

Wishbone



“And he says that’s for fun?”

BF was having trouble getting his mind around this one. Woody tried to explain.

“Supposed to be a “G” spot just inside.”

BF wasn’t convinced. He remembered having a suppository once and the doctor didn’t hit a “G” spot with that. Not with his finger either, which felt like a torpedo firing up his backside.

“How much finger does he shove up?”

“Not him. His girlfriend. I don’t know. Just the tip I think.”

“Well I’m glad I’m not pulling the wishbone with her then.”

The patrol car slid in the snow, headlights slewing across the country lane before BF corrected the steering. Mr “G” Spot had been on the shift for three years and BF would never have suspected he liked having fingers shoved up his jacksey. As far as he was concerned the back passage was one-way traffic with a great big No Entry sign. Woody smiled from the number 2 seat. If you knew which buttons to press you could always get a rise out of BF and he didn’t need a “G” spot either. Woody considered it an early Christmas present. There was one other thing guaranteed to get BF’s goat.

“I hear Malachi Ringwood got conditional bail.”

Woody lit the blue touch paper and stood back.

“I’d like to give him conditional bail. Condition that he gets my boot up his arse.”

“He’s already had that.”

“Not often enough. What goes through them magistrates’ heads I don’t know. Wishbone’s been burgling and twocking since he leaked out of his father’s condom.”

BF’s knuckles tightened on the wheel, almost sending the patrol car into another skid. They were off the country lane now and into the bottom of the estate. Wishbone’s estate. Looking at the houses it amazed BF that the bowlegged little bastard managed to get through

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the windows; he was thin enough but his knees hadn't met since his mother gave birth.

"I'd like to pull him after Christmas dinner and see who got the biggest piece. I know what I'd wish for."

Snow blanketed Ravenscliffe estate, turning it into a winter wonderland completely at odds with the pond life that lived there. Heavy flakes settled on the road. The streets were deserted. Wishbone's house was in a cul-de-sac just up the road and it was BF's first port of call on this festive nightshift. Conditional bail meant the conditions had to be met. If Wishbone didn't keep to the curfew he'd be meeting BF Cranston instead. He curled his lip at the torched cars dotted around the playground, burnt, abandoned and buried in snow.

"Nothing wrong with this place half a Panzer division couldn't cure."

Woody smiled. He'd been quietly ticking off the minutes until his partner threatened blitzkrieg on the residents of Ravenscliffe. It hadn't taken as long as he'd expected.

"You can't blame them all. Some have lived here for years."

"Bollocks. Them that aren't burglars gave birth to burglars. Only Christmas box most of 'em know belonged to someone else first."

The snow was getting heavier but it wasn't lightening the tone. Christmas might be two days away but as long as Wishbone was at large it wouldn't be very festive around here.

"Butt fucked again. That's what I've been. Every time I try to keep him in. Well I'll get him next time. You just see if I don't."

BF swung the car into the cul-de-sac and stopped. Of the six houses only one remained, the others demolished years ago. The entire Ringwood family from old man Gordon down to Wishbone himself had poisoned the estate, their house standing like a castle overlooking the desolation. All the snow in the world couldn't brighten that. BF checked his watch.

"Half ten. Curfew's up. Coming ready or not."

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The patrol car circled the recreation centre for the third time, leaving twin scars that filled as soon as they were made. It wasn't so much snowing now as pelting it down, great big flakes that would be beautiful anywhere else. Even they couldn't disguise the barbed wire round the top of the building or the grills over the windows. Neither could the blizzard hide BF's disappointment that Wishbone had answered the door on the curfew check.

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“Rats-assing little pillock. I’d like to wipe that smug grin off his face.”

Woody played devil’s advocate.

“Maybe he’s turned over a new leaf. With Christmas coming up you know.”

“The only thing he’s turned over is the rock he crawled from under.”

“Well he’s not going to be twoocking any cars in this.”

BF gave Woody a withering stare. As long as they’d been partners it had been Number 1 and Number 2. BF tried to share the prisoners but he was always locking up before Woody could get out of his seat. Perhaps it was his military training or simply his aggressive nature but if there was one thing Butt Fuck Cranston couldn’t stand it was the lowlife scheming turds of Ravenscliffe estate. It was his mission in life to disrupt their activities and if Woody wasn’t quick enough then that was his problem. He sometimes thought Woody was just too nice to be a copper.

“Don’t you bet on it. He’d steal Santa’s sleigh given half a chance. You won’t catch that in your traffic car. Even if you do pass your test.”

Woody bristled at the jibe.

“Third time lucky. I’ll be T-packing before summer.”

“Aye. Well when you do make sure you T-bone Wishbone first.”

