



**The Night Before The Christmas Before I Was Married
& other festive tales**

Adam Maxwell

Published: 2009

Categorie(s): Fiction, Humorous, Short Stories

Tag(s): christmas xmas "christmas stories" "christmas short stories" "short stories" funny fiction comic stories dark weird comedy surreal "flash fiction" absurd strange

*For Eve
& Nina
& for Mam*

The Night Before The Christmas Before I Was Married

It's difficult to explain, I suppose, how I ended up here in the middle of a crowded shopping centre covered in blood and punching Santa Claus repeatedly in the face with security guards running towards me. Quite surprisingly, it's a much shorter story than you would imagine.

Home for the holidays. You meet people. People you know, people you once knew, people you have tried hard to no longer know.

I was on High Street cutting through the crowds like a drunken elf through a bottle of brandy when it stared;

Prod. Prod. Prod.

I kept weaving and walking through the masses, trying to work out what it was I was supposed to be buying for Aunty Betty but it kept at me.

Prod. Prod. Proooooooooooooood.

I stopped in front of a window displaying a cacophony of confectionary and absently brushed at my shoulder. The prodding stopped and was almost instantly replaced by a tongue in my ear.

"I can't believe you did that in front of all those people," I said, dumping two steaming cinnamon latte's on the table of the coffee house we found ourselves in a few minutes later.

Christine laughed in that way I remembered and we started talking about when we used to be together. She wasn't anything like I remembered her being, not the girl I had built up in my mind. Not the girl I had made the decision to dump because... I couldn't remember exactly. She linked arms with me when we finally left the coffee house and it felt good. Natural. Christmassy.

I smiled and it started to snow. Really snow, flurries of the stuff billowing like bastard duvets from the sky. We took shelter in a doorway and Christine leaned in and kissed me on the cheek, her perfume was

intoxicating and I should never have let her but it's always retrospect that gives you clarity isn't it?

So that's us - freezing, huddled in a doorway, snow trying its damndest to bury us where we stood, my lips brush her forehead, my hands so cold that my thumb-ring drops to the ground. I stooped to pick it up and then the next thing I know I'm relating the story to my brother.

"Only you could manage to get engaged to Crazy Christine?" he howls with derisive laughter.

"I don't think I said anything," I said, and scratched at my earlobe. "She did all the talking."

"It takes a special talent to pull off something as mindblowingly stupid as this having only been in the city for," he looked at his watch. "Five hours is it?"

"Four and a half," I said, reaching for the mulled wine. I had a feeling I was going to need it.

In all honesty it's unlikely that the mulled wine fuelled our actions. It's more likely it was the Stella Artois or perhaps the Cabernet Sauvignon. Either way the alcohol hit me nearly as hard as I knew my actual fiancée would hit me when she arrived the next day and found out I had handed the ring she bought me for my birthday to an ex-girlfriend.

I had a feeling it was going to get awkward.

And I was right.

The doorbell rang and it was Christine. My brother shoved me forward to deal with the situation and, fuelled by alcohol and a resulting lack of self-consciousness I knew I could deal with the situation.

"I don't love you," I blurted. "I didn't even propose you crazy bitch, why would I?"

Never, ever call a woman a crazy bitch when she really is a crazy bitch.

And never, ever, ever call a crazy bitch a crazy bitch when you are standing with your legs slightly parted and partially arseholed. She raised her knee with a practiced precision rendering me speechless and gasping for air on the carpet.

“Don’t think you can get away with this,” she leant down, hissing the words close into my ear so specks of her saliva caught in the tiny hair inside. “When Daddy hears about this... ”

“Gnnnnng?” I tried to say.

“Do you know what a shotgun wedding is?” She grabbed the ring she had taken from me and shoved it into my panting mouth. I rolled over so that my back was towards her and lay, inhaling carpet fibres and breathing heavily whilst she made her exit, slamming the door behind her.

After a brief but necessary recovery my drunken brother and I resolved that decisive action was required so, with less than twenty four hours until my fiancée arrived I went to head Christine off at the pass. We called a taxi and cracked open another can of lager for the road.

“So, you see, I can’t marry your daughter,” I explained as calmly as I could to her father. “It was just a bit of a misunderstanding.”

He looked at me for a moment, digesting the information and inhaling the alcohol fumes pouring from me. He pulled his big white fake beard down a little and spoke.

“Seems pretty straightforward to me,” he said, the red hat with its white trim slipping backwards on his head. “You proposed to her. You marry her. It’s that simple.”

“What? Are you bloody insane?”

He stood up and leaned in close to me, the stuffing inside his coat pushing against my stomach.

“No swearing in front of the kids,” he whispered in a way that was distinctly un-jolly. “Or I’ll be forced to teach you a lesson.”

There wasn't much else to say. There was no reasoning with stupidity on this scale. I took my mobile out of my jeans' pocket and dialed my fiancée's number. I have found over the course of our relationship that honesty is the best policy. I put my hand theatrically over the mouth-piece and leaned towards Christine's father.

"Just going to give me actual fiancée a call," I said conspiratorially then removed the hand as she answered. "Hi darling... delayed? Oh shame, I was looking forward to seeing you... yes... not too bad... yes... no... mmm, I got Aunt Betsy that toffee you mentioned... ah, just one thing... there's a girl here thinks I'm engaged to her... yes I am pretty drunk... no I wasn't when it happened... yeah, it'll all be sorted when you get here, I'm with the crazy bitch's father now... "

Santa hit me hard with the open palm of his hand, smashing the phone into my ear and knocking me to the ground. The children stared, some gawping, all of them swimming around in my blurred vision.

"You mad bastard," I touched my ear and found pieces of the plastic casing of my mobile phone sticking out of it, blood starting to run from the Santa-inflicted wounds.

He came at me fast, his knee going to my chest, his arm pulling back ready to punch.

"I told you," he said, glancing up at the collection of infants. "No swearing in front of the kids."

But the old man was too slow. Adrenaline kicked in and I caught his punch, deflecting it past my good ear before rolling over and tipping him onto his back and hitting.

And hitting and hitting and hitting.

And hitting.

You've probably got a picture in your mind now of me. This prize fighter beating an old man to death like some psychotic. But you'd be wrong. The problem is that I hit like a girl.

I would maintain that I don't run like a girl or throw like a girl, but hitting - something I had never really done before - I discovered quickly was done in the manner of a six year old girl in a pink dress and pigtails.

Soon the kids became bored. Some of them walked off.

