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For my mum and dad

Chapter One

Falford, Christmas Eve

‘**H**appy Christmas Eve!’
Bo Grayson’s pulse rocketed as two arms encircled her unexpectedly in the twilight outside the Boatyard Café. She’d just given the padlock on the door a final tug to check it was secure before the festive break.

‘Oh my God, Hamish! You scared me.’

‘Sorry,’ he said, freeing her so she could turn around and look at him face to face. ‘Didn’t mean to make you jump.’

‘It’s OK – you just took me by surprise.’

‘Well, I’m a good surprise, I hope?’

Bo hesitated, but only to keep him on tenterhooks. Hamish MacKenzie had made her heart pound far too often over the past few months, and it was fun to see him unsure about her feelings for a change.

‘Yes, you are a good surprise,’ she conceded.

A satisfied grin spread over his face and his eyes glinted. ‘Cade not around?’ he asked, scanning the terrace area next to

the café beside the estuary. Birds called as dusk fell and lights already twinkled in the windows of the cottages of Falford village, which straddled both sides of the creek.

‘No. I sent him home half an hour ago. He wanted to help me clear away and close up but he deserves some time with his family on Christmas Eve. He’s worked so hard all season. Neither of us has been able to have a proper break.’ Cade was not only Bo’s assistant but also one of her regular partners at the Falford Flingers, the dance group of which she was a member.

‘You’ve worked bloody hard too. You’re a saint,’ Hamish said, then raised one of his eyebrows suggestively. ‘Though not too much of one, I hope.’

Suddenly he swept into his arms and kissed her, the soft wool of his scarf tickling her nose and making her laugh so that the kiss ended sooner than she’d really have liked. Then again, it was always too soon to end one of Hamish’s kisses.

‘Sorry,’ Bo said, wrinkling her nose and trying not to sneeze, which would have been most unromantic. ‘Your scarf got in the way.’

‘In that case, I must remember not to wear it again.’ His eyes glinted with promise. ‘I wouldn’t want to let anything get in the way of kissing you.’

With a tingle of excitement, Bo tucked the scarf deeper into the open neck of his Barbour jacket. He looked more delicious than anything she’d served up in the Boatyard café over the past six weeks. Bo could still hardly believe that this year, for the first time in many, she wouldn’t be waking up alone on Christmas Day. She’d always enjoyed spending the day with her parents, sister, brother-in-law and little niece and nephew, but it would be lovely to wake up with Hamish and share breakfast

in her own place; open their presents together before heading off to visit her family.

She'd had his present wrapped up and hidden away in the back of her wardrobe for weeks now, and she couldn't wait to give it to him. She'd ordered a beautiful hip flask – sterling silver with his initials engraved. As they hadn't been together for too long, she felt confident this was just the right sort of gift: a playful nod to his Scots heritage, but also something personal – a keepsake from her.

Bo smiled to herself, thinking how lucky she was to have found Hamish. It wasn't easy meeting new people in a small village like Falford and, though Hamish was working in nearby Helston, it was fair to say he'd caused a stir for miles around. He was tall and hunky with curly brown hair and a Highlands accent to-die-for and – God love him – he was a vet.

He was single too, which had seemed like a minor miracle. He was also a keen sailor and had been given use of a colleague's yacht which was kept at the boatyard. After a few visits to Bo's café and a lot of chat, he'd asked her out for a drink and a meal at a local pub. That had been back in September and, it was safe to say, they hadn't wasted any time since.

'You managed to get away from work, then?' Bo said, knowing the vet's surgery where he worked always planned to close at three on Christmas Eve, but that was never usually the case with people rushing to make last-minute appointments for their pets ahead of the holidays.

'Remarkably, aye. I castrated a male cat and emptied the anal glands of an elderly spaniel but that's as wild as it got. Luckily I'm not on call for a few days so we can make the most of our lie-in tomorrow.'

