

JINXED CHRISTMAS

Lillian slammed the Christmas pudding into the steamer on the hob. She gave a moan as she looked at the unlit cooker. 'I'm sorry' he had said, 'I just took the protector glass out of the door, to clean it and it broke into a hundred pieces.' She had flung her slipper at him, screaming, 'You'll be in a hundred pieces when I catch up with you! Our daughter coming for Christmas lunch and no oven. I'll have to improvise on the hob. I could kill you!' Believing her capable of it, Tom jammed a hat on his head, wrapped a scarf round his neck and backed out, not looking at her. Lillian collapsed on a chair, bowed her head on the table and cried bitterly.

Angry voices came through the wall and Lillian could hear the odd scream. Poor Netta she thought, at least Tom had never struck her. Still, bad luck seemed to dog him and she had had years of anguish with crisis after crisis to be sorted- always by her. Next door slammed and heavy boots hammered the pavement. She could hear Netta crying. No privacy with these thin walls.

The phone rang, "Hello Mam, The car broke down. The garage hasn't a spare and all the taxis are booked up. My P.M.T, is working overtime. I'm giving in and going to bed with a glass of wine. See you Monday, eh?"

'Yes you go to bed. Don't worry about me. Your father doesn't, why should you? Oh.goodbye.'

Lillian replaced the phone, bent her head on the table and wept. There was a shuffling of voices outside and the church choir began to sing, God rest ye merry, gentlemen. blow Christmas, she thought and hid behind the Welch dresser. The doorbell rang four times before they gave up.

An hour later, next door slammed and looking out she saw Netta with a large suitcase, enter a taxi. No, it wasn't a taxi, for the driver jumped out and kissed her heartily. Lillian sighed, began to cut up pieces of chicken, peel potatoes, and vegetables. She would make a stew, followed by pudding and custard. Tears fell into the pot as disasters of earlier years slid through her mind. Missed holidays; near accidents; taps left running into floods and insurance not paid; her pet cat run over with his mechanised mower. Not much laughter or love.

Fifty two years old and what lay before her? More bad luck she supposed. The church told you to count your blessings: She only had one - her daughter, who would never give her grandchildren, being more fond of women than men and who was drifting away from her. The bell rang loudly. Lost his key again, she thought. Lillian hurried to open the door and froze at the sight of a W.P.C and a Sergeant. "Can we come in?" they asked.

Lillian backed away, indicating the kitchen. "What's happened?" she pleaded when sitting down.

The W.P.C. at her side said. 'There's been a terrorist bomb exploded near the Rat and Gun pub. I'm sorry to tell you, your husband and neighbour walked into it and both are dead!'

Elizabeth Burdis.