

Welcome to *How to Hold a Grudge*. I'm Sophie Hannah, bestselling crime writer, creator and host of this podcast, and author of the world's first ever book on the specific subject of grudges. Many of us believe it's always wrong and bad for us to hold a grudge – but what if our grudges, when handled correctly, can be positively good for us, and for others? What if grudges are actually great: not a cause for guilt, but exactly what we need to lead a happier, safer, more fulfilled life? If you're intrigued and want to know more, you can listen to a new episode of this podcast every Thursday between now and 27 December. Join me and guests to find out how to use grudges to transform your life for the better, and to make the world a more peaceful and compassionate place.

And now ... Episode Ten: Festive Grudges!

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Hello, everybody! I'm really excited about this episode, not only because it's the festive episode where we're gonna talk about festive grudges. That is very exciting. But equally exciting is that today I am welcoming back Nic Aubury, who you will know by now is one of my top fave living poets. And Nic is gonna join me to talk about seasonal grudges and how Christmas can be a real breeding ground for all things grudgeworthy. Hello, Nic.

**NA:** *Hello.*

[*laughs*] Nic has very kindly agreed to come on the podcast for this special festive episode. And, later on, Nic and I will be discussing festive grudges, and why we are more likely to create and sustain and brew new grudges at holiday times – Christmas time, any time when extended families are thrown together.

So, we're gonna talk about that later, but first of all, I'm gonna ask Nic to read some of his poems. Because, actually, I think one of the reasons I love Nic's poems so much is that they are about the sort of everyday things in life that, when you read about them, you think, 'Yes. I've felt that. I've been there. I've been annoyed about that. I've had that sarcastic thought about that.' And it's all so familiar, but nobody expresses it as brilliantly as Nic does.

So, I'm gonna start by asking Nic to read one of my favourites of his poems. What's the title of the poem?

**NA:** *(A)truism.*

Altruism.

**NA:** *But the 'Al' is in brackets.*

Yes, that's right. And when I first saw it, I thought, 'Why is the "al" in brackets?' although that's probably a diversion. But let's hear the poem, and then we will talk about it afterwards.

**NA:** *(Al)truism.*

*'By putting other people first,  
You'll find you'll always do what's best,'  
Is wisdom that oft-rehearsed  
By other people, I suggest.*

[laughs] I love that. And Nic specialises in very short but very perceptive and hilarious poems. So ...

**NA:** *You're very ... it's very flattering. I'm very pleased I came.*

Well, it's all true. So, I think this is – while it's not a poem directly on the subject of grudges, it's really relevant, I think, to a lot of what I'm arguing both on this podcast and in my book, *How to Hold a Grudge*, because ... Yes, one of the reasons why other people might so often tell us that it's really not nice to hold a grudge and it's not good for us ... I mean, it's not for our own good to hold a grudge, it would be much better for us if we forgave them ... is kind of a philosophy that might suit them for all kinds of reasons.

**NA:** *Correct. It is just an observable truth that when people say ...*

Think of others first.

**NA:** *'Think of other people first.' Hang on a minute!*

Hang on a minute, you're another person!

**NA:** *That's you!*

That's you! Yeah. Yeah. So, you know, I was talking in a previous episode about how, if we try and put other people first always and forgive before we're ready

and banish our own negative feelings, there's a danger that we will make ourselves feel as if whatever wrong was done to us somehow doesn't matter, and doesn't deserve to be acknowledged. And, you know, yes, of course we have to think about other people and doing right by them, and not, you know, condemning them out of hand and writing them off.

But one of the things I love about, you know, the idea of holding grudges in a positive way is that it acknowledges that you matter. If someone does something wrong to you, you have the right to put yourself first, at least for long enough to think, 'That was not okay. I did not deserve to be treated like that. And, for once, I'm gonna think about *me* and mind that this bad treatment was doled out to me.'

So, yeah. So, that's why I, you know, I just felt that poem was so relevant to the whole grudge discourse.

Now, Nic, you've written another poem called 'Nearly Over', which is directly on the subject of a grudge, isn't it?

**NA:** *Yes. This is a specific grudge. I don't write many poems that are about romantic relationships, I suppose, because I'm an English man. [general laughter] We don't really talk about it. But this is sort of about a specific relationship from deep in my past, where, I think, one day, I realised that my grudge had, while still being there, had sort of diminished a bit.*

Or changed character.

**NA:** *Or changed character, yeah, exactly.*

So, one of the things I love about the poem is that it talks about grudges as though grudges have desires of their own. So, let's hear the poem and then we can discuss it.

**NA:** *It's a sonnet and it's called 'Nearly Over.'*

*In spite of everything, I'm pleased to say  
I think I might be nearly over you,  
And now, at least, no longer hope that true  
Misfortune, grief and pain might come your way*

*Or close my eyes in bed each night and pray*

*You'll suffer for the things you put me through.  
No, minor inconvenience will do,  
And irritating blights upon your day.*

*I hope your zip gets stuck, and that your sock  
Slips down inside your shoe a little bit.  
I hope you drop your fork and that your chair  
Has one uneven leg, which makes it rock  
Enough to leave you feeling slightly shit,  
But not so much that anyone will care.*

[laughs] I just adore that poem. I think that's actually one of the most profound grudge poems that's ever been written.

