

## The Ghost of Christmas Past

The phone rung, taking Becky several seconds before she actually realised where the noise was coming from. At first her hand hovered over the alarm clock, ready to hit the off button, before it finally sunk in it was the phone.

Wrenching it off the hook quickly, she huskily spoke into it.

‘Hello.’ She said before clearing her throat and saying, ‘hi,’ waiting for what seemed like forever for someone else to answer her.

‘Hi..... mum, sorry to wake you up, but you’re not going to believe.....’

Before the guy on the other end could say another word, Becky cut him off.

‘Do you know what the time is? You’ve got the wrong number. I’m no-one’s mum, and most definitely not yours.’ She slammed the phone down in disgust. Looking at the illuminated alarm clock, it told her it was early very early in the morning.

‘Great.’ She thought moodily. There she was just about to kiss George Clooney, and some idiot rings. Arrrh! Sitting up in bed she thumped her pillow in rage, imagining the face of the guy who’d just woken her. But then something made her think about what he’d said. He’d called her mum? And said that she wouldn’t believe, wouldn’t believe what?

Oh wonderful, now was she not only wide awake, but she was going to be thinking about what his mum wouldn’t believe. Whoever he was?

Suddenly, the phone rang again making her jump in the process. She leant over to her bedside lamp and quickly turned it on.

‘Hello.’ They both said at the same time, before the guy hurriedly spoke again.

‘Look I only rung again to say I’m sorry for ringing the first time and waking you up?’

Becky couldn’t believe what she was hearing; the ridiculousness of the conversation soon had her chuckling away.

‘Are you some kind of idiot?’ she said smiling at herself in the mirror that was hung on the opposite wall of her bedroom.

He heard her chuckling, ‘look I’m really sorry I rung your number by mistake. You’ve every right to be cross, because not only have I rung you once, but then I’ve rung again to apologise for that first time.’

‘Look, I’m sorry I shouted at you and so rudely hung up, but you wouldn’t believe the dream I was having.’ And then suddenly she thought perhaps she shouldn’t be discussing her dreams on the phone with a complete stranger.

‘Hey forget that. Look it’s alright, I had to wake up and answer the phone anyways.’ She said still smiling. Becky heard him chuckling. And then because she couldn’t resist being nosey she just had to ask him.

‘So what won’t your mum believe?’

‘Oh yeah, the reason why I rang you in the first place or rather thought I was ringing her was, you might think this pretty disgusting actually. Are you sure you want to hear it?’

By this time Becky’s mind had gone into overdrive. She could hear him breathing heavily down the phone. Was he some kind of pervert? Well she knew she wouldn’t have any hesitation about hanging up again and leaving the phone off its hook if he said something truly perverted.

‘Go on then,’ she finally replied.

‘Well it’s because for the first time in ages I’ve managed to eat all my dinner....’ Becky was relieved, thinking, ‘that wasn’t disgusting,’ until he said, ‘and keep it down.’

Her smile was wiped from her face. Instantly she was repulsed. What was up with this guy?

Almost as if he could read her mind he suddenly said, ‘look I’m sorry, I guess you really didn’t want to know that at 3.20am though.’

‘Well if I’m honest, I have to say that wasn’t what I thought you were going to say. Perhaps you’d better explain a bit more?’

‘Well how about I introduce myself? My name’s Bruce Dyer, I’d been staying at ‘Winter House,’ having treatment for cancer. Normally when I ate anything I couldn’t seem to keep it down. My mum’s been so worried about me, about the weight I’d lost that I thought I’d ring her with the good news, that I’m now back to normal. The trouble was I didn’t realise what the time was, I tend to get a bit disorientated where I am. I knew it was morning, but didn’t realise it was that early. Or that I had miss-dialled mum’s number and rung you instead.’

‘Well Bruce that’s quite a unique chat up line.’ Becky laughed and then said, ‘as we’re at the introducing ourselves stage, I’d better tell you my name’s Becky Hamilton.’

‘Well Becky Hamilton, it sure is a pleasure to meet you.’

‘Likewise,’ Becky hesitated before saying, ‘I hope you don’t mind me asking, but have you got to have a lot more treatment? Are you going to be able to be home in time for Christmas?’

Christmas Day was just two days away; Becky who’d only just recently moved to the pretty village of Woodley was going to be alone yet again. Spending Christmas on her own, had been her way of life for years. Being an only child, with no other living relatives, she didn’t find it easy making friends. Her parents had both been killed one Christmas, by a drunk driver.

She’d recently seen a poster advertising an event on the church notice board. They had a list which you signed, if you were able to help with the Christmas lunch for the homeless. Becky had wanted to offer her services, but she was shy. Could she put herself forward to do something like that?

Whilst in the village shop, she'd overheard one of the customers telling the owner it was her third year of helping out at the Christmas lunch. She'd said it was her way of being able to give a little something back to the community. And that she wouldn't be alone at Christmas, 'no-one should be alone at Christmas.'