"Mummy," one said without taking his gaze from us. "Do you think that man didn't get what he asked for? I liked the Santa from the other shopping centre better."

"No darling I don't think he did," she replied. "But look - I think those security guards are going to help Santa out. Shall we go and get some ice cream?"

I looked up through the dissipating crowd and the finally saw the security guards and bolted - through the food court, hurled myself through Marks and Spencers out the doors and into the waiting taxi.

"Sorted?" asked my brother.

"Sorted." I said, my chest heaving.

He handed me a fresh can of lager.

"Merry Christmas you asshole."

Blood In The Snow

So I told you about last Christmas, yeah? How I wound up beating the living shit out of Santa? Not the real Santa, of course, it was the father of my ex-girlfriend dressed up. Ah well, it was the night before the Christmas before I was married. It all worked out in the end I suppose because now I'm happily married and thankfully not to my ex-girlfriend.

The thing about marriage is that it requires a bit of give and take so this year was going to be have to be different. This year it wasn't going to be the easy by-the-numbers of accidentally becoming engaged to a loony tunes ex-girlfriend and beating the crap out of Santa all the while relying on my brother to help extricate me from said predicament. This year the big guns were out. This year we weren't visiting my family. We were visiting my wife Sonia's family.

Hang on, that deserves capital letters. MY WIFE'S FAMILY.

WHAT A BUNCH OF LOON BAGS. Sorry. I mean what a bunch of interesting people whose take on life is slightly different to my own. And my wife's. And pretty much anyone else I had ever met who walked upright.

There were others but, for the purposes of this discourse I will limit myself to the relevant players. Perhaps I can bend you ear another time on the complexities of the twin Aunts Nadia and Maria...

Firstly there was her little cousin Jeff whose dual fixation with his female relatives' breasts and the cartoon PowerFormers seemed equally disturbing and interchangeable. And secondly there was her father. He was a man who seemed to be one hundred and fifty years old, the last seventy of which he had spent in a chair by the fire apparently due to the fact that his skeleton had been removed. He liked to have Terry's Chocolate Orange melted down and would drink it through a straw until it solidified then throw the mug with all his might at whoever was closest to him whilst screaming the words "Why Gertrude? Why?"

Needless to say I found this out the hard way. Someone, possibly my wife who had retreated into drunkenness a full half hour after arriving

home, had slopped the stuff on the floor. I only realised this when I felt the warm goo seeping through my sock and solidifying on the cold sole of foot. I may have had the chance to dwell on this had it not been for the glancing blow the side of my head received courtesy of the father in law. My wife blew a sort of raspberry laugh at the scene but showed no signs of entertaining sobriety any time soon.

Breakfast was accompanied with a nip of sherry.

Mid-morning snack and pre-lunch was mulled wine.

Lunch time - a bottle of red wine.

Evening time spirits were raised by raising glass after glass of spirits.

Need I say more?

It was, it has to be said, a drunkenness that I sympathised with but not one I could dive into. It was one thing to inflict yourself on your own family who would forgive you no matter what. It was another entirely to be howling the words AND ANOTHER THING whilst stabbing a dip-somaniacal digit at anyone you weren't related to.

Which was why I was so disappointed when, on Christmas Eve after forty eight hours of virtual success things took a turn for the worse.

Papa – for that was what he insisted I call him in spite of the fact that everyone else called him Dad – got to congealing point with his Chocolate Orange and was preparing to hurl the thing across the room. Now, being sober I'd been watching the proceedings with some interest, noting the stages and waiting for the inevitable to occur. When he reached the point of no return I reacted, standing up and making a break for the door before some worse injury was inflicted.

It seemed that my dear wife Sonia had the same idea but my execution was a little more precise than hers. She rolled off the sofa into my path, I tripped on her prone and giggling form, my right foot shooting forward, trying to find purchase before finding it safely at the base of the Christmas tree. Well, not that safely. Before reaching the floor my foot passed through first wrapping paper, then (I found out after I removed it) a

cardboard box, some plastic cellophane and then something that crunched a plasticky, snappity crunch under my weight. Fortunately for me I had learned the lesson of the previous night and had opted to wear my trainers around the house. If I hadn't then whatever was in the present would have sliced through my foot and landed me in the hospital.

Whether or not that was a better position to be in was a moot point. Something was broken. Something that had once been whole was now in shards, several of which had pierced the sole of my shoe and were precariously close to doing the same thing to the ball of my foot.

In an awesome display of *Homo erectus* my father in law jumped to his feet.

"Whah-whah-what-what-what did you just do you clumsy oaf of a man?" he barked, his bones suddenly solidifying and his lungs filling with venomous air.

"Um," I said as I pulled the plastic out of the danger zone, hopped once then stood straight. "I tripped over your daughter Papa."

"You, sir, are drunk, sir," he pointed a wizened finger at me.

Sonia giggled at my feet and tried to bury her head in the rug.

"And is that?" he pointed again, this time allowing his finger to shake. "Is that Jeff's PowerFormer? My wife waited in line for three hours for that. You can't buy them for love nor money."

"I'm sorry?" I offered and tried to end the conversation by helping Sonia to her feet.

"Sorry won't cut it. That was this year's must have present."

"Ah."

"Ah? AH!? You spineless twit of a man, that's Jeff's Christmas BUGGERED!"

And so, to prevent Jeff being buggered I dragged my drunken wife to the car and bundled her into the passenger seat all the while cursing the fact that her family were a bunch of bloody loonies.

I think it warrants capitals now.

BLOODY LOONIES.

“Do you want me to show you the way to Toys R Us or not?” she said folding her arms in the universal female signal for don’t push your luck any further I don’t care how drunk I am I demand respect.

“Sorry,” I said, trying to sound like I meant it. “Which way.”

“Left,” she said and was asleep before we reached the end of the block.

Fifteen minutes later and stubbornness had set in. I had a pretty good idea of where the shopping centre was and I followed my instincts as Sonia snored next to me. Thirty minutes later and I knew I would have to wake her and ask for directions. Forty five minutes later and I pulled the car over to the side of the road. Fifty minutes later I had to lick my finger and stick it in her ear to get a reaction.

Her body tried to rise up into the air to escape the schoolboy trick but the seatbelt held her down.

“Ow, my tits,” she screamed and slapped me hard.

“I’m lost,” I said clenching and unclenching my jaw, I thought I might be able to taste blood. “Which way?”

“Fuck off,” she dragged a sleepy hand over her face hoisting the skin up and down in an apparent attempt to focus.

“Sonia, there’s like ten minutes til it closes. Please. If not for me then for Jeff.”

