



Secret Santa

Scarlett Bailey

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A self-confessed Christmas queen, Sue Montaigne prides herself on organising the annual nativity pageant in her small Cornish village of Poldore.

But this year, what with having to deal with the repairs on Castle House after it was wrecked by a terrible storm, training a new – and frankly flighty – Virgin Mary and managing a Joseph who is allergic to sheep, she is distinctly lacking a little bit of ‘me time’.

And then there are the auditions for the new Santa. But nothing prepares her for the beautiful man who turns up, a twinkle in his eye and a promise to make her Christmas dreams come true...

Secret Santa Details

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From Reader Review Secret Santa for online ebook

MetLineReader says

A little bit of Christmas magic to finish the series. A little far fetched but enjoyable tale, finalising the poldore series. Amusing in places, it was good to see a little more depth to the character of Sue.

It was too short - a novella rather than a book!

4* but should be read after books 1 and 2 in the series.

Sharon Atkinson says

Had me grinning from ear to ear. Such a lovely festive read.

Fabulous Book Fiend says

Review: What a fabulous festive novella. I love the Poldore novels by Scarlett Bailey and I was so pleased when I found out that there would be a festive novella this year. I think people expect this lovely author to come out with some at Christmas and so we were all a bit worried when she brought something out in the summer but here we are being spoilt because we have Scarlett in the summer and Scarlett for Christmas too. If you love the Poldore novels already out there by Scarlet Bailey, you will definitely love this one. I wouldn't recommended reading this one if you intend on reading the others first and haven't already done so, this will definitely contain spoilers for you. The other novels are equally as fabulous though and so you're going to want to read those anyway!

The characters in this novella are the same as in the previous novels and so it really is like visiting old friends, catching up with them, this book though focuses on Sue. She has been a kind of linchpin character in the other novels so it was great for her to have her time in the spotlight. What we don't realise in the other novels in how fragile Sue actually is. We see a strong woman who basically rules the village and her massive family of children and dogs. This is a great read because we really get to know her insecurities and see whether other people are prepared to support her as much as she has supported them,.

There is a special celebrity guest/love interest in the novella as well which really heats things up. he is just dreamy and rich and handsome and so he really seems to inadvertently shake things up around the village. It was wonderful to see my name appearing in this book again and I really hope we have another Poldore novel to see what happens to baby mo and the rest of the Poldore gang.

This novella is super-christmasey but without it being rammed down your throat. It centres around a nativity and so there's not too much Christmas spirit going on all the time, but you expect a good dollop of festive cheer with Scarlett Bailey, let's face it. It is structured over the days leading up to Christmas and I really liked that because you knew exactly where you stood. There is an epilogue too, which i loved, but you don't always get them in a novella so that was a nice surprise. I think fans of scarlet bailey will really enjoy this year's festive treat and if you're just looking for something Christmasey to read, you can't go wrong with this

author. I hope there's another Poldore novel in the works because I need more of the people and the dogs in my life!

Jill says

I'm sat here typing and humming 'Santa Claus is coming to town' thanks to Scarlett Bailey and Secret Santa! This novella is a fun festive read with some romance that I really enjoyed.

We meet Sue, the village do-er in the build up to Christmas. Sue is the centre of village life and is taking the lead on organising all the village festivities. When we meet her she is desperately trying to convince one of the locals to don his Santa suit for the annual Christmas pageant and grotto....without much success!

Sue seems to operate on one speed.....full throttle! I was exhausted thinking about her juggling her big house, children, and being centre of the community. But I also recognised that I like to be just as busy and thrive on it. We soon find out that Sue's husband Rory has left her after yet another affair, but she is trying to keep it all together and hide it from her kids and everyone else until after Christmas. Her life is not easy and she could do with financial help and support, but is more concerned about others than herself.

The book is a bit like a panto in so much that we have the baddie I wanted to boo and hiss at every time they are mentioned, and we have a Prince Charming who I wanted our heroine, Sue, to live happily ever after with. There was also magical mystery in Nick who takes on the role of Santa. Where did he appear from and how is he so special?