'I can't wait,' Bo said. She'd always loved Christmas morning,

and spending it with Hamish would be the cherry on top of the icing on a very large and delicious cake.

‘Come on, let’s go home and I’ll have a shower before we go over to the Ferryman.’

‘You’d better plan on inviting me to share that shower . . .’

At thirty-five, Bo had thought she was past the age of blushing, but the prospect of getting hot and soapy with Hamish brought a glow to her cheeks despite the damp evening. He’d warmed her nights as the weather turned cooler, and her days off had been filled with walks, pub lunches and afternoons in his bed. She’d even persuaded him to call in at a Falford Flingers social night once, but he’d drawn the line at joining in with the dancing.

He was solvent, single and thirty-seven. On their first date Bo had known he was perfect for her, and she tried in vain not to fall too hard for him. She’d woken up one morning next to him and, watching him as he slept, realised that, despite her best efforts to keep things casual and keep her cool, she was in love. Deeply, madly in love – was there any other kind?

He tucked his arm around her now and they walked up to the car park where he’d left his mud-spattered Land Rover. Bo heaved a sigh of relief. She loved the run-up to Christmas but she was mighty glad she’d served her last turkey and cranberry wrap, festive brownie and spiced latte until after the New Year.

She was looking forward to two weeks of snuggling up by the fire, watching trashy TV and lie-ins with Hamish until he headed home to Scotland for Hogmanay. Now she could relax, put on her dancing shoes and cherry-red frock and head to the pub with Hamish to celebrate with her friends from the Flingers.

Hamish drove up the hill towards the bridge that crossed the head of the creek and across the water then back down into

Falford village. The lane was narrow and ran in front of the cottages and the shops until it turned sharply upwards again and out of the village.

Bo's little cottage was situated in the centre of the village on the opposite side of the creek to the boatyard.

Falford itself was a sheltered offshoot of the main Fal estuary, which gave way to the open sea on the eastern side of the Lizard. Its creeks were dotted with villages and hamlets, havens for watercraft of all kinds. Coloured fairy lights adorned the terrace of the Ferryman Inn and the Falford Yacht Club which faced each other on opposite sides of the water. The art gallery and folklore gift shop, Cornish Magick, had closed for the holidays, but their windows were still aglow with festive displays.

The post office-cum-village store near Bo's cottage was still open, though, and would be for a while, catering to locals and holidaymakers scurrying in for cranberry sauce, tinfoil or an extra bottle of prosecco.

Hamish parked next to Bo's small van in the village residents' car park and, with his arm around her, they walked through the clear Cornish air to her cottage. Bo's fingers trembled in anticipation as she unlocked the door, then led Hamish straight upstairs where he made good on his offer to join her in the shower. Getting clean after her long day at the café and his at the vet's turned out to be the last thing on their minds – getting dirty was a more accurate description – but at last, fresh and steamy from the shower, they made it downstairs where Hamish lit the wood burner and they snuggled onto the sofa to relax and talk about the busy week they'd had in the run-up to Christmas.

Prior to buying the café, Bo had trained as a chef, learning her trade in various restaurants and pubs in the area before

travelling and working abroad. She'd finally come home to Falford five years previously and found the Boatyard Café had come up for sale. It had been little more than a shack by the slipway, where the height of sophisticated cuisine was an egg on your sausage butt. The roof was leaking, the paint was peeling and the plastic chairs and tables were cracked.

Back then, it catered almost exclusively to boat workers and fishermen – it did the job, but Bo had always thought it held so much more potential, particularly as Falford Boatyard was becoming a trendy place to keep your boat as well as a practical one.

In the spring through to the autumn, Falford was bustling with visitors who gravitated to the water's edge. All kinds of waterfowl feasted on the low-tide mudflats and sometimes seals and even dolphins popped up in the deeper parts of the estuary. The café was the perfect spot for watching all the action, and Bo had long cast a wistful eye on it, fantasising about how she'd transform it and keep customers coming all year round.

