

Worst Christmas Present Ever

OMG, this is it! I look at my partner, Neil across the table in the restaurant. I'm sure this is going to be the pivotal point in our relationship. This is when he is going to propose to me: I just know it.

We've had a great meal and two glasses of a good red wine. My stomach felt too full of butterflies to eat a dessert, but he has taken an age picking at cheese and crackers.

I take a deep breath and relax my shoulders. I want to remember every tiny detail about this special moment between us. Will he get down on one knee? Or, maybe he'll slide the little black box along the table for me to open myself. My heart begins to race, and I feel my cheeks flush. I can't see a bulge in his trouser pockets where he could have hidden the box. But I suppose he could have taken the ring out of the box with the intention of sliding it onto my finger.

He is shuffling on his seat and I can hear the rubber soles of his shoes squeaking on the tiled floor. He is chewing the inside of his lip then fiddles with the cutlery on the table. After two years of living together I know his every move and can tell what is going through his mind before he even thinks about it himself.

I've known this wasn't just going to be an ordinary Christmas Eve celebratory meal since I spotted the little black box in a jeweller's bag in his underwear drawer.

The box had been sealed and even though as a little girl I've always loved a pre-Christmas snoop, I'd gasped and backed away from the drawer. Apart from knowing there was no way I'd be able to open and re-fasten the box without it being obvious, I hadn't wanted to see it. My mouth had dried, and I'd swallowed hard. No, I'd thought, not this time. Mum used to say, if you snoop for pressies you'll ruin the surprise on Christmas morning. And she was right.

I'd known this commitment from the ring he'd chosen to spoil with childis

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This was the precious to

I'd returned to the ironing and let my thoughts wander. His brother and girlfriend had been engaged two months ago and he'd helped choose the surprise ring at the jewellers. He'd been enamoured throughout their surprise party and had relished in his participation of the secret. A friend standing near us had chuckled, 'So, when is it going to be your turn, Neil?'

My insides had churned, and I'd felt quite giddy as I'd stood with my arm through his.

Neil had grinned and winked at him. 'Ah, now that would be telling wouldn't it!'

Whilst hanging the ironed clothes in our wardrobe I'd smiled at the memory and hadn't been able to resist another peek at the little black box. Last week, I'd found him whispering with my sister at Sunday lunch, and then later secretly talking to my best friend on his mobile. But I'd shrugged off this clandestine behaviour because I'd done the same with his mother and his rugby pals looking for Christmas gift ideas.

However, I know now this Christmas gift isn't about new pyjamas, perfume or my favourite chocolates.

My hand is laid in the middle of the table as if reaching out to him. I stare into his eyes looking for a sign that he is going to say something profound. I tilt my head to the side and raise an eyebrow.

He grins then pushes his hand down into his jacket pocket which is hanging on the back of his chair.

He pulls out the small box wrapped in Christmas paper with a white bow on the top. 'Happy Christmas, darling,' he says handing me the box.