In her quest to find a Santa, Sue approaches famous actor Blake who lives in the village. He agrees to help her audition for the part, and it leads to them becoming friends. Could there be more to it? I liked Blake. Quiet and unassuming he would be lovely to be around, and I was willing Sue to spot this and for them to come together and be happy.

I also loved her friends. They rallied round her when they found out that Rory had left her and the advice and some scenes made me laugh out loud. I felt a real affinity to Sue and wanted to tell her what for and that life is too short to look after everyone else all the time. There is great support to be had from your girlfriends and this novella showcases it brilliantly.

The story is a mix of lighthearted fun as well as some pull at the heart string moments which I really enjoyed. I loved moving towards Christmas with the culmination on Christmas Eve when we get to see how it all comes together. My daughter is 21 now so Christmas is very different to when she was younger. This story has me hankering after the days of grottos, stockings and snowmen. I hope you enjoy this story as much as I have.

I spotted the name of a fabulous book blogger amongst the characters. I hope she sees it. What an honour to be cast in a story by such a great author!

Thank you to Ebury who provided a copy in return for an honest review.

Sarah says

It is a delightful, uplifting festive read. It has kept me in the festive mood and I feel like I have a much brighter outlook after reading it. I didn't want the story to end; I want to find out what happens in the rest of Sue's life. When I wasn't reading it I was thinking about it and didn't want to put it down. If I didn't have to work I would easily have read it in one sitting as it isn't a very long book.

I loved this story it was based around Sue the main character who was in charge of running the local community Christmas pageant and rallying the community together whilst still having her own woes and worries. The story reflected the true spirit of Christmas and brought it to life as well as capturing the close knit community feeling.

I connected with Sue the main character like I was part of her. I felt for her facing the struggles that she had and really wanted to help fix them for her. I love how I was engaged by the whole story and felt like I was a part of the community. I wish it was real life so I could live there and be a part of their world. It gives a sense of community that I think is lacking in a lot of real places now but used to be around years ago.

This is one of the best Christmas themed books that I have read over the Christmas period and I would definitely put it in my top 3 festive reads. It is the ideal book to read if you feel a bit down about the festive period or not quite in the festive mood.

Lisa Bentley says

Synopsis

It is but a few days before Poldore's annual Christmas pageant and Sue's usual Santa Claus has retired, parked the reindeer and hung up his present sack. Sue has to ensure that the event runs as smoothly as it does every year, not just because she is a control freak and town matriarch but also because the people of Poldore are only just getting over the devastating impact of last year's inclement weather. On a more personal note, Sue also is trying to hold things together ever since her husband walked out on her a few days earlier. No, she needs to make this year special. She needs a Christmas miracle.

Review

Whilst I did enjoy this short story I felt at a slight disadvantage being that I hadn't read its predecessor. This is no fault of the authors or should in any way reflect on the short story Secret Santa; the fact that I knew that the characters had previously been written about is because of the conscientious writing of Bailey who introduced all the main players with thoughtful information from their book past. What Bailey has managed to do with this short story is intrigue me enough to want to read the rest of the books in the Poldore series.

Focusing on Secret Santa, this story gave me what the other festive texts have yet to do. It gave me that added bit of Christmas magic. There was a slight element of the unnatural, the unrecorded and whilst I have loved the books that I have read in my festive feature they have all lacked that element of magic that you can really only get away with at Christmas.

I loved how strong willed Sue was, how her determination to look after everyone took precedence over her own life. She seemed to be such a giving person. What I loved more about her though is that we were able to see moments of self doubt and weakness and that she wasn't too proud to let others help her. Her strength didn't become a detriment.

I was really impressed by Secret Santa and I am intrigued to read about the rest of the characters. This book should be on your Christmas to be read list. I know the rest of the series has been added to mine.

Secret Santa by Scarlett Bailey (Rowan Coleman) is available now.

You can follow Scarlett Bailey (@ScarlettBailey) on Twitter.