When she got the chance, she pounced.

She still served breakfast butties, but she offered them on bread from the local bakery rather than cheap loaves from the cash and carry. A few customers grumbled that she had to put up the price but most had forgiven her when they tasted the result, made from fresh Cornish produce.

The old-timers rolled their eyes when she added smashed avocado on sourdough to the menu, but they didn't have to eat it and she knew the second-home owners and London holiday cottage visitors adored it. Over the summer, she'd been open seven days a week from nine until four, with the help of a couple of part-time staff who enabled her to have a rare day off. She'd done shorter hours and fewer days from October

with another surge of six-day weeks in the run-up to Christmas. It was high time for a break and she'd never looked forward to it more.

Hamish had her feet in his lap and was massaging them. Closing her eyes, Bo sighed in ecstasy.

'I could stay here all evening,' he said.

'Me too, but everyone's expecting us and I need to get changed.'

His fingers encircled her ankle and slid higher up her leg. 'Don't see why.'

'Because I can't go to the pub wearing a fluffy bathrobe and no knickers.'

'Again. I don't see why not?' He gave the cheeky grin that drove her wild.

Laughing, she extricated herself from the sofa, forcing any thoughts of lingering to the back of her mind.

'I won't be long.'

With an exaggerated sigh, he picked up the TV remote. 'I'll just have to amuse myself, I suppose.'

Her wardrobe was bulging with vintage pieces in her favourite 1950s style. She picked out a cherry-red velvet dress, which was nipped in at the waist with a sweetheart neckline and three-quarter-length sleeves. She added a black cropped cardigan she'd found on a vintage stall, black seamed tights and black patent shoes with chunky heels.

None of it was practical for a December night by the river but she didn't care. It was only five minutes to the Ferryman and, although it was a damp night, it was still ten degrees in this mild corner of Cornwall, where camellias and magnolias were already in bloom thanks to the sheltered river valleys and micro-climate.

Hamish was sprawled on the sofa watching *Die Hard* when Bo entered the sitting room. He let out a whistle. 'You look bloody amazing.'

'Thanks. I'm probably overdressed for the Ferryman but it is Christmas Eve.'

He muted the sound and beckoned her closer. 'As long as you're underdressed later, I don't care.' He lifted the hem of her dress. 'Are those stockings?'

'That's for me to know and you to find out.'

'Well, that would only take me a minute . . .' Hamish said suggestively as he started to run his fingers up from the back of her knee to her thigh.

Bo playfully batted his hand away, saying, 'Not now! You'll have to wait, but I wouldn't get your hopes up.'

Trying not to think about how much she'd like to take Hamish up on his offer, Bo shooed him out of the house. He unhooked his battered Barbour from the hall stand and they stepped into the night air. The light mist was rising off the estuary and cast halos around the fairy lights adorning most of the homes and shops. The Ferryman was no exception, with strings of coloured bulbs that hung from the eaves and over its terrace. Even some of the yachts moored in the estuary and at the yacht club opposite had lights on their masts. Caught up in the festive excitement, Bo couldn't wait to start the celebrations.

When they reached the Ferryman, some of the revellers had spilled out from the bar and onto the waterside terrace above the jetty. Waving at various locals, Bo and Hamish threaded their way through the drinkers, looking for the rest of the Flingers. The group's leaders, Hubert and Sally Jaye, were sitting at a table by the fire with some of the other older members.

Cade was their son, but he'd be spending Christmas Eve at home with his wife and new baby.

After a quick hello to her fellow dancers, Bo and Hamish went for a table in the corner where a bright-eyed middle-aged woman sat with a glass of Coke in front of her.

'Hello, Angel! Happy Christmas!' Bo said.

Angel Carrack sprang up and hugged her. 'Happy Christmas! I saved you both a space – it's packed in here.'

'Thanks, Angel,' Bo said.

'Hello, Hamish. Happy Christmas,' Angel said.