And now for some reason those words were ringing in Becky's ears.

Bruce spoke, but she'd not been concentrating.

'Sorry Bruce what did you say?'

'No, I don't think I will be home for Christmas, but I know my mum will come and visit me. What are you doing for Christmas?'

So Becky told him all about being new to the village, and the fact she hadn't made any friends. She also told him about the poster. Should she offer her services?

'You know they would really appreciate it if you did. It's a wonderful thing you'd be doing. You'll find everyone is nice and friendly. And they will always be there for you, especially when you need them to be.'

'Do you know something Bruce, I think I will go and volunteer. And then afterwards, would you mind if I came and visited you?' Suddenly Becky yawned.

'I think it's time I let you get back to sleep and carry on with your dream about George Clooney.' Bruce laughed. 'It was great talking to you Becky; you know you will fit in just fine in the village. In no-time you will find you have so many friends, that you will never be on your own at Christmas ever again. Goodbye Becky.'

'Bye Bruce.' Becky said to the dialling tone sounding in her ear. She replaced the receiver. 'How did he know I was dreaming about George Clooney?' She couldn't remember telling him? And another thing, he hadn't said if it was okay to visit him?

But he'd helped her make her mind up. She was going to help with the Christmas lunch. There was a lot to thank Bruce for. She yawned again before switching off the light, falling fast asleep instantly.

The next morning saw her putting her name down. A man came over to her just as she finished writing.

'Hello I see that you've volunteered to help us. My name's Daniel Groves, I'm St Peter's vicar.' He smiled as he offered his hand, which Becky took.

'I'm Becky Hamilton. I'm pleased to meet you, I hope I won't be a hindrance more than a help.' She shyly smiled.

Almost as if he knew, Daniel said, 'there's no need to be shy, everyone's very kind, you won't be a hindrance at all.' He warmly smiled.

The next day was very busy; the queue of homeless people wanting to be served was endless. It was nearly 3pm before the last few finished. Becky kept glancing at the clock.

'Do you have to be somewhere? Only I, I mean us....,' Daniel said looking at all the other volunteers 'would like you stay and have your Christmas dinner here.'

'I would love to, it's just I thought I'd go to 'Winter House,' and visit someone.....'

Suddenly, there was an audible gasp from Grace one of the other volunteers.

'No you don't mean 'Winter House,' Daniel said.

Becky looked at him slightly confused.

'Yes I do. I want to go and see someone there. He phoned me two nights ago; he told me he'd been having treatment for cancer. Actually he rung me by mistake, he wanted to talk to his mum.'

Grace stepped forward.

'This person, did they give you their name?'

'Yes, he said his name was Bruce Dyer.'

Suddenly Grace burst into tears. Daniel moved forward putting his arm around her.

‘There, there Grace. I’m sure Becky’s got it wrong.’

By this time Becky was confused. She felt uneasy, whatever she’d said had obviously upset Grace, which was the last thing she’d wanted to do. Grace had been so kind to her today. She walked towards her.

‘I’m really sorry Grace; obviously I’ve upset you. I wouldn’t want to hurt you, please tell me, what I’ve said?’

Grace wiped her eyes.

‘Would you put your coat on?’

‘Oh great, now I’m being kicked out!’ Becky thought dejectedly. She nodded and grabbed her coat putting it on. She walked to the front door, as she got there Grace touched her arm.

‘Please will you just follow me outside?’ Grace said pulling her own coat on.

Becky nodded as she followed her. Grace walked a few yards and stopped.

‘Becky I’d like to introduce you to my son Bruce.’

Grace was stood by a headstone.

‘Bruce John Dyer,

Beloved son,

Born 17.10.1990,

Died 24.12.2009.’

Becky couldn’t believe it. She looked towards Grace, her vision awash with tears.

‘He can’t be dead, I spoke to him. I swear to you Grace, I’m not making this up.

What reason would I have to?’

Grace nodded.

‘Why don’t you tell me what he said?’

Becky nodded, when she'd finished Grace smiled at her.

'I was always worried about him, losing weight. Now he's found a way to tell me he's well and not to worry anymore. Thank you Becky, thank you so much, this is the best Christmas present I could have ever wished for.'

'So you do believe me?' Becky said as Grace nodded.

'I do. You know at the time I thought life was so unfair, Bruce had been battling cancer for such a long time, just when we thought he'd beaten it, 'Winter House,' caught fire, he died trapped in his room.'

It was Becky's turn to look astounded.

'But he spoke to me as clear as day, in fact when I told him about seeing the poster, it was his idea for me to come and volunteer. He told me that I would meet people and make friends.....'

'Well he was right about that my dear.' Grace smiled before saying, 'shall we go back inside and have our Christmas dinner? I think Daniel would like it very much if you came back with me, in fact he wouldn't be the only one.' She smiled sincerely.

Becky glanced back at Bruce's grave, sending him her thanks. Without his phone call she would have never have made the lifelong friends, which she somehow knew she had made today.

The End