Paris Baker says

Originally posted on Paris Baker's Book Nook.

Sue Montaigne packs quite a punch in Poldore; resident busy body, and an unofficial town leader. The Christmas Pageant is her pride and joy of the festive season, but this year it's not at all going to plan. With their long-standing Santa dropping out with only days to go, Sue is left to arrange some very last minute auditions.

They go abysmally, until one Santa turns up who almost seems like the real thing. He's a little bit crackers himself, but he's harmless and kind, so Sue finds herself putting her faith in him, more than she could ever have planned to.

Secret Santa is such a charming Christmas read, it really does get you into the festive spirit. Scarlett Bailey is practically the Queen of Christmas Chick Lit, and there really is no question as to why.

Sue was a fantastic character, a hard and stern battle-axe of a woman, or so you'd think, but we're allowed to strip behind her cool façade, and see the sweet, worried woman underneath, who really is quite lovable. A woman who always puts the needs of Poldore above her own, never letting on how much she might need helping too.

Secret Santa for me has a bit of everything that Christmas is about. It's about love, friendship, family, community and faith – a perfect Christmas story.

Natalie TBGWP says

It is so lovely to be back in Poldore, and even more lovely that we're back at Christmas. Catching up with characters we have grown fond of, and meeting new ones as we read on.

Secret Santa is the perfect Christmas short story. It's not all happy families, love and romance, with a hint of Christmas thrown in like most Christmas books. It's a story much deeper than that, it's about respect, loyalty, friendship. About a lady who's lost in herself, so used to just getting on with things, and being unhappy that it all just becomes too much. We've all been in a similar situation, or had somebody close to us in that

situation, so we know how awful it can be. So, we connect deeply with heroine Sue Montaigne, local aristocrat, busy body, and town ruler. It shows us a different side to Sue, and for me sees her gone from a scary battleaxe that you know has a good heart, to a normal, kind, and very lonely lady. It really is touching.

It is a great read, and one that not only makes you giggle out loud at the dry wit that some characters have, but it leaves you feeling warm, blessed, lovely. Christmas is about giving, family, and friendship isn't it? Secret Santa gives us just that. For a short read it is full to bursting. It has been written cleverly, giving us a full plot with twists and turns, and the usual Scarlett Bailey fast flowing charm.

It's a Christmas cracker.

5/5

Holly says

Originally reviewed for Bookaholic Confessions In Secret Santa we return to one of my favourite settings ever... Poldore. If you've read any of Scarlett Bailey's previous novels then you'll already be familiar with this beautiful village and its array of residents.

This time the story focuses on the ever-in-control Sue Montaigne...only it appears this Christmas she's not as in control of everything as she would like.

Castle House is falling apart and Sue has no idea where she's going to find the money for the necessary repairs, her husband Rory has upped and left her and the children for another woman, and to top it all Poldore's regular Santa Claus, Jargo, has decided to retire, leaving Sue with very little time to find a replacement for the annual nativity pageant.

However, when Sue plucks up the courage to ask Poldore's very own movie star, Blake Fletcher to help with auditions for the new Santa, she ends up getting a whole lot more than she bargained for...

For me, Scarlett Bailey is the QUEEN of Christmas novels. They're always perfect, with just the right amount of romance, magic, festivities and cosiness and this delightful short story lived up to all of my expectations.

I loved returning to Poldore, it's fast becoming one of my favourite villages and it was great to catch up with the residents and also to be introduced to some new characters at the same time.

I was rooting for poor Sue right from the start – how much can one woman take? I really admire her spirit and my opinion of completely changed. I now think she's one heck of a woman who only wants the best for her friends, family and Poldore. I loved seeing her transformation from stressed, worn out mother to some super-hot lady dining out with a movie star. (As you do...)

I also really liked Nick (or should I say Santa!?) He was a perfect example of how Scarlett infuses her story with that little bit of magic. Nick brought a smile to my face and his dialogue and interactions with Sue are pure brilliance.