The recreation centre wasn’t going to get burgled tonight. BF gave up and pulled onto the main road leaving a fading trail across the field. Ravenscliffe Avenue was barely visible beneath a carpet of snow that was getting deeper by the minute. At this rate the weather would achieve zero tolerance long before BF Cranston. No burglar was going to risk leaving a trail right back to his house, and no householder was going to be out in this weather, leaving his home empty to be burgled. It looked like Wishbone had got his wish tonight at least. BF was about to pull out of the estate when the radio crackled into life.

“Any unit for an immediate? Level One alarm at Lishman’s Butchers.”

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The patrol car skidded to a halt outside the parade of shops on Ravenscliffe Avenue, blue lights and sirens off. The drifting snow made for a silent night all round, muffling BF’s approach and soaking up his expletives. Lishman’s Butchers was the middle shop on the parade and the parade was in the middle of Ravenscliffe Estate. Half a mile from Malachi Ringwood’s cul-de-sac.

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“The bowlegged little bastard must have enough toys for Christmas. Started on the meat for dinner now.”

First job of the night had been a burglary two streets away and the MO was pure Wishbone; climb drainpipe to insecure bathroom window, ransack bedrooms and living room, tear open presents under tree, egress through front door. The young couple, who hadn't realised what the estate was like when they moved in, were distraught; their two year old daughter even more so. Two days to Christmas and all the presents gone. With no relatives and no insurance things looked bleak for the King family. BF wished he could show the magistrates just what they had done. With Wishbone at large and 48 hours to go the festive season was going to turn very un-festive for the families of Ravenscliffe estate.

BF slogged round the back while Woody covered the front. The windows and door were shuttered but you couldn't be too careful. He remembered going for a breach of bailer once who climbed out of the front bedroom window as Woody went upstairs. Dented the patrol car roof on his way down then off like a rocket. He wasn't going to let that happen again.

Snow feathered his collar as he padded through the drifts, his breath pluming around him like a head of steam. He was building up a fine head of steam himself, blood boiling at the thought of Wishbone getting away again. He rounded the bins in silence, listening as much as watching but there was nothing to see or hear. The snow had been disturbed but had already begun to fill in and the back windows were as secure as the front. Half way up the wall the alarm box flashed blue and white, the only sign that the place might have been burgled.

Then he noticed a fresh mound in the snow beside the back fence. The tracks were already covered but the mound was melting snowflakes. Steam spiralled from the battered turkey and BF knew where to go.

“The scummy little shit's gone over the backs.”

He was in the driver's seat before Woody realised what was happening and the car sped off into the blizzard. Number Two stepped back in amazement but wasn't amazed at all. He knew where BF had gone and all he could do now was wait for the keyholder.

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The cul-de-sac was quiet as the grave, curtains of snow almost blotting out the house. BF parked round the corner then approached on foot, hoping he'd arrived before Wishbone but not expecting that he

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had. Malachi might be bowlegged but once he'd screwed your house he could move like greased lightning. The porch light above the side door blasted whiteness across the landscape and threw the rest of the world into shadow. BF stayed in the shadows and watched.

Nothing moved. Apart from the dancing snowflakes the house was asleep, no lights on, no movement behind closed curtains, and no sound. BF examined each window carefully from across the street. *He's not back yet*, he thought. *Gotcha*. He turned his attention to the surrounding gardens. If Wishbone hadn't made it back to the house then he was out there somewhere, maybe watching for the inevitable police car. BF checked over his shoulder to make sure it was hidden then scoured the gardens again.

Still nothing. He moved to his left, keeping to the hedgerow, and gradually came around the back of the house. The front door faced the main road so the back was Wishbone's favoured route. Intelligence showed that he could be out of the bedroom window and across the garden shed before a copper's second knock, and it was the garden shed BF checked now. Snow hung over the angled roof like icing on a cake and the bedroom window was closed. Nobody had been through that tonight. An unbroken drift leaned against the side of the house, blocking the door. Wishbone hadn't come in through that either. BF muttered under his breath.

"Come on you scum sucking little pilchard."

The scum sucking little pilchard wasn't coming. BF felt it in his bones and was about to do a second knock to breach his bail when Woody called up on talk through.

"Alpha Four. Keyholder's here. You'd better come look at this."



After the blizzard BF expected it to be warmer inside but the snow didn't melt off his shoulders and the breath still plumed around his head. Herman Lishman led the way to the basement for the second time to explain what he'd already explained to PC Brown. The cold didn't bother him, he'd been using walk-in refrigerators all his life, but Woody's teeth chattered.

"Tell him what you told me."

Mr Lishman opened the door into a bare concrete room.

"This is where he took it from. I don't understand."

The room wasn't completely empty; two black bin liners leaned against the far wall with red and white tags tied around their throats and

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WARNING – DO NOT EAT stencilled across their bellies. BF smelled the rotting meat and backed out.

“How many did he take?”