'Happy Christmas,' he replied, giving her a peck on the cheek.

Hamish popped to the bar while Bo and Angel chatted. Bo decided on a glass of mulled wine but Hamish wasn't drinking, saying he'd had a skinful at the vet's Christmas do earlier that week.

Bo shrugged off her coat, draping it over the back of her chair.

Angel gave a sigh. 'Oh, I love that coat. You look amazing.'

'You look fabulous yourself! Is that a new dress? What a gorgeous colour.'

Angel beamed as she smoothed out the skirt of her emerald-green satin dress. The style fitted her petite form like a glove and the colour perfectly complemented her auburn curls and green eyes. 'It is! In fact, I made it.'

'Wow. You're so talented.'

Angel wrinkled her nose. 'Tommy said it makes me look like a Christmas tree.'

'You don't! He's rotten!'

'He was only joking, I expect. He did also say it really suited me.'

'I should hope so,' Bo said, picturing Angel's gruff husband and feeling quite cross with him for teasing her friend.

‘He’s coming to pick me up tonight. It’ll make a nice change for him not to be at sea and for me to have a lift rather than collecting him from the pub.’

‘I’m glad he’s home for Christmas,’ Bo said. Angel’s husband was a fisherman and often at sea for days on end. He also liked a drink or two but that didn’t seem to be an issue for Angel, who tolerated Tommy’s quirks with remarkable good humour. Bo wasn’t sure she would have been so forgiving.

Hamish was engaged in a conversation about worming treatments with one of the other vets who’d stopped at their table so Bo chatted to Angel about their preparations for Christmas dinner, and the Christmas shopping triumphs and disasters. Bo had done some of hers at the Country Stores, which was stocked with gift ideas as well as more mundane essentials like horse feed and compost.

She loved hunting out the perfect gift for friends and family; knowing you didn’t have to spend much if you planned in advance and put some thought into the ideal present. As a businesswoman herself, she also liked to stick to smaller local shops as much as possible – even if her purchases from the Country Stores helped to line the pockets of Kelvin, Angel’s boss, who’d taken on the place after his great-uncle had retired. However, tonight wasn’t for wasting time thinking about Kelvin, and Bo soon moved on to chatting about the Flingers.

‘Is Ran coming tonight?’ Angel asked.

Bo shrugged. ‘I don’t know. He didn’t say.’

Ran Larsen was a relatively new face in Falford and the Flingers’ latest – and rather enigmatic – member. He was Norwegian by birth but had lived in the UK most of his life, moving from London the previous spring. He’d joined the Flingers in early October, but not to dance – he had been sent

along by Cookie, their usual DJ, who couldn't make it at the last moment.

Cookie knew Ran as a regular customer in the vintage record shop he ran in Falmouth. He'd mentioned Ran was renting a cottage by one of the narrow valleys that branched off from the main Falford estuary and Bo knew the house – a solitary place almost hidden under the trees at the very head of the romantically named Smuggler's Creek.

Ran had turned up that night at the Flingers rehearsal, knowing no one and appearing anything but a rock and roll enthusiast, dressed in black jeans and an anonymous grey T-shirt as opposed to the quirky vintage gear favoured by most of the men. He'd played some great tunes, many they hadn't heard before but they had got everyone bopping away enthusiastically. However, in contrast to Cookie's amusing patter, Ran had largely let his music do the talking. Apart from chatting to Hubert briefly, he hadn't hung around. The more charitable members of their group might describe him as 'quiet', the less forgiving members as 'aloof'.

'Maybe he's just shy,' Angel, generous as ever, had remarked to Bo. 'After all, he doesn't know anyone. I wonder what Ran's short for? I think it's a Viking name. He looks like a Viking.'

'Well he certainly doesn't look like the rock and roll type,' Bo had said. She simply couldn't imagine him with sideburns and crepe-soled shoes anyway, and the thought made her want to giggle.

'I think he looks like a younger version of that chap from *Tarzan* . . . my kids still love that film even though they're grown-up.'