Secret Santa is one of those short stories that doesn't feel unfairly short, unlike some novella's which end and leave you thinking 'Whaaa!?' There's plenty of action and excitement packed into the story, yet there's a satisfying ending for the characters too.

I've no doubt that Secret Santa will put you in a Christmassy mood if you're not feeling especially festive yet. It's the ideal novel to enjoy on a chilly afternoon; it'll bring a smile to your face and give you a warm fuzzy feeling at the same time.

Anne says

I've made no secret of how much I've loved Scarlett Bailey's previous Poldore novels - I'm sure you'll have seen my reviews of Just For Christmas and Two Weddings And A Baby, and I think I could now find my way blindfold from The Silent Man to Castle House - and this Kindle-only novella was a lovely opportunity to visit old friends again.

Sue Montaigne has always been one of my favourite characters, the powerhouse behind the annual Christmas pageant, the saviour of Poldore during the flood, the supreme organiser paddling furiously beneath the surface to keep her family life together. It was lovely to get to know her better, and to see her experiencing a little Christmas joy and romance in her life. The mysterious Nick who takes on the role of Father Christmas is a quite wonderful creation: but it was equally lovely to catch up with Alex and Ruan, Tamsyn and Jed, and there's a wonderfully chaotic Christmas lunch featuring my favourite dog Buoy and his sidekick Skipper.

I guess you don't need to have read Scarlett Bailey's other Poldore books to enjoy this one - but why wouldn't you? Scarlett Bailey is the alter ego - perhaps the badly behaved twin - of Rowan Coleman. So the writing is excellent - wonderful touches of humour, believable characters, a lovely romantic story, a really vivid sense of place, and in this lovely novella all wrapped up in a beautiful small package. This really was a perfect Christmas read - I loved every one of its 106 pages.

Agi says

Oh, Scarlett Bailey, the Queen of Christmas, is back with her new short story "Secret Santa"! It's such a shame that it's only a short story, as it is about Poldore, and I can't have enough of Poldore and its residents. But, okay, no Christmas would be Christmas without a book from Scarlett, no matter if full length novel or a short story, and as "Secret Santa" has left me with a smile on my lips, then I guess I couldn't ask for more.

This time Scarlett concentrates on Sue Montaigne. Sue, that always has everything under control, this time feels that she's losing her grip: their Santa has just retired and she's looking for a new one, but it's not so easy; she's of course the one organising the nativity pageant, and it takes time; Rory has gone AWOL (again) and is not answering his phone; the roof of the castle is leaking and there is no money to repair it; a Hollywood star takes her for dinner...

Oh my, how I felt sorry for Sue! She was a shadow of her previous self and there were moments that I was really scared that she has depression. But well, why do you have friends in the form of Tamsyn, Alex, Cordelia and the whole Poldore if not to help you? Sue was a real star, she has helped all the people after the Great Flood and didn't want anything in exchange, and said nothing that she herself is in troubles. While perhaps earlier I have regarded her as a nosey, busybody, a little arrogant woman, now I have discovered her other side, and I really rooted for her, for this strong, brave, funny person and kept my fingers crossed for

her.

I had no idea how much I missed all the characters and when I started reading this story I felt as if there were no books read in between, as if I have never left Poldore, I immediately felt comfortable and there was this nice, cosy feeling of being back with old friends, with all their news, preparing for Christmas. And nothing changed in Poldore, it was still full of warm, friendly people and gossips travelling with the speed of light. A place where I could really live! Scarlett is a brilliant story - teller, she gives her characters personality and their own voice and let them live their own lives, which are really colourful and vivid.

It was a short story, but nevertheless brimming with action, surprises, humour and this lovely, warm feeling that Scarlett's books are full of. With larger than life, vivid characters, sharp and witty dialogues, and clever, original, heart - melting storyline, it made w brilliant read. Scarlett also adds some magic to the book, but she makes it in such a subtle, light way, and I love Nick/Santa so, so much, he has always something very nice and clever to say. I love Poldore so much that I guess I have nothing against Scarlett writing about every single one of its residents! Highly recommend story, perfect for curling on the sofa with a cup of hot chocolate and cracking fire.

