

A
CHRISTMAS
SHORT
STORY



XMAS.TV

*Wish upon a
Christmas Star!*



TOM CAVAL

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ISBN 978-3-96549-018-5



Table of Contents

Copyright

Title Page

Xmas.tv

I'm Going to Give the Gays Everything They Want

Gaynfluencer

About the Author

XMAS.TV

TOM CAVAL

Harry

I'm sure Christmas is the most polarising day of the year. OK, maybe Valentine's day. Or the final of Britain's Got Talent. But I'm pretty positive Christmas beats them all. There's no worse time to feel sad, when others are shopping for gifts, and singing carols. Smiling faces in the Christmas Market, the city full of lights, and music surrounding you; there's no escape. Although, this year, I think we are all on the sad bandwagon. No ... I *know* we are.

2020 has been one hell of a ride. There was that threat of World War 3 and fires in Australia, but it has been a pesky virus which sent the habitants of the planet to their rooms. The *motherbummer* of the year. No, (that doesn't cut it) ... of the century! How such a small thing can cause so much distress and make the festivities look like the set of an apocalypse movie? At least it wasn't a zombie apocalypse; heaven knows I wouldn't make it if it was.

I'm so lucky I have my boyfriend with me, though. My handsome Will. We have prepared a lovely Christmas dinner with so much food! I tried to Mary Berry my way in the kitchen with a fancy Christmas pudding recipe, but I was a bit too generous with the brandy and the final product tastes like a boozy dessert out of a student residence party (I guess Mary has smaller tablespoons than I have). It will keep us warm, at least. Luckily for me, Will is a much better cook and has taken care of the rest: Tiger Prawns with chermoula butter, Christmas ginger beer-glazed ham paired perfectly with a fresh fig and

melon salad. I can't wait! Will has said the Tiger Prawns pack quite the heat.

It's been a bit lonely these days with only us, though. What with all the restrictions to travel and social distancing. But we have each other. And we are in love. That is all that matters. I mean, come on, what's life without love?

Although ...

Nothing. It's all good. The fact that we are in Reading, away from our friends, is just an unfortunate circumstance. *Damn that pesky virus!*

People are suffering around the world, so I shouldn't complain about being trapped in this town. Besides, Reading is a lovely place, so calm and quiet and Will's here, there's Tiger Prawns, and it's ... cosy. Nothing like London. I'm sure there are people on the streets of London. Not as usual, of course, but at least *some* buzzing. Although it can get quite noisy if you ask me. I'm perfectly fine here where it's quiet and safe and there's Tiger Prawns.

If it weren't for the pandemic, we would probably be in London, celebrating with our friends.

But it's fine. It is. We have phones and internet. I facetimes my friends this afternoon to wish them Merry Christmas. Oliver is staying at Alistair's flat in London. I miss our lovely flat in Hammersmith. We had so much fun there. I sigh.

Matteo, on his side, is over the moon as he has ordered a magnificent dinner from our favourite restaurant in Soho that he will enjoy with Erik in their amazing apartment in Canary Wharf, with views to the Thames. He sent me pictures and his apartment resembles the Buckingham Palace decorations. He's always so extra with his celebrations.

We have lovely decorations, too. A cute Christmas tree

with classy white and blue lights. We even have Harold, our charming and jolly dancing Santa. And we also have beautiful views. There's the backyard and the garden. Although the hydrangeas look a bit lacklustre at this time of the year, to be honest. Luckily, we are in a high-rise block from where we can see the dark sky, which is clear tonight.

Now Will is doing the last preparations to the food while I'm sitting close to a window sewing a mask. I love these *do-it-yourself* masks. Super easy. All you need to do is order a big piece of fabric online, cut it and sew a few stitches and presto! You have a collection of super fashionable masks. This has been my hobby during the past weeks. I didn't know I could sew until I stumbled across some YouTube tutorials. I tried it for a bit, forgot to use a thimble once and ended up with some boo-boos. Will was here to kiss the boo-boos and make the pain go away. He's my hero.