Bo knew exactly what her friend meant, and sneaked a look at Ran, who'd been setting up the decks and sorting through

records. 'You must mean Alexander Skarsgård? Hmm, I *can* kind of see the resemblance.'

Sideburns or no sideburns, the music he played was fantastic. He clearly had a passion for the sounds of the era and an impressive set of equipment, record decks, and amps. Even so, Bo hadn't expected him to come along again and had been surprised when he'd turned up with Cookie the following week. When Cookie had confessed he was too busy with his business to DJ any longer, Ran had become a regular fixture.

Hamish returned from the bar and, a moment later, Ran himself emerged from a laughing group of locals. He made for their table, a half pint in his hand.

Bo and Angel exchanged glances, as if to say: 'What timing!'

'Oh, hello, Ran! I didn't see you walk in,' Angel said.

'I came up from the terrace. I've had a word with the others en route.' He kissed Angel on the cheek. 'Happy Christmas, Angel.'

She beamed.

'It's good to see you,' Bo said.

Ran gave one of his enigmatic smiles that might have meant anything.

'So, how are you liking Falford?' Angel asked. 'Now you've been here a few months.'

'It's been eight months, actually,' he said.

'So long?' Bo was genuinely surprised. 'Time flies!'

'I'd been here a while before I joined the Flingers,' Ran said.

'You're almost as new here as me,' Hamish said. 'So, what's your verdict on the locals?'

'Everyone's been very welcoming so far,' Ran said evenly.

'You can say that again. I've certainly had a *very* warm welcome from the locals,' Hamish said as he kissed Bo's lips

briefly. 'Especially from one in particular. Phew, talk about hot.'

'Ooh errr.' Angel let out a squeak.

Bo felt the heat rise into her cheeks and squirmed, feeling embarrassed.

Hamish's hand crept over her thigh under the table. Bo shifted in her seat. His fingers slid underneath the hem of her velvet dress and rested above her knee. It would have been sexy in private or possibly in a quiet corner of a pub, but *here*? The Ferryman was packed with people, many of whom she knew, and Angel was only two feet away on the opposite side of the table, with Ran standing next to her. She hoped no one could see and gently moved his hand off her leg. 'Later,' she mouthed with a smile.

'Are you staying in Falford for Christmas, Ran?' she asked, sure her voice was rising higher in pitch but trying to deflect attention away from her red face.

'I am,' he said.

'No plans to see your family?' Angel said, sounding a little surprised.

'My sister's lot will be going to see our parents in Surrey. I don't mind staying at home and, anyway, I'm on duty over the festive period.'

'On duty?' Hamish asked.

'I occasionally volunteer for the Marine Divers Wildlife Rescue,' he said. 'And besides, Thor needs me.'

'Thor?' Hamish burst out laughing.

'My cat.' Ran smiled. 'Although I call him the Beast of Bodmin. He's a terror to the local wildlife.'

'You love him really,' Angel said. 'I'm so glad you could take him.'

‘He’s certainly got his paws under the table, and I was glad to give him a home.’

‘A wildlife rescue diver with a rescue cat? I approve,’ Hamish said, miming applause.

Ran smiled politely.

‘This is the first I’ve heard about a cat,’ Bo said.

‘I’ve only had him a couple of weeks. A customer of Angel’s died and the family couldn’t take him so I was persuaded.’

‘A customer from the Country Stores?’ Bo said. Angel worked at, or rather, virtually ran, the local country supplies centre a few miles away and got little thanks for it, from what Bo could glean.

‘Yes, Thor belonged to a lovely old chap who lived on his own and had no relatives. I mentioned it to Ran and he said he’d take him.’

‘For my sins,’ Ran said solemnly.

‘You didn’t need much persuasion!’ Angel said. ‘You told me you love cats.’

‘No, well, who could possibly have turned down Thor? I think we make a formidable pair, too – Thor and Ranulph.’ Ran smiled.