“That little perv. I dunno. Have we got any booze in this car I’m getting a hangover?”

I shook my head in spite of the fact I knew there were a couple of cans in the back and stamped on the accelerator.

There was a horrendous thump and the car slid on the snow.

“What was that?” Sonia screamed.

I looked around but couldn’t see anything in the dark.

“Probably just the ABS – it’s the brake on the car and the ice under the snow. Which way?”

“What’s it worth?” she grinned then slid forward and kissed me on the cheek.

“What will it take?”

“To impress my family and redeem yourself in their eyes. Oh, I don’t know, the best Christmas present ever.”

“Those shoes you were looking at the other day,” I looked in the rear view mirror but still couldn’t see anything out there.

“Have some respect. They weren’t just shoes. They were Manolo Blahniks.”

“Wasn’t he a Cuban dictator?” I checked the side mirrors and moved the car forward but it just slid again. I cut the engine.

She rolled her eyes, “Respect?”

“I’ll buy them.”

She clicked her tongue.

“How do I know you will?”

“I will.”

“But how do I know?”

“I will, come on.”

“Hang on,” she said and opened the glove compartment, discarding a biro before pulling out the CD marker pen that was in there. “Lift your shirt.”

“No, no that’s a permanent pen,” I said waving a weary hand. “I won’t be able to wash it off.”

Two minutes later I was walking towards the Toys R Us with the words I PROMISE TO BOY MY WAFE NICE SHOOOOES MINOLO BLHNKS drunkenly scrawled across my gut. Sonia had pointed behind us. I had turned around and there it was. We were practically in the car park.

As I walked away from the car the snow slowly sneaked into my shoe, soaking my sock and letting a icy chill spread over my already frosty foot.

“Help,” said a voice from just to the side of the road. “Please...”

I slid over and could see the outline of a man in the ditch by the side of the road. As I came closer the limited light revealed a security guard propped up on his elbow in the snow, blood dripping from his forehead and landing in a pool just beneath his name badge. His Toys R Us name badge.

“Did you see the car drive away?” he asked.

I spent the longest three seconds of my life weighing up the pros and cons of coming clean. The matter was decided when my gaze was caught by someone in Toys R Us bringing down the shutters.

“I did but I didn’t get the number plate, it’s too dark.”

And so I helped Neil, as his name turned out to be, to his feet and helped him hobble his way to the store. I helped him call his colleagues for help, helped him inside the store. I helped him with a cup of tea and helped encourage him in his idea to reward me in some way. Finally I

helped myself to a certain PowerFormers toy I had my eye on, bid him goodbye and returned to the car.

The car's windows were steamed and I opened the back door with a certain sense of trepidation. A sense that was rewarded as several empty cans of lager clacked onto the ground as I opened the door.

My darling wife was passed out pissed in the back of the car behind the driver's seat. I took one look at her, rolled my eyes and carefully placed the PowerFormers toy in the footwell behind the passenger seat, far away from her grasp.

There was just enough time to get back to the house get the damn thing wrapped and get to bed. I turned the engine over, gunned the car and heard a crunch as Sonia rolled forward onto the PowerFormers toy, crushing it without interrupting her sleep for a moment.

I stared out of the window, sighed, then lifted my shirt, spat on my fingers and started rubbing at the marker pen on my belly. There was no way she was getting those fucking shoes.

Rudolph Redux

Soon after what I now refer to as my 'Holiday Incident' I started writing '*Happy Holidays?*' in cards instead of '*Merry Christmas!*'

My wife was screaming out of the landing window.

'You are not putting that monstrosity on *my* roof.'

I looked down at Rudolph standing two feet tall next to me. His paint was peeling, one antler had broken off leaving only a long, sharp, shard pointing straight up and a long length of cable protruded from his worn posterior that, when plugged in, would illuminate him for the whole neighbourhood to see.

Of course that wasn't the thought going through my head as I hung from the roof of my house, the electrical cord that was wrapped around my foot the only thing keeping me from falling two stories and landing on my head. And Rudolph? Well, instead of lighting up he was swinging and hitting me repeatedly in the face. My wife was inside the house and I was shouting and maybe I was screaming. When I eventually told the story to my friends I didn't mention the screaming.

I could see frost on the garden as it spun underneath me as I hung, twisting in the air, molested by a shabby reindeer.

'What do you want? I'm trying to get ready, we're going out in half an hour.'

I could hear her through the bedroom window. She sounded the same upside down as she did the right way up.

Dear Santa, I have been a very good boy this year, please don't let me become the person they remember as Reindeer Man.

LOCAL MAN FOUND WITH HEAD UP REINDEER'S ARSE.

Children would make pilgrimages to the place where Rudolph nearly bought the big one.

'No, darling. Santa was worried but it was all right in the end – Rudolph could fly but the Reindeer Man couldn't.'

I kept thinking of ice skaters and how they keep their balance after spinning around over and over. My memory was telling me that they tried to keep focussed on one fixed point so I tried it and the number on door 81 became my focus. Really I was just trying to keep from thinking about how old the cable was and how it would snap any second.

I started in the loft looking for decorations except I knew we didn't have any because we'd just moved into the house two months ago. My wife is at the bottom of the ladder saying, 'Just go to the shop and buy a tree. If you wait for five minutes I'll come with you and help you choose baubles.'

Notice the careful positioning of the word 'help'.

So, of course, I ignored her and started rummaging, a medium sized torch shoved into my mouth, wedging it so far open that my jaw ached and saliva ran down at the corners. It was a treasure trove up there but for every box I opened, for every neatly wrapped nugget of a forgotten holiday season I found I was greeted with a thump, a bump or a grump from the Grinch downstairs.

Dear Santa, although I have not been a particularly good boy this year I was wondering whether you would see your way clear to leaving me a ball gag and restraints. They aren't for me so I thought you may make an exception.

It was then I found him. My soon to be nemesis. Dusty. Forgotten. Rudolph.

I carefully carried him down the ladder to the landing, put him lightly on the ground and began dusting him off. It elicited exactly the response I expected.

'What the bloody hell is that?' screamed my current nemesis.

On the third day of Christmas my true love gave to me; three blazing rows, two dirty looks and a promise there'd be no sex for me.

There were these carol singers in Australia who had gone out to do their thing and two of them had died of sunstroke. Perfectly normal thing to do at that time of year but they got carried away, filled with the spirit of the season and that was it, game over. This sort of thing happens every day, we just don't expect it to happen to us.

