



It Makes You Wonder
Nick Teed

Ashley tells a friend about the events of a Christmas Day that they will never forget.

ASHLEY: It was that time on a Christmas Day when the kitchen is just a mass of piled up dirty plates and dishes and pans. I'd been sending texts...all about presents and money and food. So, I'm stood at the kitchen window and mum's rushing around like she does, with her party hat on, searching for a tin of salmon to give to grandma to take home. I'd been allowed one small glass of sparkling wine and it was there on the worktop. I think it might have gone flat so I held it up. I was looking for bubbles...

How can I explain it? A flickering orange glow on the side of the glass...does that make sense? I just moved my eyes a fraction past the glass...it only took a second to focus on Mrs Medlock's bungalow across the street. There were flames in her kitchen window!

When they burst the door down, they started coughing straight away but they ran in. We waited in the street. They got her out, over dad's shoulder. She was unconscious...pale. *You've seen Molly, her cat out in the street haven't you?* I thought, *'she might be in there somewhere'*. So, I looked in and she was there in the hallway. Dad was yelling at me to stay away but I grabbed her and ran for it...

I saved a scared cat. Big deal. Dad and uncle Jack saved Mrs Medlock, *that's* praise worthy. But people keep expecting me to be all happy and excited because *'we were all so brave'*...

I *can't* be happy about it because... well, as I grabbed Molly, I looked in the living room. There was a small table with a couple of cards on it and a tiny Christmas tree with fairy lights. The dining table was set near the window. Don't know what she was having for dinner... that was burning in the kitchen...but there was *one* dinner plate, *one* bowl, *one* christmas cracker... what would you think if you saw that? How sweet? How sad? All those years, all those Christmas Days since her husband died she'd been on her own while we partied across the street. Makes you wonder, doesn't it? How many other Mrs Medlock's are out there; keeping going all on their own?