**HA:** *That's extremely kind of you to say.*

Well, because, if all those things happened, like, if your sock ... I mean, it's so annoying, isn't it, when your sock slips down inside your shoe?

**NA:** *Yes.*

Or if you've got a chair that rocks. So, everyone who hears that poem or reads it can instantly imagine what a shit day they would have if all those things happened to them, and will also know that no one would care. You're not going to ring your friend and go, 'These things happened,' and get any sympathy at all.

**NA:** *No.*

So, it's actually – it's actually a brilliant kind of revenge poem, but it's not one that's gonna harm anyone. I mean, in an earlier episode – in fact, the same one where I read your 'RSVP' poem about the wedding present list, I also read a poem by Wendy Cope, who is another of my favourite living poets. And her poem was called 'A Song of Hate' and it's a proper full-on grudge poem. And like your poem, you know, I think these poems are an example of how grudges can do active good and not harm. So, however much they ... I mean, yes, they celebrate negative feelings, but in a way that makes everybody feel better. And so, as long as the person they're written about doesn't get sent a copy with a post-it note saying 'This is about you, you utter git,' then these poems are not doing any harm. But everyone who's had these feelings, which is all of us ...

**NA:** Yes.

... feels kind of jubilant, because we go, 'Yes! I can identify with that.'

**NA:** *And it isn't self-destructive in the way that wishing genuine grief or misfortune upon someone ... That is not edifying, is it? That doesn't ...*

No.

**NA:** *... doesn't get you anywhere.*

And in fact, I think, you know, one of the things I really stress in the book is that actually trying to get revenge or actively doing something nasty is always wrong, whatever the other person has done. And you know it's wrong because if you ever do strike back in any way, even verbally, you feel instantly ... You know, you have that feeling of awfulness you have when you do something wrong. So, yeah.

**NA:** *Or even wishing those things.*

Absolutely.

**NA:** *Even wishing those things.*

So, that was what I was gonna go on to say. Like, I say in the book it's bad to do something wrong, but I do believe it's also morally wrong to wish serious ill on people. One of my big problems with the internet is that so often people will casually say, 'Oh, I really hope he falls under a bus.' And, you know, they're probably joking, but you think, 'Never say that.'

**NA:** *No, absolutely.*

It's horrendous. But I love the sort of absurd humour in the poem as well, because it's both making an excellent serious point that – you know – it is not morally wrong to hope that someone's chair leg rocks. It's just not. Like, you wouldn't feel guilty if that actually happened. You wouldn't think, 'Did I make that happen?' [*laughs*] So, it's not wrong, and it makes perfect sense, and it would still be a good revenge because it would be an annoying day for them.

But the other brilliant thing about it is the idea of the narrator actually putting energy into wishing for those specific things, which is hilarious in itself.

**NA:** *Yes. Yeah, I mean it sort of makes me worry about the backstory of this person. The sort of fictional me in the poem.*

Yes.

**NA:** *You sort of wonder where they've come from ...*

Yeah.

**NA:** *... because presumably, there have been some dark days [Sophie laughs] that have preceded this sort of enlightened state of wishing for trivial irritation.*

Yeah. And yet, it is progress, that the narrator who is ... I mean, it's always a fictionalised version of oneself, isn't it? It's never the real you narrating the poem.

**NA:** *No.*

But that fictional character, who might be loosely based on you, is actually making progress.

**NA:** *Yes, exactly.*

So, maybe at first, his negative feelings of pain and anger were so strong that he couldn't help wishing bad things on the person. But now, he's kind of feeling mildly self-congratulatory because he's reached this brilliantly enlightened point of only wishing for sock-related annoyances.

**NA:** *Yes. And there's something quite charming in this sort of unspoken pride in his achievement in sort of getting to that point.*

Exactly. That's part of the joke, is that he's congratulating himself ...

**NA:** *Exactly.*

... when, if you take him absolutely literally ... I mean, the reader, if they take it seriously, will think, 'Wow, this guy is still really messed up.' You know, if he's bothering to wish for all this ... And, of course, the reader is complicit with you.

**NA:** *Yes.*

Because they know that you're not ... that you, Nick Aubury, are not really spending time wishing for people's chairs to rock ...

**NA:** *Yes.*

... and that you've had a funny idea for a poem about someone who might. But so often, those funny ... you know, imagine if someone were to be that crazy. When I have those kinds of ideas, there is always a bit of me that could do that, and I'm imagining this only just a tiny bit more unhinged version of actual me.

*[General laughter]*

**NA:** *Well, that's it, isn't it? It's a way of giving expression to you worst traits and pretending it's not true, isn't it? Writing a poem about ...*

Yeah. But also, it's a way of making sure that you never become that worst possible version of yourself because you're aware it's there and you're taking the piss out of it.

**NA:** *That's right, yes.*

Which is so brilliant, and that's ... I just love the way that poem works on so many levels.

**NA:** *You're very kind.*

So, now we're gonna move onto the festive part of this episode. Around Christmastime, or around the holidays, many of us have lots and lots of people descend on us in the form of guests. Or we pack up all our millions of presents that we have for everybody and we traipse round the country visiting lots of rellies, going round visiting other people's houses. And in fact, I wrote a poem once called 'A Christmas Dilemma', and the refrain line was, 'Which is worst at Christmas, to visit or to host?' which I feel cuts right to the heart of Christmas dilemma. *[General laughter]*

Nic, you've written a poem, also on the theme of people who might stay in one's house over Christmas. Can you read it, please?