Rudolph had proved to be heavier than I imagined and it took me some time to wrestle the damn thing step by step, hauling it towards its appointment on the roof. By the time we reached our destination I was panting from the effort, I put him down by my side and bent over, my hands on my knees as I tried to catch my breath and... well you know the rest.

Dear Santa, thank you for the lovely flowers. And the grapes. The doctors and nurses have been wonderful and although the injuries I suffered were extensive only one of them is permanent. As I fell, only the only thing that stopped my face from hitting the pavement was a certain red-nosed friend of yours. I have been in touch with my lawyer who says I have a good case against you as I was erecting an effigy in your honour, thereby working for your, therefore you are liable as an employer. You will be hearing from us in due course.

A long time later, many months after I got out of the hospital my wife and I returned to the old house. It was November, maybe early December. I'd grown used to wearing the patch over my eye. We stood, the cold biting at us, my arm around her as she snuggled in for warmth and we looked at the house.

After a couple of minutes my wife said, 'Come on darling, it's freezing. Can we go now?'

I smiled and nodded, kissed her brow and a kid ran out of the open garage wrapped up and ready for the cold. He ran past us, did a double take and stopped.

'Mister,' he said, staring at me wide-eyed. 'Are you a pirate?'

I laughed and shook my head.

'Wh-?' he began but the sentence stalled.

'You have to be a good boy at Christmas time,' I said, leaning in close to impart secret knowledge to him. 'I was a bad boy and Rudolph did this to me with his antlers...'

I lifted the patch. The kid screamed and ran. To destroy the good name of Rudolph was one of the things I enjoyed most.

My wife and I turned our backs on the incident at number 18 and went to find a bar we used to drink in.

Widow Twanky's Revenge

Christmas wasn't the best time of year for me. I don't mean I'd be on the phone to the Samaritans, but after what happened I always approached the season with a sense of unease. Perhaps that's why I'd started with Meals on Wheels, to face my fears in a round about sort of way. I'd been delivering for around five years, ever since my Gran became ill and I had to look after her. People didn't realise the importance of Meals on Wheels, especially at this time of year its the lifeline to those who otherwise wouldn't be able to cook a decent meal for themselves. To be honest, I didn't ever think I would stop delivering until I was the one who needed food delivering to me. Last Christmas changed all that. Really stopped me in my tracks. For good this time.

You may say I'm callous, heartless, uncaring, believe me I've heard it all before. I couldn't tell anyone about it for months but you can't keep it inside forever so I might as well tell you the whole sordid story from beginning to end. I'm not saying you'll sympathise, you probably won't but at least it might go some way to help you understand. I don't know.

It all began in early November, I had my usual round on the Palace Estate but one of my colleagues, George, had broken his leg and wouldn't be back until after Christmas. As he was a good friend I offered to do his round for him. At the time it seemed easy, so very easy, just an extra quarter of an hour a day to help those less fortunate than myself.

Mr and Mrs Moon were always first on my round, closest to the depot and some of the nicest people it has ever been my privilege to meet. Then Mrs Jones followed by Mr Balofski, onwards and northwards until the end of my route at Mrs Hughes house. This time, however, I continued on through Mount Grove to take on four more deliveries culminating in a drop in Battlefield Road at Mr Grimwald's house.

I remember there was a cold but deliberate breeze throwing the remnants of the autumn leaves around the front garden of the house. It stood around twenty metres back from the road, a respectable, detached, Victorian-looking house, seeming much too big for a solitary old man in the twilight of his life. The windows all glittered with condensation and somewhere high above me I thought I saw the twitching of curtains.

The house must have seen more generations pass through it than I cared to imagine. Although from a distance the appearance was semi-Victorian, the closer you came to the house, the older the brickwork seemed to be. As I opened the gate to the garden goose bumps rose on my arms and neck despite the thick layers I was wearing. The house itself was symmetrical with a single door in the centre flanked on each side by a bay window. This in turn was mirrored by two more floors of windows and skylights glinting just out of sight.

As I climbed the three stone steps to the huge door the gate slammed at the end of the path, making me jump. I turned back to the door and looked for where a bell-push might be but there was none, no knocker, no bell, just a plain black door. Realising that I would have to attract the attention of the curtain-twitcher I raised my clenched fist and brought my hand forward to make sharp contact with the wood...

"Hello. You must be the new boy," said Mr Grimwald as he creaked open the door.

"Erm, yes, that's right. I'm with meals on wheels, I've brought your dinner for you," I replied, slightly wrong-footed by being referred to as a boy at forty-two.

"Excellent, why don't you come inside."

Mr Grimwald walked into the hallway beckoning me to follow. He wasn't at all as strange as I had pictured him as I crept up his garden path. A house with such gothic sensibilities meant you really expected someone with a long, pointy nose, wispy grey hair and a faintly menacing demeanour. Mr Grimwald was the antithesis of this; a stocky man dressed in a tweed suit with a lilac cravat, who carried a perpetually empty pipe. His rosy red cheeks gave him something of a Santa Claus persona and a gap between his two front teeth that showed on the regular occasions when he grinned made him an odd but endearing old man.

After I had served up his dinner, I excused myself and returned to my van to make my way home. The inside of the house appeared to be extremely hotchpotch with items strewn seemingly haphazard on every available surface. As I closed the door of my van a chill once more swept over my body and I stared down the garden path towards the house

looking back menacingly at me. I started the engine, feeling idiotic and childlike to be deriving any fear from an old house and a jolly old man.

Our meetings in the weeks that followed were brief, polite and sincere. He had lost his wife five years ago and had no family left. He amused himself with his collection of vintage posters from around the world, all framed and adorning any spare vertical surface. Here was an original Houdini, there a 1960's pantomime, all very interesting and all in immaculate condition no matter how old and odd. However, I felt the chill again as I cast my gaze over them.

The first week of December yielded the first snow of the season lying around an inch deep but instead of putting a spring in my step it left me with an empty feeling in the pit of my stomach because I knew that this was the beginning of the Christmas season for real. People had begun to decorate their houses and I liked helping in my own little ways with the people on my round; putting up a streamer here and there, occasionally decorating a tree. It gave me a real sense of warmth to help people rather than simply feeding them which was unusual because before Meals on Wheels I always dreaded the season to be jolly. I have a theory that a person's Christmas decorations say a lot about their personality and I was intrigued as to how Mr Grimwald would manage to fit any decorations into his already over-populated house.