Copy received from publisher in exchange for a review.

Samantha says

I absolutely loved 'Just for Christmas' and 'Two weddings and a baby' last year, so when I heard Scarlett Bailey was back with Secret Santa also set in Poldore, I needed to read it.

This story centres around Sue, Sue inherited a large castle in the village, that had been passed down to her by her ancestors. She has got big financial problems and some with her husband. Sue is really in the heart of the community, she decides to really throw herself into the festivities this year, things are not plain sailing for her, especially when the long running Santa pulls out this year. Sue only has a few days to try and get a new Santa in time for Christmas!

There is a new visitor in the village this year, a famous actor, who Sue has taken a shine to. (Actually I think we all did!)

Although the story is set with the run up to Christmas, there are many issues in it that you can almost be forgiven for forgetting when it is set. A major them in this novella is the break down of Sue' s marriage and the effect she feels this will have on her children. Money worries and the stress this can cause is also a big theme.

I love the mysterious Nick and how his character can really change the dynamics and feelings of the story.

I really loved this short story and has become one of my favourites I have read so far. I am so glad I discovered Scarlett Bailey last year and I hope we will be getting more instalments from Poldore in the future.

I would like to thank the publisher for sending this in exchange for an honest review.

Emma Star Crossed Reviews says

This review was originally posted on Star Crossed Reviews I have previously read the first book in the Poldore Series Just for Christmas a few years ago and I love Scarlett's writing.

Sue is always at the heart of the village. She makes sure that everything runs smoothly for all the local community events. Sue sees her self as the bossy villager that no one likes. She couldn't be more wrong. Everyone loves her.

Sue is having marital problems and may need to move out of her ancestral home in the new year but for now she must focus on the final task of the year...finding a Santa for the children.

This is a lovely christmassy story. It was great to see Alex and Ruan again and I'm now dying to read Two Weddings and a Baby to have the full story. If you need that Christmas magic then Scarlett has it right here in this book.

Kim says

What a special short story. We rejoin the folk of Poldore- which was a lovely surprise. Sue is devastated when 'Santa' retires and she has to audition for the perfect replacement. She approaches a local Hollywood star to ask if he'll come along to help audition- so that more of the locals will volunteer.

She's going to make the grotto at her family home and we get swept up in the preparations and the magical place they create. She also finds a very special Santa- who is very secretive. Is he the 'real' Santa Claus, could he be based closer to home????

We have everything here- a lovely sense of community, everyone pulling together to help Sue through a very difficult patch, a touch of magic and romance and the pure Christmas sparkle that Scarlett provides for the reader!

Definitely one to add to your Christmas list.

Many thanks to the publisher and Net Galley for the chance to read this one.

Simona says

Yay, we are back in Poldore! One of the most festive and sweet places, especially around Christmas. If you know Scarlett Bailey's book, you know Alex, Ruan, Tamsyn and Jed and yes we get to read about them again! Alex and Ruan had some happy news and I couldn't be more excited about that!

This story is about Sue Montaigne, a 40 years old mum, who is organising Poldore's Christmas pageant. Her marriage is struggling and she is very busy. She has to deal with all these roles and who is going to be Santa?!

Somehow it didn't click with Sue, she's nice, but I didn't find a real connection to her.

The Secert Santa/Nick turns up, leaving Sue all confused, but also helping her to see her Christmas dreams... Nick added the right mystery to the story and I think it's a wonderful way to help Sue see the light.

Hollywood actor Blake is in town over Christmas and he promises her his help with the Santa auditions.

When he doesn't turn up Sue is a bit disappointed, but then he asks her out...

The spark between them was obvious, so I was really curious, how it was going to develop. I liked Blake, he had a quietness and calmness around him and his small sweet gestures were perfect for the story.

A short little Christmas story, in a beautiful setting and with wonderful characters. I loved catching up with all of them and I really think Cordelia (Ruan's and Tamsyn's sister) needs her own story now! Scarlett's writing is beautiful!