**NA:** *Yes. It's another very short one, and it's called 'House Guest'.*

*However long they stay,  
However much they peeve,  
They do, I'm pleased to say,  
Invariably leave.*

[Sophie laughs]

*And it's exactly as you say. The truth of the matter is, there's no answer to your refrain in your poem, is there? They're both as hideous as each other, but just in ...*

There's a downside to visiting.

**NA:** Yes.

There's a downside to hosting. I've got actually ... I think I'm quite proud of myself. I've come up with a Christmas methodology that's kind of a bit of both in a way.

**NA:** *I need it.*

[Laughs] But it works really well. The last few Christmases, we have found a house very, very near ours ...

**NA:** *Okay.*

... which, loads of relatives have ... We've rented it, or our relatives and us in conjunction have all rented this big house, like a few footsteps from our house.

**NA:** *Right.*

They all stay there, so we don't have loads of houseguests. And then we all get together in the rented house, and we have a catered Christmas dinner.

**NA:** *Wow.*

So, I feel as though I'm kind of hosting because it's my turf, it's my patch. But it's not actually in my house and I don't actually have to cook. But I also don't have to go and stay in someone else's house and be far away from home and take all my belongings. So that works quite well.



**NA:** *That's brilliant, because what you've done is you've sort of ... you've removed lots of the disparity and lots of the inequality of the set-up, which is sort of the root cause of so many of those tensions and grudges, isn't it? When there's disparity of effort, or ...*

[Laughs] Disparity of effort!

**NA:** *... You know, where things aren't equal or fair in some way, there's always a potential for a grudge.*

Yes. Interesting. So, in a minute, we're gonna talk about what precisely it is about Christmas and other big family special occasions that is likely to cause more grudges than usual. But first of all, I am gonna play a very short snippet of another song that Annette Armitage and I wrote together for our first musical which we co-wrote, which is called *The Mystery of Mr E*, in which a character in the play, Peter Landrigan, expresses pretty much the same feelings that Nic's poem about house guests expresses, with an additional side order of how he'd rather not ever have to have anything in his diary, any appointments, anything to do, because he's tired of having to do things and see people.

I would rather not do anything, see anyone, go anywhere,  
Not on any day, even one day out of ten.  
I would rather not see even you, have a single easy thing to do,  
I would rather not do anything, or see anyone again.  
I would rather all my guests would leave. Tell 'em something that they'll  
all believe,  
Say the house will soon run out of oxygen,  
And a tear of joy will be in my eye when they pack their bags and say  
goodbye,  
'Cause I'd rather not do anything, I'd rather not see anyone again.

So, that was an extract from a song called 'Peter's Lament', and Peter is lamenting how he always has too much to do, and there's always people in his house, staying, that he wishes were not there – as is often the case at Christmas.

So, Nic and I are going to discuss what it is about Christmas that makes grudges so prevalent, to the point where, actually, when Christmas is approaching, like, the day before, in the run up to the Christmas period ... Until I discovered that, actually, holding grudges is a good thing and I'm gonna make it a thing, I'm gonna celebrate it and kind of collect new grudges in an active and positive

way, I used to slightly dread Christmas. And I would find myself in the run-up, thinking, 'I hope nothing happens. I hope nothing happens on Christmas day that I then spend the rest of the day feeling upset and annoyed about.' Do you think that's a sort of common reaction?

**NA:** *Absolutely. Because your sort of in forced proximity with a group of people, some of whom you'd almost certainly choose to be in forced proximity with.*

Or voluntary proximity!

**NA:** *Or voluntary proximity with, yes, and some of whom are, probably, slightly further away than that. The weather's usually terrible. You usually stay inside and in each other's company for much longer than you otherwise would. And it's a collection of people with whom you probably naturally have rivalries anyway. I mean, there are probably siblings in the same house. And a collection of people who have known you for longer than anyone else in the world, probably, and so have had more time ...*

And they know how to press all your buttons.

**NA:** *Correct. And there has been time for grudges to ferment between you.*

Yeah. So there's a backstory.

**NA:** *Yeah, it's the perfect storm, really, isn't there?*

[Laughs] Yeah. There's the backstory. There's, you know, possibly a long history of previous grudge-worthy behaviour and grudges.

**NA:** *Indeed.*

And there's the fact that they know you so well, so you can't sort of ... in a way, you can't fool them as easily, by pretending everything's fine.

**NA:** *Exactly. And then you have all those disparities that we were talking about. So, someone, inevitably, is doing the cooking and doing more of the cleaning up because it's their house. And then you introduce the whole thorny business of presents, you know, and the potential inequalities there. And it's just ...*

And, so, presents. I'm gonna come back to that, because it's a huge one. But also, who gets to set the Christmas Day agenda.

**NA:** *Absolutely.*

That is a massive one, isn't it?

**NA:** *Massive.*

Because, you know, you can imagine. I'm trying to think if I've ever been in this. I think I have been in mild versions of the situation, where, you know, one group of people ... Because, the other thing is, you have different sub-branches of families, often, that haven't all been together before. So it's like a massive kind of United Nations of different interest groups. And one person will say, 'Well, we always traditionally ...