On this particular round I had decided to take my dog, Sally, with me. Not so much for the company but because I knew she loved the attention of the diners and equally they loved tempting her with titbits and morsels. After a fairly uneventful round, I finally reached the corner of Battlefield Road and Mr Grimwald's residence. Sally had become excitable, barking, whining and fretting in the back of the van so I gathered up the trays and left her in there to clam down.

"Hello again Gary," said Mr Grimwald as he opened the door. "First snow of winter eh?"

"Evening Mr Grimwald," I stepped over the threshold of his house just as a gust of wind punched a cloud of powdery snow into his hallway but apart from this impromptu decoration I found the house unchanged. After I had set Mr Grimwald's dinner down I made to leave but as I reached the hallway I noticed a new frame, clean and dustless

against the sun-bleached wallpaper. Upon closer examination it proved to be an advertisement for this year's pantomime at the local Palladium but for some reason the picture of 'Neil Smart as Widow Twanky' had been neatly trimmed out leaving the reddy-brown background of the picture frame clearly visible from behind. I stared at it for a moment but was jolted out of my fascinated trance but what sounded like a shout from way above me in the house. I stopped dead but as I tried to listen closer no more sounds were forthcoming. When I arrived back at my van Sally had vanished and even after a brief scout around the vicinity she was nowhere to be seen. I jogged lightly back up to the house to see if Mr Grimwald had seen her and as I reached the steps, the door sharply swung open.

"Did you forget something?" Mr Grimwald asked, grinning.

"No, no, its just my dog, Sally, she was in the van and she seems to have run off."

"Ah, she's behind you."

I spun around but there was no sign of Sally. "No, no she isn't."

"Oh yes she is." He flicked his wrist, gesturing towards the garden behind me.

I looked over into the garden once more but she was nowhere to be seen.

"No she isn't. I... "

"Oh yes she is." Mr Grimwald's voice had risen ever so slightly and had a vague hint of hysteria as if he was about to burst into fits of uncontrollable laughter but before I could challenge him on it Sally ran out from inside the house and jumped into my arms.

"There she is, you see - behind you all the while," he smiled and waved. "See you next week."

As I drove away Sally sat bolt upright in the back of the van watching the house tail into the distance and growling almost inaudibly under her

breath. I resolved not to bring her on my rounds again this Christmas season in case she made a habit of this disappearing act of hers.

That evening I went to visit George to see how he was holding up with his broken leg. It wasn't long before the conversation turned towards Mr Grimwald.

"So," said George with a wry smile. "What do you make of the old fruit?"

"I don't know," I replied. "Sometimes he seems perfectly normal and other times..."

"Other times he makes you skin crawl, right?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

"I don't know, most of the time he's just this old tweed guy with an empty pipe," he paused for a moment as if he was going to stop there but after mulling it over continued. "There was this one time there was a note on the front door. Said he was ill, just to come in and set the food down."

"What did you do?"

"Just that. But after I had laid it out I got a bit paranoid that he might be... Well you know..."

"Incapacitated."

"Or worse. So I started upstairs - calling out for him, asking if he was alright."

"And was he?"

"Well, I got as far as the second floor before he came trundling out of one of the rooms and whisked me downstairs but..."

"What?"

"Well, I know it sounds stupid but I thought I caught a glimpse, around the attic door..."

"Yes?"

"Well it looked like there were lightbulbs all the way around."

"What do you mean?"

"You know, like a mirror in a theatre."

I didn't know quite what to make of this new information so I began to relate to George exactly what had been happening, my suspicions, everything.

"I mean I didn't mind that the poster had been defaced," I added. "To tell the truth I was happy about it."

"What? I don't understand. Why?"

"Well the whole pantomime dame thing. It bring back too many unhappy memories."

George laughed for a second before realising I was serious.

"What do you mean mate?" he asked.

"Well," I was nervous, not sure how far to go. "We've been friends for a while now haven't we?"

"Yes, must be knocking on for fifteen years."

"Well, when I was a kid..." I hesitated.

"Its okay, honestly," George looked worried.

"You see, when I was a child there was an incident at the local theatre."

"What sort of incident?"

“I had won a competition to go backstage and meet the cast after the performance. My teacher Mr Collins had taken me after the show, I must have been six or seven years old at the time. I remember walking down the narrow corridors backstage, the damp, peeling paint looking quite the opposite of the showbiz glitz I expected. We had gone to the dressing room door and Mr Collins knocked. There was no reply but I was excited and burst in to find Widow Twanky hanging from his stockings from the rafters. Dead.”

“Bloody hell.”

“The image of a suicidal cross dresser swinging right in front of me has hampered my enjoyment of Christmas ever since. ”

“I’m not surprised.”

The next week I arrived at Mr Grimwald’s I noticed a change to the house, the usual steamed and dark windows had red velvet curtains drawn over them, something I had never noticed on either the inside or from the outside of the house. I knocked loudly on the door and after a few moments, Mr Grimwald appeared, inviting me inside. I could see there was something different about him but it wasn’t until I had finished my duties and was back outside that I realised what it was.

His complexion was usually very rosy, from his bald head to his collar line but there was a difference this time, his cheeks were unnaturally coloured. As I stumbled towards the van I became irrationally afraid of what might become of him, the same sick scenario from my childhood ringing around my mind. It couldn’t be, I told myself but made a mental note to speak to one of the health workers about possible causes for bright red circles on his cheeks. Perhaps he was simply unwell and after all I had a responsibility to look after our customers.

By my next visit, the Christmas season was in full swing with the streets daubed with coloured light bulbs and Christmas trees in every window and on every corner. It was with a real sense of unease that I mounted the steps to his house, unsure of what I would find inside. Whatever I expected couldn’t have prepared me for what I saw; a man in

his seventies with rouged cheeks, a big ginger wig full of ringlets, a pair of frilly bloomers and to cap it all, completely bare-chested.

“Evening Gary,” he smiled. One of his front teeth had been blacked-out. “Do come inside.”

In a kind of shocked-daze I went about my business of unwrapping and heating, serving and vending before making hasty excuses and leaving. At least he was alive, I reasoned. As I reached the garden gate I turned to the house, unsure of whether I had seen what I believed I had seen and as I surveyed the house in the all too early darkness my attention was drawn to one of the windows on the second floor. Although there were no lights on in the window I could have sworn I saw a pair of hands clawing down the window, smearing the condensation. Just as quickly as this half-imagined scene had happened the streetlight illuminating the front of the house blinked out, shrouding me and the house in darkness leaving me with nothing but doubt and paranoia. I stood for a second, my skin crawling when, on the wind I seemed to here Mr Grimwald’s voice.