‘Ranulph’s an unusual name. I went to vet school with one. He was from Orkney. Viking stock, are you?’ Hamish asked.

Bo sipped her wine, hoping to hear more about the mysterious Ran.

‘My mother’s Norwegian so it’s pretty likely. My father’s British and, like I said, they live in Surrey now. Not many Vikings there.’

‘How exciting,’ Angel said. ‘Christmas in Norway sounds like it would be magical.’

‘Magical, but also very cold and very dark.’ He smiled. ‘My family are from Tromsø, in the north.’

Hamish grinned and put his arm around Bo. 'I'm personally happy to stay in warmer regions for Christmas.'

'We're planning to have a quiet Christmas together but we're going round my mum and dad's for Christmas dinner tomorrow,' Bo explained, squirming a little at his innuendo and wanting to move the conversation on. 'Hamish has yet to experience the full effect of my sister and her kids.'

'Don't worry, I'm escaping for Hogmanay,' Hamish said and they all laughed. Even Ran smiled.

Bo was a little nervous about introducing Hamish to her family for the first time but it felt like the right step given he was becoming a regular fixture in her life. Whether that fixture would be more permanent remained to be seen. The atmosphere in the pub warmed as the landlord amped up the festive tunes. Having exhausted the more modern mix tapes, some vintage tunes came on.

'Oh, I love this one!' Bo cried, instantly recognising 'Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree'.

'And it's the original by Brenda Lee!' Angel cried in delight.

'Thank goodness,' Ran said archly. 'If it had been the Kim Wilde version, you wouldn't have seen me for dust.'

Bo tapped her fingers on the table to the beat. 'I feel like dancing right now.'

Hamish winced. 'Not in here, surely?' He rolled his eyes. 'This stuff's out of the ark. It's my granada's era.'

'I know . . . but I love it,' Bo said.

Hamish turned to Ran as he said, 'I keep telling Bo she's too young for this sort of thing. You too, if you don't mind me saying, mate.'

'Hamish . . .' Bo said, playfully, but a little annoyed at his teasing her friends. 'There are all ages of people at Flingers.'

Some are in their early twenties. You don't have to be old to enjoy vintage music.'

'Bo's right,' Ran said. 'You don't have to be two hundred years old to enjoy reading Jane Austen or born in the nineteenth century to appreciate a Monet painting.'

'I suppose not,' Hamish replied, sounding unconvinced. 'But come on, it's hardly cool.'

Ran sipped his pint before replying. 'I don't listen to it because it's cool. I listen to it because I enjoy it.'

Bo sensed the tension ramping up between the two men but, before she could interject, Hamish said, 'Right . . . I still can't imagine you bopping along to this.'

'Actually, you don't need to imagine me bopping along to anything. I stay strictly on the other side of the decks.'

'I wish you would dance,' Angel said. 'You'd love it.'

'Thanks, but I have two left feet. I am more than happy to play the music while you all enjoy the hard part.'

'Well, if you ever do, there'd be plenty of people who'd teach you and be your partner,' Angel said. 'You too, Hamish.'

Hamish smirked. 'I'm more than happy to stay in the twenty-first century, thanks. I'll leave all this old fogey business to you lot.'

Angel's eyes widened, though if she was hurt by Hamish's comment, she covered it with a smile.

Bo wondered if Hamish felt left out because they were all talking shop, but he could at least have shown an interest and not been quite so combative with Ran. If he was worried Ran was some kind of rival, he was wrong – she barely knew him.

'I love Brenda Lee,' Angel went on, presumably sensing the atmosphere and wanting to defuse the situation. 'Hard to believe she was only thirteen years old when she recorded this.'

‘Incredible, isn’t it?’ Ran said. ‘I’ve got an early pressing of this one in my collection.’

‘Oh, you never mentioned that before!’ Angel squeaked in excitement.

‘I’d love to hear it,’ Bo said.

