

AY
I want
for
Christmas

ALSO BY BETH GARROD

SUPER AWKWARD

TRULY MADLY AWKWARD

ACCESS ALL AWKWARD

TAKE A CHANCE ON ME

ALL
I Want
for
Christmas

BETH GARROD

 SCHOLASTIC

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FOR MOOMIN, WHO MADE SURE
CHRISTMAS WAS – AND ALWAYS
WILL BE – MAGICAL FOR ALL OF US.

FORTY-TWO DAYS BEFORE CHRISTMAS...

Is it so wrong to put a Santa hat on a shrivelled pumpkin? I did it anyway, and pulled on my elf onesie. It must have had an incident in the wash because it only reached my calves and the H on the front now said **Π**. But who cared? Not meee. It was November 14th, my Christmas playlist was on and everything was going to plan. Freezing ankles weren't going to get in the way of tradition (unless the tradition was woolly socks).

I sat on the edge of my bed and reached underneath. Bingo. I pulled out the battered shoebox, blew off the dust and peeled back the tape. I loved this moment. Every. Single. Year.

And there it was, waiting for me. A Christmas card, some paper folded inside. I snapped off a piece

of Chocolate Orange (actually two, but they seemed so happy together, why separate them?) and opened the envelope.

Happy Christmas Holly!

If you're reading this, it means only one thing. It's Chriiiiiistmas. Well, the start of it anyway. Well done you on getting through the other less-point-ful ten months of the year. Is it snowing? I hope for the sake of all that is festive and cinnamon-scented, it is.

IN FACT. STOP. Are you sipping on something gingerbread flavoured rn? If not, SORT IT OUT before reading another word – because this is about to get biiiiiig.

What you're holding in your hand is not just a Christmas card. Oh no. It's a time-travelling gift from the Best Christmas Ever. Honestly, this year was IT.

And no detail must be forgotten. EVER. (In case you're not getting the hint, this is your reminder to make notes starting ... now.) Treat this card like a priceless relic. Like the ... er ... Mona Lisa. But BETTER. Because she doesn't have Malteser Reindeers.

Or maybe she does ... and that's why she's smiling??

So lemme break it down...

OF COURSE Carol singing was amazing. As in Carol, Mum's friend, who NEVER lets us down at the

village Christmas Eve singalong round the tree. Serious question – has she genuinely never heard of any of the songs DESPITE THEM BEING THE SAME ONES EVERY YEAR AND ALSO THE SAME ONES SINCE CHRISTMAS WAS INVENTED?? As usual, she sang the wrong words. And the wrong tunes. Iconic.

Then we all headed to ours for the legendary Christmas Eve party. After we'd stood around pretending mince pies are nice (and me telling everyone they used to be oblong-shaped, like the nativity crib), Naomi and I competitive speed-ate all the pink Quality Street without getting spotted (Mum genuinely thinks they just don't put as many in the tin?! Pahahaha), and I herded everyone into the garden. Mum, her new boyf, the twins, my sister, Ruby, Fred – everyone.

And, HELLO, best-ever surprise! I'd snuck back early and pegged up matching onesies – one for everyone, each with their initial on. They'd taken weeks! Sure, I do agree with Fred, that on reflection, seven full-length body shapes swaying in the dark garden was kind of creepy. BUT after I'd persuaded the twins to stop screaming and come back out, everyone was dead impressed, and pulled them on. Not to blow my own Christmas trumpet here, but we looked A.May.Zing. I really nailed my yearly "Christmas Cracker" surprise. The group photo was perfection. (Mum

has already put it on the fridge – over the one of Naomi passing her driving test. Hahaha.) The only one not in it was Colin. I'd crafted his onesie from an old jumper, but had sort of forgotten dogs had four legs ... and a head. So basically, I'd made him an elaborate giant sock.

ANYWAY.

Mum and New Boyfriend drank mulled wine and chatted loudly about the heat burning off the alcohol (clearly a LIE, due to the volume at which they were talking about it) and Ruby, Fred and I escaped up to my room for the most sacred of festive traditions. Elf. Saaantaaaaa!!!! We are word perfect. This year, Ruby and Fred went next-level with their attempt at recreating the escalator scene. Rubes was, of course, amazing, and Fred was ... well, Fred. I don't think he'll ever attempt the splits again – or maybe not even enjoy normal walking judging by how he hobbled out. We swapped presents – Fred's looked very much like two Toblerones end-to-end. (SPOILER ALERT: You can imagine how excited I was when it turned out to be ... two Toblerones super-glued end-to-end. My friends are THE BEST.) Then everyone left and it was just Mum, me and Nay. So we hung our stockings on the stairs and went to bed.