“Ooh, saucy!” he seemed to say.

I got in my van and drove away.

The next day, the morning papers were filled with the breaking news that actor ‘Neil Smart’ had gone missing, wife and kids were frantic, police were flummoxed for motive or whereabouts. Pantomimes around the region were placed on a state of high alert, bodyguards had been drafted in to protect these precious men in tights because Neil Smart was the seventh Widow Twanky to go missing this pantomime season. The press were having a field day, up until this point the police had managed to keep the whole thing under wraps, reasoning that no-one would really miss a few D-list celebrities but Neil Smart was too famous, they had to go public. Children’s hearts up and down the country were breaking as Dames fled from theatres without tight security, performances were cancelled, every man woman and child became a suspect and were frisked before performances. Even the matinees.

I was in shock. Could it be a curse? Or worse, was it possible that Mr Grimwald had something to do with this. To suspect him would be truly

insane but to dismiss what I thought I had seen might be equally as dangerous. Was such a kind natured old man really capable of such a feat or was it just my over-active imagination all too eager to make a fool of me. I knew I must investigate, to find out if it really was the old man or some consortium of disgruntled understudies so jumped straight in the van and drove over to Mr Grimwald's house.

Arriving at the front door I knocked tentatively at first and then with real vigour but no answer was forthcoming. After a couple of minutes I knew he must be out but something inside of me was willing me onward, I tried the handle. It was locked. Slowly and quietly I made my way around the side of the house so as not to attract any unwanted attention from nosey neighbours until I reached the dilapidated conservatory I had seen from the dining room window so many times before. I tried the handle and to my astonishment it opened and I stepped inside.

Technically this was breaking and entering but I felt driven by some unstoppable force to go onward. I moved through the utility room at the back, the house cold and my breath hanging in the air as if I was still outside. I slid slowly into the kitchen and the hallway. There were no lights on in the house but I found my way quite easily as I was now familiar with this part of the house.

I stood very still in the hallway, listening for the slightest sound, any signs of life within this massive house but after a minute all I could hear was my heart thumping in my chest. I grabbed the banister and move steadily up the creaking stairs, just one piercing step after another. On the first landing I paused again, waiting for Mr Grimwald to potter out of a room, dressed in his usual tweed suit and cravat but there was no sign of him.

Just as downstairs, there were pantomime posters everywhere but even in the half light provided by the outside streetlight which flickered in and out of existence as it leaked into the room I could see that all of them were missing a pantomime dame. Each one had been neatly removed.

The higher in the house I climbed, the more Christmassy the whole place became. The colour scheme was jolly enough, if a little garish and all of the available surfaces were littered with stage props and pieces of

make-up. When I eventually reached the highest landing there was still no sign of life but at the top of the attic stairs was a door.

My eyes flicked left and right, expecting at any moment to be confronted by the apparition of Mr Grimwald chastising me for being in his house without permission. I tried to think of excuses for my behaviour but my thoughts were interrupted when I took a single step towards the door and it struck me. The door really was surrounded by light bulbs, in the same way a mirror in a theatre would be, just as George had described it. I was back to when I was a kid.

I took another step and they blinked into life.

I froze. Waiting. Waiting and watching.

I galloped up the remainder of the stairs, unable to contain myself any longer, the adrenaline pounding around my body making me shaky until I reached the top, flung open the door and saw...

Mr Grimwald. In full drag this time, replete with bloomers, make-up, wig, crinoline skirt and high-heeled boots. I was taken aback, but nothing, nothing could have prepared me for what came next

"Young man," screeched Mr Grimwald, falsetto voice wavering under the strain. "I don't know, coming up me back passage like that unannounced. Its enough to give the old girl the hump!"

He turned and winked at an invisible audience.

"I'm sorry, I can see you're busy. I'll just..."

"No. Sit. Enjoy. Here, you want a feel of my melons?" He reached into his brassiere and handed me a melon. I didn't know what to do. I took it and sat down.

As I gazed, open mouthed he sashayed around me in some dance of the mad, waving a fairy wand as he minced around the room.

"It's time for Widow Twanky to cast her spell," he squealed before bringing the wand into contact with the back of my head. It was only the

sudden onset of unconsciousness that gave away the fact that the wand was made of metal instead of the traditional wood.

Three weeks later the police had tracked us down, myself and seven Widow Twankys from around the region, all bound and gagged and subject to the cruellest of tortures: the double entedre.

Night and day, day and night, he continued – screeching in his half-rant of high-pitched puns, slowly wearing us down, driving us mad...

It turned out that Mr Grimwald hadn't been the normal Meal on Wheels customer, he had been humiliated and broken hearted by a cross dresser as a young man. After being tempted by sexual dirty talk and the promise of body whoring he was exposed in the crudest possible way in front of his friends and family. After years of being taunted by those closest to him, the jibes always being worse at Christmas with the Widow Twanky snaps plaguing him and since his wife died he had spent every day reliving the night when he realised he'd fallen for a man. He wanted to destroy the world of men and only by dressing in this way could he rid himself of the nightmare. The press declared him a nutcase.

I made it. Eventually after long and patient hours of counselling, the undoing of what had been done. I'm alright now. I couldn't tell anyone, the embarrassment and all. But it was eating me alive. To this day I can't watch a Carry On film without breaking down and even the sight of a man in drag makes me wince. Nothing can prepare you for a time like that, there's no recovery, it's the call of the crinoline, the beckoning of the bloomers, there is no escape – it just keeps coming around. Every year, like clockwork...

The Curious Story of the Hypnotists' Christmas Tree

“You have to swear to me you won't forget,” my girlfriend Tracy had said. “Swear to me.”

“I swear to you I won't forget,” I replied dutifully.

“Mum's present. Christmas tree for work. Say it.”

“I'm not a child.”

“It's important. Mum's present and if I impress my boss with a big enough tree, you never know... so say it.”

“Your Mum's present. The bloody Christmas tree for your bloody work.”

“Brilliant. You're a star,” she kissed me and started to walk towards the lobby of her office. “And it's not just my job on the line if you forget,” she shouted so everyone around could hear. “It's our relationship too.”

Winking at me, she kissed her fingertips and mimicked blowing the kiss to me. A personal joke that was wasted on the circling crowds.

I turned around and began walking in the direction of the shops and my left foot slid on the icy, un-gritted pavement. I caught myself, rebalanced and moved on as quickly as I dared.

The gaudy tat for the future mother-in-law was first on the list. I rummaged in my overcoat pockets for the receipt as I reached the shop but it was hidden within wrappers, papers and tissues all of which chose that moment to hurl themselves to the four winds.