If you told me a year ago I would be doing the whole mask thing, I'd have laughed at you, but it's different now. Besides, it's easy and keeps me quiet. I have the feeling if I give it my all, I could start a business: *Harry's Masks* or *Bespoke masks*. Yeah, I'm going with the former. I could have Will redecorate my study and turn it into a mask making studio. Will would probably shrug and do it, although I am a writer and don't need to create *Bespoke Masks* or *Harry's Masks*. But it's for extra income, you know. The truth is, lately, I couldn't quite concentrate on writing. I'm the kind of artist who loves to observe his surroundings and interact with people to be able to produce stories that are *finger-flipping* quality. Like when a meal is good and you say it's *finger-licking*, but with books.

Anyway, it's been difficult to think of stories with the lockdown situation. Will says it's safer this way, though. I guess I just have to work on my craft and one day I might

surpass Gucci in the fashion industry. Matteo would approve. I'm so waiting to visit him when things get calmer. That would be a nice project for the both of us. I miss him.

Before throwing the big names out of business, I decide to continue with practice. Right now, I'm sewing the last stitches to a mask for Harold, which is red with lovely reindeers on it. I love it. It's one of my finest works so far.

Will comes out of the kitchen. The lovely smell of Tiger Prawns following him.

"All good?" he asks.

"Yeah, fine," I give a bright smile. "Look! For Harold!" I show him the mini-mask, satisfied.

"Uhm ..." Will looks at me, puzzled.

"Our Santa!" I add for clarification. Now that I think of it, maybe I hadn't shared his name with Will.

"Oh, right." The puzzled expression still on his face. I am starting to worry him, I'm afraid. "Food is almost ready. Can you please set the table?" he finally says.

"Sure thing, babe."

I leave my spot by the window and go to the cabinet to get our Christmas tablecloth. It's beautiful in red with white snowflakes. I should put out candles too. For extra atmosphere. But which to use? The red or white candles? Red on red seems too much. But the white ones are a bit boring. This is a *hard* decision.

I know. I'll call Matteo. I can't rely solely on Will for decoration crises.

I take my phone and I'm already dialling when Will comes out with a tray with the most luscious beer-glazed ham on it.

"Harry! The table!" He stops dead.

"Oh, sorry. I just wanted to quickly call Matteo," I say, as if it were obvious what I was doing.

"Again?" I see Will rolling his eyes ... *slightly*. "Harry,

you talked to him on the phone for two hours today!”

So long? I honestly didn't notice. Time flies when you are gossiping with your bestie. Even if you have nothing to gossip about.

“Sure, sorry.” I put the phone down and pick the white candles. Whatever. I'll blame Will if they look lame on the table.

I unfold the tablecloth and put it on the table. Just when I finish extending it, I realise it's the other way. “Shit!” I say before I can stop myself.

“Harry ...” Will says, still holding the tray.

“What?”

“I know you miss the guys.” Will's voice softens. “But we already talked about it. It's safer this way.”

“Yeah, right ...” I say but can't help adding, “but they're in London, it's not ... New Zealand.”

“Still. You know the regulations,” he says patiently.

“Honestly, I don't even keep up with the restrictions anymore,” I say, before remembering I haven't used sanitiser all day.

Finally, the tablecloth is on the table and Will puts the tray on it. “I'll bring the cutlery,” he says, going back to the kitchen.

I start arranging the candles. I'm feeling a bit moody, and I do miss my friends. Is it so bad? I don't think so. I love being here with Will, but he must understand that missing London, with all its liveliness and the company of friends, is completely normal.

But it's fine. I love Will over everything. I am happy with him. It's just ... I don't see my friends. We speak every day, but it's not the same. I miss the pats on the back, the drinking parties, the physical presence.

Will is working on a new renovation for the youth centre, so he's busy with measurements, and lines, and

maths. But I am a different kind of artist. I need inspiration from other people. It's been ... hard.

I take another look at the table and the white candles do look lame. I better change them, or I won't be able to enjoy the dinner. I take them off and replace with the red ones, but that doesn't look much exciting either. I decide to mix them up, you know, all red and white, but it looks like we're preparing for a meeting with the occult. I swallow my dissatisfaction and decide to use just the red candles.

I'm about to remove all the candles when I see something out the corner of my eye. There's a star in the middle of the sky I've never seen before. I tell myself '*calm down Harry, it's just a star*' but it isn't just an ordinary star. It's a star so bright that it seems like it crawled out of a Christmas fireplace story. And what better thing to do than make a wish upon it! I don't have to think twice about what I want: an amazing, safe, fabulous and a pesky-virus-free 2021!