**NA:** *Yes.*

'... play Charades between 2 and 3.' And someone else will say, 'Well, that's when we always have our turkey.' And so, it's, you know, who's gonna get their way for the day?

**NA:** *Absolutely. And the whole – the prickly business of grandparents wanting to watch the Queen and republican grandchildren making rude faces. And, exactly, the whole thing is just fraught with that sort of tacit passive aggressive negotiation, isn't it? We actually have two models.*

Right.

**NA:** *So, we have the My Family Model and the My Wife's Family Model.*

Right. And do you have to rigorously ...

**NA:** *And we follow ...*

But, like, do you have one year at your family and one year at your wife's? Because that's another huge ...

**NA:** *It is, yeah.*

... grudge area. Like, 'You went to the in-laws four years running. What about us? When are you gonna come to us?'

**NA:** *Well, we ... again, the only way ... We do it alternately. And we host. We've got a sufficient number of children that we can claim it's difficult for us to travel, so people come to us. And – yeah – and down to the sort of ... as you say, the traditional menus. What you have on Christmas Eve, what you have on Boxing Day and that sort of thing ...*

Yeah, yeah.

**NA:** *... is different, depending on ... There's an A pattern and a B pattern ...*

Yeah.

**NA:** *... and you just alternate between the two.*

And are you quite scrupulous about one year of each?

**NA:** Yes.

Yeah.

**NA:** Yes.

Because otherwise people would get cross.

**NA:** *Absolutely. And, yeah, and it's just ...*

Fair. Yeah. And then there's also – there's the kind of Christmas grudges that we have about ourselves, about our own behaviour. Sometimes, as early as three or four days before Christmas, I can start beating myself up because I'm having negative thoughts when I should be full of joy and looking forward to seeing people.

And, you know, obviously not I, because I am lovely, but people less lovely than me, might find themselves thinking, 'Three days 'til that fucker arrives.' [*General laughter*] And instead of allowing those feelings and accepting they're natural, we tend to beat ourselves up for, you know, not being sufficiently Christmassy in our hearts and spirits.

**NA:** *No, absolutely. And, as you say, it just sort of sours the whole thing, doesn't it? And you are predicting behaviours or anticipating behaviours in other people before they've even happened ...*

Yes. [Laughs]

**NA:** ... *thereby making yourself feel bitter, but also making yourself much more alert to those things, so any tiny trace of that thing in the person ...*

Yeah, and then you go, 'I knew it!'

**NA:** *'I knew it!'*

'I knew they'd do that!' [Laughs]

**NA:** *Exactly. But then that just sort of ... it just ferments the whole thing, doesn't it?*

Yeah. Also, if you're at all contrary, as I massively am, you can have a bit of a grudge just about the idea that you're expected to feel happy on a particular day of the year when you might rather have a brilliant celebration on the 23<sup>rd</sup> December and you might rather feel grumpy on the 25<sup>th</sup>. [Laughs] You know, there's all that going on as well.

**NA:** *Definitely.*

That sort of expectation placed on this big special day that has to be big and special.

**NA:** *Forced Fun. Yeah, exactly. You know, 'You will have fun now, to order.' It's tricky, particularly when you're sweating in front of a turkey or whatever you're doing. It's just – so much of it isn't fun. And I think that's one of the things that doesn't get acknowledged about Christmas enough. Lots of it's boring. There's a huge amount of boredom at Christmas. I think the kids get bored, because they basically just sit around, saying, 'When are we having our presents?' And you say, 'Well, according to the pre-agreed agenda, [Sophie laughs] it's at 3.15,' or whatever it is. And the cooking is boring and the cleaning is boring, and waiting for the presents is boring, and most of the stuff that's on telly is boring. And there is ... it is joyful, but there's also just a lot of hanging round. There's lot of time ... Do you know what I mean by that?*

I do, and actually ... I think it's quite interesting. I really noticed a difference in what I felt about Christmas when we started to spend Christmas in our house in the Cotswolds, where ... Alright, on Christmas Day, the swimming pool ...

There's a sort of shared spa and swimming pool complex where everybody who lives in that bit where we live gets to share it. And it's open Christmas Eve, and it's open Boxing Day, and actually there's another swimming pool in the same complex that's not part of the spa building, and that, you probably could swim in on Christmas Day as well. And there's loads of kind of walking to be done. And I really found, as soon as I could get my exercise when I wanted, even over Christmas, I felt much more relaxed and happy.

**NA:** *That's interesting.*

What I used to hate was spending Christmas – say, the few days around Christmas – in houses where there was no option but to just sit on a sofa for hour after hour ...

**NA:** *Absolutely.*

... or do kitchen work ...

**NA:** *Correct.*

... both of which can be annoying in different ways. As soon as I was in a place where I could say, 'And now I'm going for a swim,' or, 'And now I'm going for a long walk in the country,' then I felt a lot better about Christmas.

**NA:** *It's that bunker mentality, isn't it?*

[Laughs] It is! It is a bunker ... the Christmas Bunker.