The receipt with the distinctive logo fluttered towards the floor. I reached forward but it wasn't to be, the wind sent it spinning behind me. Bending down to retrieve it, the door of the shop snapped open, struck me on the hip and sent me crashing downwards. I landed on my arse and slid backwards on the ice, spinning in two neat circles before coming to an abrupt stop as my spine made contact with a nearby lamppost.

"The Astounding Marlin Lazzar as I live and breath!" said a voice I knew only too well. "I'm so sorry my dear man. Please let me help you."

The Great Gerry Spagnolo, the man who had just sent me sliding, was a hack-hypnotist. A purveyor of cheap parlour tricks with no conscience or credibility and whose only purpose in life seemed to be to get the gigs, prestige and fame that belonged to me.

You see, I'm a proper entertainer. Yes, I use hypnosis but my act is practically art. I have this one review that even says that. Unfortunately this jaded trickster always seemed to be one step ahead of me.

"Terry Castle?" I said. For that was his name.

"Now then *Martin* there's no need to be like that. It was an accident."

"Accident?" I stood up and patted myself down. "Hardly."

"Now, now. I didn't see you there bending down."

Bending down – that was a good point, if I lost the receipts Tracy had given me there would be hell to pay. I glanced around to see if I could spot them.

"Looking for these?" asked the Great Spagnolo. Raising a plucked eyebrow he held up the two receipts.

"Give me them," I said and reached out to snatch them but he was too quick and snapped them back.

"Let's see what they are shall we?" without his glasses he needed to hold them away from his body. Squinting he read them aloud one by one as I stood and indulged his playground routine. First the tat-brooch for her Mum was duly mocked, then he came to the tree. "Just what I need, actually, a Christmas tree."

"Don't be childish *Gerry*," I couldn't let the idiot do this.

"Childish? Hardly. Tell you what," he grinned a grin I didn't like the look of. "You're always at great pains to tell everyone how much better

you are at the old mesmeric arts so why don't we have a little contest. Winner gets the tree?"

I'd had enough. I lunged forward once more to grab the receipts and the ice caught me again. My feet went forward and slid into Spagnolo, toppling him toward me. I rectified myself easily by shooting out my right hand.

Unfortunately my flat palm hit the Great Gerry in the face and burst his nose wide open. Well, I say 'unfortunate' but perhaps that isn't the right word.

"You're on," I said, snatching the receipts and stepping over him into the jewellers. And that was that, the game was afoot. Or it nearly was, the game had to be briefly paused to allow me to collect the Mam-tat and to be hurled bodily out of the store by a hypnotised security guard who believed me to be a mountain goat.

You had to respect Spagnolo's style. The bastard.

When Christmas struck Kilchester it struck like a drunken tornado. It was as if a woodchipper had been turned on and it was spewing people, spraying them into the air and having them land directly in my path.

When I tried to walk on the path, in the road, attempted to ride the bus and even when I resorted to a trip on the underground. Everywhere I was plagued by people crushed together and slowly, slowly moving forward seemingly without purpose or shopping agenda.

By the time I reached my destination Spagnolo had been afforded ample opportunity to slide in and succeed ahead of me. I wasn't worried, I knew I was better than that greasy great twat and this *was* going to prove it.

The Christmas trees were being sold from what was usually a small car park. Through an insane quirk of bureaucracy it had been handed over to this festive forest, denying desperate shoppers a place to park their overburdened transport.

Occasionally a car would try to plough through the small shed that had been erected as a makeshift home for the attendant and would slide to a halt on the ice, inches from demolition. The reason I knew this was the attendant had told me it was the very reason he'd stopped going in there. For 'health reasons' as he put it. I told him why I was there, he nodded and took the receipt Tracy had given me. He looked at it carefully then thanked me and began quietly clucking like a chicken.

I watched for a few seconds, drinking it in with creeping disappointment. I had really, really, hoped for better than this.

His head bobbed forward with a *bok-bok-bokaaaaaw!*

He tucked his hands under his arms and, elbows outstretched and started walking up and down, scratching for grain with his feet.

"Where's the tree?" I said firmly.

He paused, cocked his head to one side and stared at me. I stared back resolutely and he clucked appreciatively before starting to walk in what appeared to be a specific direction. Following a few steps behind him, I sensed that all was not as it should be. There was movement in the Christmas trees and I glanced around warily wondering whether things were going to plan.

As I walked, an onion the size of my fist rolled into the path startling the chicken-man and he fled off out of sight. I stopped and stared as another man came crawling on all fours from between some of the trees.

"Have you seen my delicious apple? I just..." he began but his eyes saw the onion and picked it up. "Never mind."

Grinning, he took an enormous bite from the onion, his eyes beginning to tear up as he chewed. That pretty much settled it, Spagnolo *had* been here. I stepped over the onion-man and went on my way.

There was a noise to my left and I turned to look but as I did a young woman hurtled at me from the right, spinning me around.

“Excuse me?” I said, without bothering to try to conceal my irritation.

She glanced down from my eyes to my midriff and blushed.

“Oh you’re excused, I’m sure big boy,” she said, her hand darting up to cover her mouth. “Aren’t you cold out here without your clothes on?”

And so the pattern continued as my search for the tree continued. It was like the ghosts of shit-hypnotists past; the man speaking Swedish like the Swedish Chef from the Muppets, a teenage girl flirting with a plastic doll in the mistaken belief it was Brad Pitt, a man playing the trombone really badly believing in all his heart that he was a maestro. The cacophony of cack just rose and rose until...

“What on earth is going on?” said a voice.

I looked over to see it was a man standing in front of the tallest tree in the lot. Standing an enormous fifteen feet high. The tree, not the man.

“I think I have an idea,” I replied.

“Care to share it?” he said.

“Not really.”

“Are you the Astounding Marlin Lazzar?”

“Yes,” I said. “And that’s my tree.”

“I am your King, sir, and I will assist you.”

I nodded and waited. He breathed deeply and began to speak loud and clear in the darkness.

“Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more,” he bellowed. “Or close the wall up with our English dead!”

There was a clucking from nearby and the attendant came into view.

“This could be the greatest night. We could give someone a fine, fine Christmas but you,” he jabbed a gloved finger at the chicken-man. “You are going to let it be the worst.”

The chicken man now stood beside me, watching intently as a post-hypnotically-regressed Henry V somehow monologued up a crowd.

“‘Oh, we’re afraid to go with you, sire, we might get in trouble.’ Well kiss my royal arse from now on! Not me!”

