

## Seasonal Sauce Ding Dong Merrily

The bell rang and Carole stuffed her apron in the umbrella stand as she went to the door. The guests were early, but the preparations, planned in October when she'd issued the invitation, were finished. So much hung on this first social occasion with the Hadleighs. He worked in banking, and she was some kind of life-coaching guru: money and motivation were an attractive combination, and Carole had decided that they would become great friends. She glanced back at the trays of canapés in the kitchen, checked her lipstick in the mirror, arranged her most welcoming smile and opened the door.



### The Neighbour from Hell

"Give's a kiss," said Gus, holding a thin bunch of bloodied mistletoe. Gus was the neighbour topping the *one to avoid at all costs* list.

"You're covered in blood!" Carole shrieked.

"Don't worry about me my lovely, a wall got in me way, but the old ding dong's still working." He waved his mistletoe in the air and fell over his feet. "Whoops a daisy!"

Carole wilted. Her guests were about to arrive and he was the last man on earth she wanted to be seen on her doorstep. "You're drunk," she said, then realised the extent of the horror, "and you're bleeding all over my ice lanterns!"

Fifteen minutes ago she'd removed the lanterns from the freezer, positioned them tenderly each side of the door and lit them with tea lights. Their gentle glow created a special kind of magic manifestly absent

in the flashing reindeer and Father Christmases illuminating the rest of the street, and, as she would modestly point out later, they were hand-crafted.

### Sno' Lanterns

Gus looked at the perfect spheres of ice from his position on all fours, then across to the blazing Bambies in his own front garden and back to the lanterns.

"Classy!" He burped. "Red stripes."

"It's blood you witless idiot, and you've completely ruined them."

Carole grabbed the snow shovel and battered the lanterns until they shattered. Spilled wax and ice merged with thin skeins of blood, resembling antique marbled paper. Far too furious to appreciate the accidental aesthetic of the festive doorstep, she turned her attention to Gus's head. The blow sent him sprawling across the path, where he lay spread-eagled and groaning as the Hadleighs, fortified with appropriate spirits and filled with seasonal goodwill, appeared at the gate in cashmere mufflers, singing with determined cheerfulness, *Ding Dong Merrily on High*.

**Lara Green**