**NA:** *It's mental. And you sort of think, you buy enough food for about 18 days, and you think, well, 'Tesco's only shut for about 36 hours in total over this whole period.'*

I mean, actually, it's a bit ... As an Agatha Christie fan, I feel obliged to say it's also a bit like *And Then There Were None* but just without the murders.

[Laughs] It's like, you know, the island that's inaccessible because the water's risen is a great metaphor for a big extended family get-together at Christmas.

**NA:** *Absolutely. And, sometimes, there might even be murders.*

[Laughs] So, have you got, or have you ever had, any Christmas present-related grudges?

**NA:** *I can't really say, can I?*

[General laughter]

Well, you could just say 'Yes' and leave it to ...

**NA:** *Yes. Yes, is the answer. I think ... Yes.*

Okay. How many can you think of at a rough count?

**NA:** *I think ...*

Wait. And by 'grudge' ... let me just define what I mean by 'Christmas present grudge.'

**NA:** *Okay. Not just disappointment. Not just standard disappointment.*

No, no, because that's unavoidable, I think.

**NA:** *Yes.*

You know, people can't read our minds.

**NA:** *No.*

I've certainly bought presents for people that have disappointed them, while trying really hard to get something I thought they'd love. So, I personally never hold a grudge if something merely disappoints me.

**NA:** *Disappoints, no.*

But I've got some grudges around Christmas presents where I just think, 'Come on.'

**NA:** *Yes.*

'That was a dig, not a present.'

**NA:** *I can think of a few, and mostly not about presents that were given to me. In fact, probably, none of them are about presents that were given to me. As soon as you have children it becomes complicated, doesn't it?*

Oh. Yes. Yes.

**NA:** *So, when your children are presented with something, you think, as you say ...*

Yeah.

**NA:** *'Really?'*

Yeah.

**NA:** *'Seriously?'*

Yeah. Because there's levels of present culpability. [*Nic laughs*] You know, somebody might get me an amazing watercolour portrait of Agatha Christie.

**NA:** *Yeah.*

And that's lovely and thoughtful because I love Agatha Christie. They know that. They're trying to get me a nice present. If I happen not to like that particular style of watercolour, that is not their fault. And I would still be really pleased they got me that. It would be a thoughtful present. One of my Christmas grudges, and I can't say what the book was, but somebody, who really ought to know me quite well, bought me a book that, they would only have thought I'd like that book if they hadn't listened to a word I'd said ...

**NA:** *Right.*

... from the moment we first met.

**NA:** *Okay.*

And so, that present ... It wasn't that, you know ... I didn't sort of think, 'Right! That's it. I'm never gonna get them a nice present again.' Because I'm very set on the idea that a grudge should ... a grudge is not a negative feeling. Negative feelings are things we have, understandably, naturally, and they can pass when they're ready. But a grudge is just a story you want to remember because it has



a live relevance and significance. And this person got me a present that just demonstrated something that I needed to remember about their character ...

**NA:** *Right.*

... which is that they are just sort of encased in their own little world, in which they only notice things about them ...

**NA:** *Right.*

... and they just don't really ... They're just very self-absorbed.

**NA:** *But that's – that cuts to the heart of that relationship, doesn't it?*

Yes.

**NA:** *I mean, that's a fairly fundamental, potentially quite undermining observation about the relationship.*

Yes. And so I've got many grudges about that person, all of which protect me from being disappointed in my future dealings with them.

**NA:** *And was that present part of a pattern or was it the establishing thing?*

There was generally a pattern.

**NA:** *Okay.*

Present-giving opportunities always revealed an absolute kind of self-absorption and lack of thoughtfulness. Yes.

**NA:** *Right.*

So, those were grudges I wanted to have.

**NA:** *Yes.*

Because, I wanted to ... you know. So, in the future, when this person hands me a wrapped present, I'm not gonna feel any – and I mean not even a tiny slither of – upset or disappointment, because I just know this grudge reminds me ...

**NA:** *You banked it.*

... of that thing. Yeah. So, that's a kind of ... that's a grudge present where the theme is utter thoughtlessness and obliviousness. But then I've got other present-related grudges where I'll open a present and I'll think, 'You are actually having a dig at me with that present.'

**NA:** *Oh, right.*

And again, because of the nature of the subject, I can't really give examples.

**NA:** *No.*

But, imagine, for example, there was a range of luxury cosmetics ...

**NA:** *Sure.*

... called 'Frizzy-haired bitch,' let's just say.

**NA:** *Yes. Got you. Got you.*

There would never be because that's an odd thing to call ...

**NA:** *Yes.*

... a luxury cosmetic. But I've had presents where the brand name of the item ...

**NA:** *... is a criticism.*

... I've been pretty sure is a dig at me.

**NA:** *Right. Okay.*

I've also had ... *[Laughs]* I've also had at least one present where the person who bought it for me knew that I was in a particularly constrained situation in a particular area, and got me a present that I could only utilise if I wasn't in that constrained situation.

**NA:** *Goodness.*

So it was a lovely present.

**NA:** *Right.*

But it would be a bit like, for example ...

**NA:** *Buying someone a full-sized snooker table who lived in a ...*

Yes.

**NA:** *... studio flat.*

Yes. So, let's say that somebody was ... You know, that the big problem they had in their life at that time was that they only had a very small bedsit and they had five children.