I close my eyes and blow a kiss to the star. I hope it works. It always works in fairy tales. In fact, I should write a tale about a granting-wishes star. *That's* the inspiration I need.

I already feel better. I still miss my friends, of course, but I am happy they are safe and sound. Better days are coming, I am sure.

With renewed determination, I strategically place the candles on the table, choosing the best spots in the tablecloth, when I realise the star shines brighter than it did just a few moments ago.

In less than two seconds I'm back at the window trying to figure out if it's the same star or a new one, as it's now in a different spot than before. In fact, now that I stare at it with more attention, I can see it's moving. Wait, what's that?

“And here comes the champagne!” I barely hear Will’s merry voice. “Harry?”

“Oh sorry!” I say, still trying to process what I just wished upon. “Perfect! Champagne?”

I go back to the table, which is already set with ham and the rest and I didn’t notice. How long had I been looking at that star?

“Are you OK, Harry?”

“Yes, I’ve just ... seen something strange.” I clear my throat. “There was something weird in the sky.”

Will looks at me suspiciously. Oh God. He really thinks I am going nuts. I don’t blame him though. I also think I’m going nuts.

“A star,” I explain, but the more I speak, the more Will’s brows knit together. “Oh, never mind. Lovely dinner! Thanks, babe.”

“You mean that one ...?”

“Of course, *this* dinner ...”

“No! I mean ... *that* star!”

Will points at the window and there it is again, except the star is now moving backwards.

“Yes! See?” *I am not inventing things*, I want to add, but instead I keep it cool. “Isn’t it weird?”

Will laughs. “Must be a plane, Harry.”

“Seriously? A plane? During the pandemic?” I snap.

But as Will observes it, the light starts making unlikely movements for an aircraft. It goes up and down, then moves in circles. We run to the window, our faces together observing the light.

“Do you think ...” I say slowly, feeling the chills. “Maybe it’s the Christmas spirit?”

Will shakes his head.

“Or an UFO?” I say, but this doesn’t make it better.

Will gives a short laugh. “How much of the brandy did

you drink while baking the cake?” He gives me a kiss on the cheek and goes to sit back at the table. “It’s probably nothing. Come on, the food will get cold.”

Will is always so practical. Why not believe that there’s something out there? I mean, he can see it, can’t he?

“Fine. And I only drank one little glass,” I lie, as I sit down in front of him, my back to the window. I actually drank three glasses, but he’ll *never* know that. It’s a secret I’ll have to carry forever. “And FYI, brandy is excellent for —”

“What the hell?” Will puts the cutlery down, his eyes bulging. “It’s coming back!”

I turn around to look at the window and indeed the light is approaching our building. Are we being attacked or something?

We are standing up to take a proper look (and I am already looking for my phone to call 999) when we see it clearly. It’s a drone! So, it wasn’t a Christmas spirit, not a UFO, not a wishing star, but a drone. I feel a little disappointed about my wish now.

“What is it doing here?” I ask, baffled.

“It’s probably a kid in the neighbourhood playing with their Christmas present,” Will says, dismantling my conspiracy theories.

Our faces are still stuck to the window as the drone comes next to us.

“Look!”

On the side of the small craft, there is a sticker that says “Join us at XMASTV.TV”.

I take my phone and type the address.

Immediately, I see the image of a family having dinner on the screen. At first, I think it’s a recording, but then these people seem to notice me and turn to the screen to say “Hello!”

Huh? Is this some voyeuristic thing or what? Like those sexcam sites?

I look closely and I see kids. So definitely not a sexcam.

“Hello?” I say back, feeling awkward.

I try to zoom in the video, but I must have accidentally clicked something because the image changes to a couple also having dinner. “Hello!” they say.

Will and I look at each other, flabbergasted. “Hello!”

I swipe the screen (swiping always works) and next is the image of an older woman. She’s dressed in a sequined black dress with her hair perfectly coiffed. She’s alone, in what looks like her apartment, having dinner on her own, and I finally get it.

I look at Will in awe. “It’s like a massive video chat to connect people, so they don’t feel so lonely!” I explain to him.

