up to anything," he said on his way

out to investigate. "I'll soon sort them out if they have."

Martin was gone for what seemed like an age. Rebecca watched the remaining episode of her favourite soap opera and then went looking for him in the break. She found him in the garden, in a heap on the floor, blood pouring from what looked like a broken nose. But what shook her the most was the state of the shed. Someone had broken in to the shed...

"Oh no!" she cried, dashing to the end of the back garden.

"It's okay," mumbled Martin, getting to his feet. "I'm not dead."

Remembering her priorities, she went back to him and fussed about his poor face.

"What happened?"

"That was no kids acting up for mischief night," he said, carefully mopping at his nose with his pocket handkerchief and wincing from the pain. "There were three men here, going on about something that belonged to them. Next thing I know is I'm seeing stars and then you come running out."

Rebecca strained to see the damage over Martin's shoulder.

"Don't worry about that now," he said, leading her indoors and flicking the outside light off. "There's nothing worth stealing in there anyway. We should call the police."

"They won't come out tonight," she said, trying not to show her agitation too much. "They'll be too busy with the kids who are making mischief."

"I pay my taxes and I've been assaulted. By grown men! Not by children. They blummin well will come out!"

And come out they did. But it was very, very late and they'd obviously had a very, very busy evening.

The two officers who came were also very, very tired and they didn't really want to come out to a broken nose and a burgled shed that didn't contain anything of any value in the first place. They were eager to leave Rebecca patching up her partner – he'd made her wait until they'd been in case they wanted to take pictures, but, of course, they hadn't. Then she packed him off to bed with a packet of frozen peas wrapped in a clean tea towel and some painkillers.

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"It's your fault I have these two black eyes and a broken nose," complained Martin the following morning as he got ready for work.

"How is it my fault?" asked Rebecca, not really surprised but wondering what his reasoning could possibly be this time.

"If you hadn't of gone out to that blinkin shed in the first place. And even then told me about them kids. I would have stayed safely indoors. And now I have to go to work looking like this!" He waved a hand in front of his messed-up face.

"You could always call in sick. We can take you to the hospital." Behind her back Rebecca crossed her fingers that he'd feel too compelled to play the martyr in front of his colleagues. She let out a soft sigh of relief as he remained true to form.

"I can't do that, they need me. I'll just have to tell them I fell or something."

"Or you could just tell them the truth. They might send you to Occupational Health anyway."

Secretly, of course, Rebecca could hardly wait for him to take himself off so she could go and examine the shed, see if her stash of money was still there. She knew that she should act as normally as she always did, hopefully making all the right noises in all the right places. But this time, for some reason, she snapped when he had just one more go at her.

"Look, I've already told you once. It's your fault. I'm not going to admit to something that's your fault and tell everyone —"

"It's my fault, is it? How? I didn't make you go out there. I tried to convince you it was probably just kids being mischievous. But no, you had to play the big man, the big I-am, the hero who just had to go out there and interfere.

"Just like it wasn't my fault you spilled hot tea down you because the mug handle was wet and slippy, even though I wasn't even in the room.

"Just like when you cut your hand on the broken glass in the washing-up bowl because you couldn't wait for me to wash the crocks. I wasn't even in the house that time, let alone in the kitchen—"

CRACK!

When the punch came it startled her first, before the pain kicked in.

"That's for being stupid!" he said, hitting her again, this time in the stomach. "And that's for answering me back!" And he left her there, stunned and crying, as he stormed off up the path to

work.

He'd never, ever hit her before. Not once. But now he'd crossed the line.

It was definitely bad enough now. Rebecca didn't care that she hadn't organised anything yet. She was off.

When she eventually managed to examine the shed she wasn't surprised to see that the briefcase had gone. She was surprised to see that her hiding place had been ransacked and the money gone. The velvet bag containing the Tarot cards lay trampled on the floor. On impulse, Rebecca picked it up and pushed it into her pocket.

She packed her bags and later that day walked into a women's refuge. It was strictly for battered wives, but today at least she had some new bruises forming. She used a false name and they didn't ask too many questions. Cathy, next door, would have to wait. But Rebecca had no doubt that she'd understand.

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The following day Martin Wood walked into the local police station.

"I'd like to report a crime," he said to the desk sergeant, who looked up and seemed shocked to see this battered face before him.

"Go on, sir," he said.

"My common-law wife had me beaten up, stole my life savings, emptied our joint bank accounts and has disappeared."

"I see," said the desk sergeant. "And how much are we talking about?"

"There was about five thousand pounds in the current account – I can let you have the exact figure – about ten thousand pounds in the savings account..." he paused.

"Sir?"

"And just over twenty-three thousand pounds in cash..."

the end



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