“Just the one. I don’t leave much for waste but it is Christmas.”

“And he came in through the first floor, down here, then back out the landing?”

“Yes, yes. He passed the fridges on the way. All the good meat.”

A picture was beginning to form in BF’s mind, the Ringwood clan pulling the wishbone on a poisoned turkey after Christmas dinner. Two hours later they’d be so sick that Wishbone would wish he *had* breached his bail. Maybe tonight hadn’t been a complete waste after all. There were more ways than one to skin a cat. A smile began to spread across his lips as Woody took the burglary report.

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The smile was wiped off BF’s face at mealtime. Heavy snowfall reduced the number of domestics to half a dozen; the worst of those being the husband whose idea of a stocking filler was the blonde next door. His wife caught him at it and proceeded to demonstrate a lack of festive spirit that was truly awesome. The lumps on hubby’s forehead needed hospital treatment but the marriage was terminal, his night in casualty proving marginally worse than her night in the cells. The blonde had to fill her stocking alone, using a present from Anne Summers.

By midnight the calls dried up and by one o’clock it was time to eat. BF parked beside the radio mast and dusted himself down. The snow had stopped, leaving a beautiful clear night that threatened frost. A crescent moon glistened off the rooftops throwing shadows across the yard. The canteen light shone out of the first floor window, highlighting the scuffed snow on the PSU store roof. Woody’s stomach rumbled.

“Sounds like you should be on K rations. That’d clog your tubes.”

Woody had sampled K rations once before when BF retrieved a self-heating tin of pork sausages from his army kit. They hadn’t so much clogged his tubes as plugged his backside so tight his “G” spot might as well be in a different country. BF had laughed for a week, shaking Woody’s hand until he cracked knuckles. Any man who could survive K ration sausages was a mate in his book. Woody had a different view.

“You can stick your K rations up your arse.”

BF shuddered.

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“Enough about arses; thank you very much.”

He led the way up to the canteen. The smell hit him even before the door shut.

“The butt fucking little pillock. I’ll mince his gizzard.”

Woody bumped into him before he realised what had happened. A ripped bin liner with **WARNING – DO NOT EAT** stencilled on it sagged on the counter, its contents strewn over the tables. Rotting meat and entrails pumped stench into the air and immediately quelled Woody’s appetite. BF was hungry but not for sandwiches; he wanted to eat a skinny runt called Wishbone. He looked out of the open window. A trail of footprints led across the field and onto the flat roof. The railings weren’t a problem from there and it wasn’t much of a stretch to reach the canteen window. Wishbone had been climbing since he was two. The first floor canteen was a piece of cake.

“I’ll do more than breach his bail when I get hold of him.”

Woody couldn’t talk through the handkerchief covering his mouth but nodded his agreement. This was one occasion when Number 1 and Number 2 were united. Bring on the Panzers. Long live the blitzkrieg. BF was considering what to do when he realised the footprints were only going one way. A single set of tracks led to the store, across the roof, and onto the windowsill. There was nothing going the other way. As he looked out of the window a wedge of snow slid off the station roof above him and plopped onto the railings below. A slow smile crept over his face as another wedge of snow was followed by a pair of legs. He addressed the battered trainers in serious tone.

“Young master Ringwood, I do believe you are outside your curfew and as such in breach of the bail conditions set by the magistrates. You are a persistent offender who shows a total disregard for the law, and will continue to commit offences if granted bail again. Despite the kind gift you saw fit to bestow upon us, the fact that these are stolen goods compels me to take you into custody and project my boot up your arse. Let me help you down.”

He grabbed a leg and tugged. More snow slid passed the window and Malachi Ringwood’s legs looked more like a wishbone than ever. Smelly feet tiptoed onto the windowsill in an attempt to fend off gravity but despite BF holding onto his belt there was only way to go. Down. Woody grabbed an arm and tried to pull him through the window but he was too heavy. As thin as he was Wishbone weighed a ton, and slowly but surely he slid out of their hands. BF gritted his teeth.

“Oy. No you don’t you little...”

Too late. He lost his grip and Woody couldn’t hold him alone. Wishbone plunged the last few feet with a smile on his face. It wasn’t

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until Woody covered his eyes and winced that he realised his mistake. The pain lanced between his buttocks and the smile transferred to BF in a flash. The railings that had failed to keep him out did a stand up job of not letting him go. BF saw the irony.

“Butt fucked again, eh Wishbone.”

Wishbone couldn't speak, translating into No Reply after caution in BF's pocketbook later. Three drops of blood soaked into the snow, adding colour to an otherwise cold white night. BF leaned out of the window.

“Is it true there's a “G” spot just inside your point of entry?”

Wishbone didn't answer and BF didn't really want to know. There were some things a man could live without, especially at Christmas. All he needed now was the cells informing, and the fire brigade.