This is the coolest thing I’ve seen in a long time. And by his soft eyes, Will seems to think the same.

I inspect the site some more and find a “go to” drop-down menu that can bring us to Sydney, New York, Madrid, only this city hub shows a divided screen with many people, like a huge Zoom meeting. Some of them are in couples, some alone, but all are beaming at the camera, looking happy.

“This is brilliant!” I can hear a spark of emotion in Will’s voice.

“It is!” I look up at him and realise the drone is gone.

As I view these people, I notice most of them are on their own. I imagine many of them live alone or work overseas and couldn’t travel to join their families before the pandemic happened. That’s pretty sad.

Then it hits me that I’d been moody all day for literally no-good reason. Sure, I miss my friends, but I am also

immensely lucky to have Will by my side. In the good and the bad moments, we have each other. So maybe I spent too much time on the phone, and in doing so I may have unknowingly made Will feel like I don't love being with him. I do, and I hope he knows it. Sure, I pictured our Christmas differently, but it's perfect if Will is here.

"Babe?" he calls, "You here?"

"I am," I say. "And I'm glad to be here." I give Will a long kiss. It tastes like Christmas, home, and cinnamon and all my favourite things.

Then we hear a cheering from the phone. Oh, they can see us too.

Will moves away from the window. "I'll be right back."

I hope he's not embarrassed that a few strangers from distant countries saw us kissing, but he goes to the laptop that sits on the desk at the other side of the room and starts typing.

Oh, good idea! Xmas.tv in a bigger screen.

But when he brings the laptop to the table, it's not Xmas.tv that I see. Instead, I hear the distinct sound of a Skype call. A few seconds later, and to my astonishment, I see Matteo's face on the screen.

"Hi guys!" he says excitedly. "Erik, come here! It's Harry and Will!"

"Matteo! Erik!" I say joyfully to the camera.

They both are now on screen, next to each other, looking with open eyes.

Will is still typing and soon Alistair appears on another screen. It's a join call!

"Guys!" Then it's also Oliver next to Alistair, wearing a Santa hat. And just like that, we are together like in the old times, my friends' little faces beaming at me from the screen of Will's laptop.

I look over to Will and say, "Thank you." He winks and

smiles back at me.

“What are you having for dinner guys?” I ask.

“Oh Harry. As if I hadn’t told you already,” Matteo says.

“Not you!” I quickly add. “I mean, Alistair and Oliver!”

“One sec, guys!” Will goes to the kitchen and comes back with a high stool. He takes the laptop and puts it on top of it, close to our dinner table, as one guest more. “Now, let’s eat!”

“Wait, what is with those massive Tiger Prawns!” someone screams. I think it’s Oliver.

“Well, my Will prepared them,” I say, proudly.

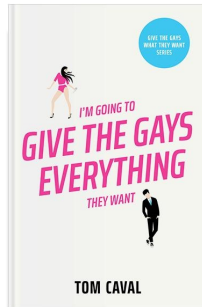
Matteo starts showing off his Queen-worthy table, and Will bursts into a fit of laughter. I’m not sure why, because he should know Matteo already. But I’m glad he enjoys my friends’ company as much as I do. I ask him to tell the guys about Xmas.tv, as I’m too busy with the Tiger Prawns (and giving my best shot to the camera—I’m glad I ditched my pyjamas for tonight’s dinner).

The conversation is lively, the food is delicious, and it feels like we are in the same room, having the best Christmas dinner ever.

I look towards the window for the Christmas star, AKA Xmas.tv, but it’s already gone, probably spreading its message elsewhere. I smile, thinking that, in any case, my wish has already started coming true.

I'm Going to Give the Gays Everything They Want

Harry and his friends are back with more fun, romance, over the top situations ... and a very special guest!



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tom Caval is the author of the *Give the Gays What They Want* series. This Sophie Kinsella and Candance Bushnell die-hard fan is in a mission to add something new to the gay fiction scene through quirky, sparkling, and humour-laden stories.

When he's not getting his characters into trouble, you can find this spontaneous bookworm immersed in big city life or going on epic dates.

Tom's next novel is currently in the works—stay tuned!

Meanwhile, connect with Tom on these platforms:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/tomcavalpage>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/tomcavalauthor>

Goodreads: <https://www.goodreads.com/tomcaval>

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