And OH. MY. JINGLE. BELLS.

Christmas Day only went and got even better?!

I got up early (the incentive of pre-8 a.m. Toblerone is a powerful thing) to surprise Mum by doing Christmas breakfast, but she was already up. In full Ms Santa dress!! I unveiled this year's Christmas playlist and we danced around the kitchen as we waited for Naomi to get up (which took forever, despite me walking outside her door really loudly four times). Then it was opening stockings and selection boxes. Mum still acts surprised when she gets her big sports sock stuffed with things as if we haven't been doing that for years, but I guess that's part of the tradition now too!

As usual, I shoved on every single bit of make-up from my stocking, so looked quite extra (aka scary) for 10 a.m., and put on all my new bits of clothing, even though none of it matched. We had to delay proper presents round the tree as I had an incident with my selection box (ie, had eaten all of it except the Crunchie) and the bending to pick up the presents and pass them out was making me feel a bit ... volatile. But then genius Naomi opened our yearly box of posh chocolates from Dad, and weirdly, it turned out eating more was the solution. Who knew?!

Mum and Nay loved their pressie from me – tickets to a baking class with one of the Bake Off winners (pheeewww – it cost ALL my savings). But Naomi went weird, and I had no idea why until I opened my pressie

from her. A ticket for me to go too! Absolute result!!! She said it was older-taller-sister intuition. (Fred later accidentally revealed he'd tipped her off about how much I wouldn't stop talking about it.)

Ruby loved what I'd bought her – a personalized handheld mirror that I'd had engraved with “And the winner of Best Actor goes to...” around the edge. It was to use before her auditions, because if I couldn't be there to remind her how awesome she was, maybe this would instead. Honestly, when Ruby, the girl who I've never seen express an emotion in almost sixteen years, rang, she looked kind of ... teary. In a good way. IT WAS TOO MUCH! Maybe that's why I blubbed when I opened hers – a snowglobe of the ice rink in Central Park that she'd also had personalized! (Related thought – me and Mum's new beige carpet can confirm my new eyeliner is NOT waterproof.) It really couldn't have been more perfect if it tried. It said ... one sec, let me get it...

“Shake my snow, dream what you feel,
make a Christmas wish, then watch it become real.”

Full disclosure, I've now done that 1,000 times, but haven't YET had my wish granted and been teleported to New York.

**Even fuller disclosure, I also shook it alllll the way through Nay and me watching the Christmas Eve Snow

*Ball concert in Madison Square Garden, but still nothing. YET.***

Argh?! Did I mention the twins? How could I not?! Oh yes ... because they spent the whole day running around with a box on their heads. One box, four legs. Each to their own. Being five must be a lot of fun. Even Colin was looking at them like they'd lost it, and his favourite hobby is licking the oven.

Which reminds me. The big thing. COLIN WENT MISSING!

Around 2 p.m. We rang everyone to ask if they'd seen him – even Carol, who turned up to look with a torch, even though the sun was still out.

But guess who eventually found him? ME. He was splatted out in the cupboard under the stairs lying on some coats, looking like a balloon with four corks sticking out. He wasn't even blinking. Obviously, we all panicked. Carol rang 111 (who pointed out they didn't deal with dogs). But ... Mum discovered a plate under the kitchen table. Yes, tiny old Chewbacca-resembling, Jack Russell poodle cross that he is, he'd somehow dragged the whole turkey off the table. And eaten it. The Christmas turkey. Every bit?! For real – it was bigger than him. No wonder he couldn't make all of his legs reach the floor at the same time – he'd effectively grounded himself from overeating. And I

respected that. I mean, I had to. He'd totally seen what had happened with me and the selection box earlier. (And every single year before that.) (And probably next year too.)

Mum was upset about the turkey, but we promised her the best bits of Christmas dinner were the accessories anyway, and stuck some frozen hamburgers in the oven. If Colin had gone for the pigs in blankets, it would have been a different matter.

But then. THEN. It happened.

******DRINK BREAK. DEEP BREATHS. Prepare to relive this******

An unexpected doorbell ring.