**NA:** *Yes.*

To buy that person an enormous snooker table ...

**NA:** *Yes.*

... and then go, 'Oh, where are you gonna put it? Because, I mean, it's lovely, isn't it? But where are you gonna put it?'

**NA:** *Right.*

Not that. That is not at all a true example. [*Nic laughs*] But, yeah, that kind of thing where you think, 'You bought this present knowing that it would remind me of the thing I'm currently pissed off about.'

**NA:** *Wow.*

Yeah. A couple of ones like that.

**NA:** *Or, most generously, you bought that and have been so crass and thoughtless that you haven't thought about it. But you're saying it's sort of impossible not to have ...*

No. I do think people can buy thoughtless presents. And when I've – when that's happened and I've thought that was what had happened, then I'd have a Thoughtless Present Grudge about that. But when somebody has a pattern of

always getting you presents that seem as though they might contain some kind of sly dig ...

**NA:** Yes.

... you know, I allow myself to notice that pattern. And then I might form a Passive Aggressive Dig Presents Grudge.

**NA:** *Got you. Now ...*

Because holding a grudge doesn't make me dislike the person, it doesn't make me behave in an unfriendly way, I would still absolutely have Christmas. You know, I'd still be totally sort of open to that person. If the passive aggressive presents stop, then I'd kind of go, 'Okay. That's stopped now. That's good.' So it's not ...

This is what I mean. This is why, when you hold grudges in the right way, they don't do any harm to anyone. So there's no reason for you not to have that grudge.

**NA:** *Okay. I have a type of grudge, I suppose, which is against the present-explainer. So, they'll give you a present and then, accompanying that is a sort of five-minute speech about either the thought process that went into it, why they thought it was a good present for you, the sort of complexity and complication of finding it, sourcing it, ordering it [Sophie laughs], explaining that it's not quite the one they'd originally intended to, which would obviously have been much, much better, but ...*

Yes.

**NA:** *... it's the closest approximation they could get.*

That's a really good ... the 'present explainer.' And you have to then sit there. So, you've not only done the whole 'Yeah, great, thank you, I love it,' which you might actually love it ...

**NA:** *Exactly.*

... but then you have to sit there and listen, as though they're a visiting speaker giving you a lecture ...

**NA:** *Correct.*

... and smile attentively and nod and reassure them.

**NA:** *Exactly. That's the thing, isn't it? It becomes all about them.*

Yeah.

**NA:** *And, by definition, one of two things is true. Either it's a great present anyway and they needn't have bothered, or it's a crap present and their speech doesn't make any difference, in a way. But, as you say, they're sort of – they're kind of ...*

It's an opportunity for them to unload their neurosis ...

**NA:** *Correct.*

... or their erudition ...

**NA:** *Correct.*

... or something onto you.

**NA:** *Or just to spin what was quite an ill-conceived present ... to post-rationalise it, I suppose.*

Yeah, yeah.

**NA:** *There's nothing worse than a thoughtless present ...*

Yeah.

**NA:** *... being post-rationalised in your presence ...*

Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes!

**NA:** *... which is effectively telling you why you need to be looking happier about this ...*

Yes! Yeah.

**NA:** ... at the point of receipt.

That is such a good point. And linked to that is ... I don't know what you'd call it. The 'present explainer' is a great name for that phenomenon. But there's another linked thing, which is the present inconveniencer. Someone whose present to you causes you so much inconvenience and stress [*Nic laughs*] that you'd much rather not get the present.

**NA:** Absolutely.

And I have somebody in my life who I would so rather they never bought me a present. Because, first of all, they'll say, 'Okay. The present is going to arrive in the next week. It's going to be delivered in five separate shipments. Shipment 1 needs to be kept in a room temperature basement and turned upside down every three days until you open it.' Just all these instructions, and that same type of person will also say, 'Can you just let me know when it's arrived? And, you know, if it's not right, just keep the receipt.'

And there's all this kind of after-care [*Nic laughs*] and before-care around their present, where ... I mean, really, if someone's going to give you a present you just want them to give you the present and then you can think what you want about it, you can do what you want with it, you don't want to have to send a photo of it every week in its new location. [*laughs*]

**NA:** Absolutely. That's brilliant. There's a subcategory of ... I completely understand that person. There's a subcategory of that type of person, which is the person who buys you a present which would require you to sort of, fundamentally to change your lifestyle [*Sophie laughs*] were you to make any use of it at all. So it would be like someone buying me a home multigym. 'What are you talking about? Why...? Either this is totally useless or you want me to behave in a complete different way.'

*I was always ... I was guilty of this. My poor grandfather, God rest his soul. I used to buy him things like ... I used to buy him digital radios and email ... you remember in the early days of email, you'd get those email machines?*

Yeah.

**NA:** 'Here you are, gramps. You can have this and you can email me.' When, of course, he was never going to email me and it was just going to sit ... I mean, of course he was going to have it sitting there plugged in in his kitchen because I

*bought it for him and he was sweet like that. But it was a really horrible thing for me to do and it was thoughtless, because it just stressed him.*

Yeah. [Laughs] And I mean, I think if it's thoughtless ... I mean, we are all more than capable of being thoughtless, so I think it's interesting to notice when it's ... if there's a pattern of thoughtlessness from a particular person.

