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## Instructions for cleaners

by Garf Collins

“How on earth did they know I needed some new underpants?” I asked myself as I stared at the unexpected gift.

It happened on the Wednesday before Christmas. As she left to play tennis, Gill said, “Don’t forget to give them the list.” The list she was referring to was a scrap of paper headed ‘Instructions for cleaners.’ I often found myself struggling to convey some briefly described tasks to Tracy and Sharon but we usually managed to work out what was required. I had a good relationship with our cleaners but not a particularly intimate one. You might think the latter comment unusual but it has a bearing on my story.

Normally, they incorporate the listed tasks very efficiently in a well-rehearsed routine which ends with them exiting the back door having mopped the floor of the utility room. That Wednesday was different, however. As they were going down the stairs, Tracy called out, “I almost forgot, I’ve left a couple of presents in the kitchen for you both. Happy Christmas.”

This was an unexpected gesture, so naturally I looked to see what the presents were. There were some mince pies and a box of chocolates. Beside them was a package loosely wrapped in festive paper. On removing the paper I saw that it was the packet of brief underpants I referred to earlier.

“Well, that’s certainly an unusual present,” I thought. But not wanting to seem ungrateful I shouted down the stairs, “Thanks very much for the present. Don’t know how you knew they were just what I needed but don’t expect me to model them next time you come.”

There was silence below. “Oh dear,” I thought, “I should curb my facetious streak. Now I’ve upset them. Maybe they’re thinking I’m a weirdo who really wants to be asked to parade around in his underwear.”

Later, I picked Gill up from the tennis club. On the way back I said, “Tracy gave us some Christmas presents. Some nice mince pies and chocolates but rather an odd present for me – some underpants.”

“Well, that is unusual. I suppose Tracy noticed your pants on the washing line. I’m always telling you to replace them.”

When we arrived home and came into the kitchen, Gill checked I had transmitted her instructions correctly and then said in a mystified tone, “Why did you throw the Christmas paper for Alex’s present in the recycling?”

“I only threw away the paper Tracy had used for these,” I said showing her the underpants.

Gill burst out laughing. “You idiot. Those are the underpants I bought Alex for Christmas. I left them here ready to wrap up.”

After Christmas, when our cleaners next came, Gill met them downstairs. I could hear them talking and giggling. I was sure they were talking about me. When they came upstairs Tracy and Sharon were both grinning broadly. “Come on then,” Tracy said, “get your kit off!”