I was pretty sure that Shakespeare had written the start of the speech but the rest was anyone’s guess. Still, it was doing the trick, the clichés were coming out of the woodwork if you’ll pardon the pun.

“You and I know that a day may come where the courage of men fails,” he shouted and as he did little speckles of spit formed at the corner of his mouth. “But it is not this day. This day we FIGHT.”

They were all here now, all of them staring at this lunatic’s commanding performance. I was certain that Henry V had never faced the hordes of Mordor but I wasn’t going to argue, he seemed to be achieving the required result.”

“This day we take this enormous tree and we carry it aloft, through the streets to its destination and we will spread joy as we go. If there is a man or a woman here who will not follow me then I will strike down upon them with great vengeance and furious anger. Is there anyone?”

Silence.

“Are you with me?”

And as one they screamed, “YES!”

Except the bloke with the trombone but he gave a little *parp* of agreement.

I got in a taxi, went on ahead and arrived at my girlfriend’s office well before the convoy.

“So you’ve got the brooch then?” said Tracy, taking it from me and opening it immediately. “Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhh, it’s beautiful. I wasn’t sure when I saw it online but that is spectacular.”

There was a barely audible *thud-thud-thud* sound in the distance.

“I saw Spagnolo there,” I said.

“Oh no, you two didn’t get in a fight did you?”

The *thud-thud-thud* was getting louder and there was a chant that went with it.

“Not exactly, no. He knocked me over. Nicked the receipts for the brooch and the tree.”

It was the stamping of feet. Marching feet *thud-thud-thudding* and the chant had a slightly menacing quality to it.

“But you got the brooch,” she said. “What about the tree. Where’s the tree Martin? Never mind Marlin Lazzar – did Martin Lester get the tree or not?”

You could hear what they were saying now, if you knew what to listen for. I did but Tracy didn’t.

“Hang on,” she said looking off down the street. “Is that what that noise is? You better not embarrass me in front of my workmates.”

I nodded and turned around to see a dozen people, all dressed as Santa Claus and carrying a fifteen foot tree. They walked in tight formation, holding up the traffic as they went and marching like an army regiment.

THUD THUD THUD went their shoes as they moved forward.

“HO! HO! HO!” they all screamed in unison.

Except the bloke with the trombone who was *parping* in time.

“You did this?” she was trying to stay mad but I could see she was going to crack.

“Not exactly.”

And I told her what had happened, how after I broke his nose I reached for him and put him in a trance with one simple command. Told her how I’d given him a suggestion, a task to carry out. To hypnotise people and get me enough little helpers to carry the bloody tree. Oh, and to make sure they looked festive. How he went about it was in his typical hack-fashion but he managed it.

“And when I was in the taxi I phoned the local news and look,” I pointed to a camera man getting out of a car. “Publicity for me and publicity for your lovely business. Bet there’s a promotion in it for you if you’re lucky.”

“And where is he now?” said Tracy.

“He’s in the shopping mall convinced he is Miss World. Giving a speech thanking everyone and wishing for world peace.”

She turned to me and smiled her wonderful smile.

“Shame there’s no mistletoe,” she said, looking up above us.

“Who says there isn’t?” I said and reached into my coat pocket.

About The Author

Adam Maxwell was born in 1976 and has written for a plethora of publications including Dave Eggers' *McSweeney's*. He spends a great deal of his time in the loft on his own and is cultivating a fear of crowds. He has a Masters Degree in Creative Writing from Northumbria University, and lives in the wilds of Northumberland. If you wave to him he is unlikely to wave back.

If you liked this eBook then firstly I would like to congratulate you for your impeccable taste and secondly I would suggest that you visit the website www.adammaxwell.com where you'll find that new stories appear on a monthly basis as well as a short story podcast and loads of other things you might be interested in.

Go on, check it out, folks.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.5 License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 543 Howard Street, 5th Floor, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.

From the same author on Feedbooks

Dial M For Monkey (2006)

Adam Maxwell's first collection of short stories is inventive, funny, dark, and hugely entertaining. Effortlessly fusing pop culture, gunplay, and simians, *Dial M For Monkey* contains a vibrant mixture of short stories - and short-short stories including 'Happiness is a Warm Gun' which featured in McSweeney's *Internet Tendency*.

The Defective Detective : Murder on the Links (2010)

Clint had woken up in some strange places in his time. Narcolepsy is like that. But even he had never woken up on a golf course next to a dead body. Until today.

When one of his friends reveals himself to be a detective Clint jumps at the chance to tag along. But his friend is an idiot. And the police are beginning to suspect that he was involved. The identity of the killer seems obvious but can Clint get to the bottom of the mystery and save his own skin before the stag party catches him? Murder. Intrigue. Alcohol. Detectives. Clues. Golf. Laxatives. What else do you need?

The Defective Detective : Cat Chaser (2010)

It's the first case for Clint, probably the world's only narcoleptic detective, and everything should be going really well. To be brutal, it probably would be going a lot better if he'd managed to stay awake when he was briefed.

With four suspects and clues flying will he be able to find out who's guilty? Or even what they're guilty of?

Chills, Kills & Snowflakes (2010)

Four tales of terror to send icy chills through your blood. These stories will scare you senseless this winter season.

When banker Alec takes shelter from a snow storm in a peculiar old shop, the shopkeeper is less than impressed by the lengths he has gone to secure to a last minute present.

He decides an education of sorts must be meted out and begins to tell Alec three stories to convince him the error of his ways.

A chef digests more than he bargained for in a dish served extremely cold.

A man is in for an unpleasant surprise when he tries to turn a curse to his own advantage.

And, when ghosts are awakened in a suburban house, a diary appears to show Alec the truth behind the spectres.

But with the cold snow storm closing in Alec is not as safe as he thinks in the back room of Venkman's Emporium of Curiosities.

The Defective Detective : The Curious Case of the Kilchester Courier (2012)

Chasing a parcel delivered to a neighbour, Clint is sucked into a remarkably civilised but mildly deranged crime scene. There he encounters almost-blackmail, not-actually prostitution, probable-sex scandals, genuine-imposters and the very real theft of something incredibly important.

Twice.

Will Clint be able to stay awake long enough to restore what has been stolen to its rightful owner and will he need to resort to his new book 'The Agency's Foundation in Private Investigation : Home Study Edition' in order to solve the case?

These and literally three other questions are answered in the third Defective Detective outing 'The Curious Case of the Kilchester Courier'.



www.feedbooks.com
Food for the mind