**NA:** Yes.

One act of thoughtlessness is inevitable. But I agree the ... you know ... You're well known as being someone who never goes camping and then your Christmas present from someone who loves camping is a massive state of the art tent ...

**NA:** Yes.

... that you would hate to ever have to go and use ...

**NA:** Yes.

... because you hate camping. You know, that kind of thing.

**NA:** Absolutely.

Another type of grudge-worthy present-giver ...

**NA:** Yes.

... is the person who cannot just buy you a normal present. So, like, let's say you are known to be a collector of, I don't know, Inspector Morse, novels.

**NA:** Right.

And this person would never just buy you an Inspector Morse novel you wanted, because that doesn't show how brilliantly creative they are.

**NA:** Yes.

There are some people whose every present has to have everyone going, 'Oh, wow – oh, isn't he a brilliant present[-giver] ... I mean, who else could have thought of that?' So, this person will like, you know, find a block of marble in a skip and then sort of carve a symbol on it they found has got specific reference

to the origin of your Christian name. And really the whole thing is about being impressive ...

**NA:** *Absolutely.*

... rather than giving you what you might want.

**NA:** *Exactly. And it's ...*

... Ego-presents. *[laughs]*

**NA:** *Exactly. Brilliant. And the sort of person ... I don't know if the phenomenon of Christmas lists exists in your world, where people will say, 'If you're struggling for ideas ...'*

Yeah. Yes.

**NA:** *'... for what to buy me for Christmas: A, B, C, D, and E.'*

Yeah.

**NA:** *That person, the ego-giver ...*

... hates that.

**NA:** *... will just ignore ...*

Yeah.

**NA:** *... as a point of principle.*

Yeah. Definitely.

**NA:** *Well, I just listed the only five things I can think of ...*

Yeah.

**NA:** *... that I could possibly want.*

Yes.



**NA:** *And you've deliberately ignored it.*

Yeah.

**NA:** *That's quite an interesting thing to do, isn't it?*

Yeah. So, the ego-present-giver will look through that list and go, 'Well, if I just get them what they want and what they've asked for, then it's not my brilliant idea.'

**NA:** *Exactly.*

And their every present has to be a 'my brilliant idea' present.

**NA:** *Yes. I think they are cousins with the present-explainer, aren't they? It's sort of, this gift is ...*

Yeah. It's all about their ego.

**NA:** *It's all about me. Yes, exactly.*

Yeah. Yeah. But – so, interestingly, this links into the wedding thing from your poem 'RSVP'. Christmas lists are potentially grudge-worthy on so many levels, though, because you can have a grudge if someone – if you give them a list of ten things you want and they give you an eleventh thing you definitely don't want, that can be grudge-worthy ...

**NA:** *Yep.*

... but, interestingly, my husband has a bit of a grudge about people who ring up and say, 'Right, I can see from my diary that I need to be buying you and all of your family presents over the next week or so. So, can you send me a list of about five items that each of you would like.'

**NA:** *Yes.*

And my husband hates that. And he always – because he's very blunt – he will just say, 'No. I'm not asking you to get me a present, but if you do want to get me one, don't give me an administrative choice.' *[General laughter]* 'Just, you know, buy me a nice thing.'

**NA:** *He's so correct.*

And it's like that. So, it's a fine line, because obviously it's fine for people to have things they want ...

**NA:** Yes.

And, in certain ways, it's fine to say, 'Is there anything in particular or shall I use my imagination?'

**NA:** Yes.

But it's those people who go, 'Right. I've got a window in my schedule next Tuesday between 3 and 7. I'm gonna be on Oxford Street in London. Can you send me a list of seven things that might be available in a 2-mile radius of where I'm gonna be and I'll get you one of those things.' And that feels a bit weird.

**NA:** *Yeah. Because there's implicit irritation in that, isn't there?*

Yeah. Like, 'Come on, then.'

**NA:** *'Come on. You're making me get this bloody present. What shall I get you?' And I remember my grandmother, as a young boy, again God rest her soul, saying to me, 'Now, would you like us to choose you something for Christmas as a surprise, or would you like money instead so you can choose something for yourself?'*

*And I said, 'Oh, I'd like you to choose something, please.' And I remember her looking at me with quite a stoney face and actually saying the words, 'Well, that was the wrong answer.'*

*[General laughter.]*

Oh, it's no wonder we have Christmas grudges. Here is a story of a brilliant Christmas ... I think I would call this a Mutual Grudge Stand-off Situation. So, I had a friend who wasn't really a big reader at all.

**NA:** *Right.*

I mean, he was very clever – really clever – but he was a scientist who read a lot of scientific journals, and so he just never read fiction. Then, in his mid-forties, he discovered fiction. I think he read, you know, *Great Expectations* or something. And [laughs] he kind of went round going, ‘Oh wow, fiction! It’s actually quite good!’ And so he started obsessively reading fiction.

**NA:** Okay.

And so, shortly after this, there was a Christmas coming up. And I thought, ‘I am gonna buy him *Bartleby the Scrivener* by Herman Melville.

