The Memory Box

As it always had been in every other year, early in December, the tree was placed by the window at the end of the room and decorated. First the lights, lights carefully arranged and rearranged until it was certain that they were perfect. Then differently coloured shiny baubles were hung on the branches and among them were placed tiny angels, snowmen, reindeer, chocolate coins and candy sticks. And, last of all, a star at the very top. When the other lights in the room were switched off it all looked magical.

As the season grew cards and parcels began to arrive. The cards were put on the mantelpiece, windowsills or anywhere there was space. The parcels – some big, some small, some soft or oddly shaped, all in Christmas paper and carefully labelled – were placed under the tree. By Christmas Eve there were so many of them. This would be a time like no other.

The next morning, Christmas Day, it was noticed right away, something that hadn’t been there the night before – an extra gift under the tree in front of all the others. “With love from Dad,” the label said.

When it was unwrapped and the lid was taken off, it was as if the scent of love filled the room – his aftershave, yes, on a neatly ironed handkerchief next to a scarf, bow tie and cufflinks. There, too, was a small bottle of whisky, his favourite dram, and his pen kept for special occasions. Tickets for the first concert we ever went to, and that little teddy bear I said that I had grown out of – you kept it, thank you. Photos, lots and lots of photos, and a book with a note on it, “You must read this!”

And a letter which began, “I’m sorry I can’t be with you. I love you and always will…”

David Buck, 2022