‘I’ll bring it to the next Flingers meet. We could dance to it at the New Year’s Eve party,’ Ran said.

Hamish blew out a breath. ‘I’m even more glad I’ll be in Scotland now. You can say what you like, I really don’t get this obsession with vintage songs. They’re so cheesy and trite.’

Ran smiled to himself. ‘Actually, rock and roll has a great cultural history that everyone ought to know about, though I’m no expert. You should ask Hubert and Sally about that. Hubert’s grandparents came from Harlem where some of the dances such as Lindy Hop and swing originated.’

‘Don’t worry, I’ll take your word for it.’ Hamish smiled and mimed a yawn. ‘Actually, I think it’s time we headed off. After all, Santa won’t fill my stocking if I’m not in bed early.’

‘Hamish! The evening’s barely begun.’ Bo blushed again, annoyed at him for making fun of her music and her friends. ‘Why don’t you grab us another round of drinks? Here, take my card.’

‘OK,’ he said, grinning. ‘But I’ll get them in this time.’

Bo watched him leave, all smiles as he greeted people he knew on the way to the bar. He was smiley enough but she thought he was on edge and not in the best of moods. She put it down to nerves and, perhaps, feeling out of his comfort zone among all her friends and the dance group.

While he waited to be served, a load of vintage tunes came through the speakers and had Bo and Angel – and the rest of the Flingers nearby – tapping their feet and humming. There

were classic Christmas songs from the Ronettes, the Crystals and another of her favourites, 'Here Comes Santa Claus' by Bob B Soxx and the Blue Jeans.

Before long, the unmistakeable sound of Elvis Presley's 'Blue Christmas' blasted out from the speakers.

'Oh, this one always makes me cry,' Angel said. 'It reminds me of a boy I was mad on at school who dropped me at the Christmas disco. I spent most of the holidays moping around and driving my mum mad.'

'Oh no,' Bo said. 'But at least you met Tommy.'

'Hmm . . .' Angel said. 'Though sometimes I can't help wondering what might have been . . .'

Bo was taken aback by her friend's wistful tone. Angel had been married to Tommy for almost thirty years and they had two grown-up children. Their marriage didn't sound perfect, but something must have gone right for them to have stuck together that long. She tried to imagine being with Hamish for thirty years . . .

While Elvis warbled about missing his ex, Hamish returned from the bar with a tray of drinks, shaking his head. 'Not *another* one?' he said, groaning as he put the tray on the table. 'When are they going to roll out the good old Pogues?'

Bo laughed but wished he wasn't quite so obvious about his dislike of her favourite sounds in front of her friends.

She knew some people thought they were harking back to a 'simpler time' and maybe wanting to ignore the fact that there were many things wrong with the past. It wasn't true in her case, or for most of the members. They took time to learn about the context of the dances and their history, some of it rooted in a time of racial inequality and injustice, as Ran had pointed out.

Hubert and Sally, the founders of the club, were always happy to explain the origins of the music. Bo enjoyed being educated about the different dances and how they'd developed. To her, the cultural background added richness and a powerful sense of being part of history to their pastime. Most of all, like the rest of the Falford Flingers, Bo simply loved the joyous feeling of moving her body to great sounds.

They had another round of drinks and chatted to more of the Flingers, as more locals squeezed into the bar. The volume of chatter rose and the landlord turned up the music. Bo was well and truly infused with Christmas spirit, although she was also aware that the time was creeping on.

To her relief, Hamish seemed more at ease and was chatting to Angel about a donkey he'd treated which had ended up being part of a living nativity scene at the local farm shop. She was laughing out loud and Bo could tell he loved his work.

The wine and the festive spirit were flowing warmly through her veins, and she was ready to snuggle up in front of the fire and see Christmas Day arrive. She might even hand over Hamish's gift this evening, once the chimes had struck midnight.

With her business doing well and Hamish in her life, this Christmas was shaping up to be her best one ever.