First thought: Carol coming back to tell us she'd rung an ambulance for Colin after all.

Second thought: Fred arriving early, because he'd got the time (or day) wrong.

But no. All kinds of no. IT WAS WOODY.

As in, love-of-my-life Woody.

As in, Woody who makes me think deeply inappropriate thoughts, just from writing his name.

As in...

*(sorry, no, had to take a moment
to think deeply*

inappropriate thoughts).

When I opened the door, he said, "I thought my girlfriend deserved a surprise on Christmas Day." Like in a film!! And he was holding out a big red Christmas plant thing. (Have since found out it was a poinsettia. KNOWLEDGE.)

And then, right on cue ... snow started falling down.

Most. Perfect. Romantic. Christmas. Moment. Ever.

He suggested we take Colin for a quick walk (carry due to his tummy dimensions) and we went to the walkway by the village hall where we'd had our first ever kiss (November 17th, 8:23 p.m.). But this time there was mistletoe. And, not to be graphic, but we stopped underneath it and ... well ... THERE'S NO OTHER WAY OF SAYING IT, WE HAD THE BEST KISS EVER. EVEREVEREVER.

**** PHEW, HAD TO PAUSE TO ACTUALLY FAN FACE ****

Genuinely, best of my life (not that there's much to compare it to, hahhahaha). Woody gave me this look before and after that was all mwwhhhhwwhhhwhhhw (aka the sound of me melting) and told me how much he liked me.

Hot. Romantic. Christmassy. And in the snow! With a poinsettia! (No idea why I'd taken that with me.) But who cares! (Well, Carol did as she walked round the corner,

almost straight into us, and was all flustered, and said “Don't mind me” five times, which made me really mind her, and then she tripped over the plant, and then over Colin.)

I had to have a quiet sit down when I got back to process it all. Naomi kept asking why I was grinning like I was watching a new Harry Styles video.

Then Fred came round and I introduced him to my plant (he named it Ant McPlantlin). He was still wearing his onesie from the day before (Fred, not Ant). I asked if he'd taken it off at any point and ... well, he was vague to say the least. He loved his present (ten packets of Jaffa Cakes cunningly arranged in the shape of an X). Then it was the usual – sofa cushions on to the floor and bundling up under my duvet, Mum and Nay under another one. We stuck on the old Gavin & Stacey Christmas special and played games and ate every edible present, even though we were already stuffed and, well ... days just don't get better. (Even if the main game we played was trying to ignore the noises Colin made as he deflated.)

I'm still smiling now ... ten days later.

I have never looked after ANYTHING like I have Ant McPlantlin. He's basically my and Woody's first child.

Which brings me to ... QUESTIONS.

Is Ant still alive? And thriving?

Did Woody let you keep his hoodie? Does it still smell of him? (Aka, heaven.)

Ruby – please tell me she made it into this year’s pantomime?!

And ... finalllly...

I know every year you say you’re going to make Christmas better than the year before, but srsly, HOW IS THAT POSSIBLE?! You better have started planning already!

So ... that’s it. END OF THIS YEAR’S CARD.

Happy Christmas! Go give Mum a hug and tell her you love her and then you know what to do...

PUT THIS UP AND OFFICIALLY LAUNCH CHRISTMAS. HAPPY HOLIDAAAAAYS!!!

Holly (from last year) (aka Christmas past)

PS – Mum mentioned she’d always wanted a calendar with pics of the family on – present idea?!

PPS – Get more Twiglets. Or hide a box. Turns out Fred panic eats them when he can’t figure out who he is in the Post-it game.

PPPS – Although Colin pretends to be lazy, he’s surprisingly good at mountaineering up a table. PUT EDIBLE THINGS HIGHER.

PPPPS – Oh, and New Boyfriend doesn't seem to be loving the New Boyfriend name. He pointed out multiple times he's been together with Mum for four years. Maybe this could be the year we start to call him by his actual name. Colin. And rename dog Colin to dog-Colin...?

Nah, I'm picturing your face, and agree. TOO SOON. As you were.

PPPPPS – Last thing, promise. Don't forget to not forget the golden rules of Christmas ...

Never say no to a novelty hot drink.

And:

Never wimp out of the high notes of "All I Want for Christmas Is You". It's what Mariah wants (even if Colin x 2 don't).