**NA:** Right.

*Bartleby the Scrivener* by Herman Melville is, for sure, one of my top five works of fiction ever. It is just a work of absolute genius. It’s very short, but it ... I mean, it’s just ... I mean, I much prefer it to *Moby Dick*, which is not very short. So, I thought, ‘Perfect present. This is someone who’s just discovered fiction. He’s actively looking for brilliant classics. And he’s a kind of obsessive list-maker type.’ So he was listing. He’d bought a special leather-bound notebook where he’s listing all the books he bought and read ...

**NA:** Right.

... and he was becoming a collector. So, I thought, ‘Perfect. Perfect.’

**NA:** Okay. Yeah.

And I knew he would love *Bartleby the Scrivener* based on what he’d loved so far.

Anyway, so, I give it to him. He opens it. And he kind of looks at it, and says, ‘What’s this?’ I was like, ‘A book. A brilliant book. You will love it.’ And he’s flicking through it. And *Bartleby* is really very short. And he said, ‘Well, is it a book or is it a short story? Is it a long short story or is it a proper book? Is it a novel?’

**NA:** Yes.

And I said, ‘I don’t know, to be honest. I mean, when I first read it, it was in a Norton anthology of American literature. And it was just what it was. It’s

definitely a work of fiction. It could be seen as a long short story, but as you'll see in this edition – which was just a book that contained nothing but *Bartleby* – you know, let's call it a novella.'

And he just went, 'Oh. Oh, well, that's really disappointing because, you know, I want to read novels. Hmm. Maybe I could read it.' [Laughs] And I just was like, 'Oh my God. I've bought you this amazing work of fiction. It's in book form so you can put it on your shelf with all the other novels you're collecting.'

**NA:** *Yeah.*

But he kind of made out as though, you know, it might not make the cut because it might not be technically a novel. So, I had a grudge about that, and he had a grudge about me totally misunderstanding the kind of thing he wanted to read and collect. And so, that is what I call a Mutual Grudge Stand-Off Situation.

**NA:** *Right. How do you resolve it? Did you buy him a longer book the next time? [Sophie laughs] Or did you deliberately ... did you buy him Hemingway, The Old Man and the Sea? [Sophie laughs] Or did you deliberately...?*

I don't think I've bought him a book since.

**NA:** *Right.*

I was so kind of interested in his determination to, you know, create a problem around *Bartleby*, I thought, 'I'm gonna buy him things that *aren't* books or long short stories from now on.'

**NA:** *It's quite interesting, isn't it? That short reader. The one ... My dad's a bit like that. Sorry, this is a digression. But my dad's sort of, in his retirement, set himself the sort of goal of reading as many of the great works of literature as he could. He's a very educated and bright man and had read a lot anyway, but this was his goal.*

*But rather than just sitting and reading them and saying, 'Well, I've read that,' it needed to be accompanied by copious notes. So he would ...*

Yeah.

**NA:** ... he had a special notebook and would annotate it. And I think it's a sort of obsessive mindset, isn't it?

Yeah. And my scientist friend absolutely was doing that thing. But my grudge was about – you know – he was trying to read the classics and *Bartleby* ...

**NA:** ... is!

... is a massive classic. And who cares whether it's technically a novel or a novella? It's not a limerick.

**NA:** No. But if he set himself the task of reading great novels ...

Yeah, then he should – in my view ...

**NA:** If you've got a certain obsessive ... if you've got an obsessive mindset ...

Yeah. And he has. And he wasn't meaning to offend me, and indeed I wasn't offended.

**NA:** No, sorry, I didn't mean to take his part. I think that's ...

No. I wasn't, sort of, upset about it. But I did just have a grudge, and I do have a grudge, about the fact that something that he should have just welcomed into exactly what he was trying to do 'cause it fitted so perfectly ...

**NA:** Yes.

... that he ...

**NA:** Dismissed it.

... problematised it. So, the blurb for this episode promised you some seasonal grudge tips. So, over lunch today, Nic and I were talking to Dominic who is the editor of this podcast. Dominic has edited all of these episodes, which have been edited brilliantly, I'm sure you will agree. And Nic and Dominic and I were talking about seasonal grudge tips and what tips or advice we might give to you.

So, Dominic's advice was, 'Go into Christmas with no expectations.' [*General laughter*] I guess that means no expectations that anything good is more likely

to happen on this special day rather than any other. So, that's the kind of pessimism of strength position, and it's absolutely true. You know, I'm sure most of us, by the time we get to adulthood, don't expect that Christmas is always necessarily gonna be an extra-brilliant day. And people are capable of being just as annoying at Christmas as they are all year round. So, if you know that going in, you can save yourself a lot of pain and anguish, presumably.

One of my seasonal tips is ... instead of worrying as I used to that, you know, 'Oh, no, what if someone annoys me? And it'll be Christmas, and then I'll have to be annoyed at Christmas, and what if that ruins my Christmas?' I used to have all that sort of anxiety around other people's behaviour at Christmas. And now that I've actually made a thing out of collecting grudges and enjoying them and celebrating them, I actually am actively looking forward to this year's Christmas grudges, almost as if they were presents. It's like, 'Ooh, I wonder what amazing new grudges I'll get this Christmas.'

And I think, you know, it sounds a bit weird, but if you can go into it with that attitude as well ... because I actually do think that every grudge is a kind of a gift. Every grudge gives you an opportunity to think, 'How do I want to behave in future? What value of mine has been reinforced by this grudge story?' You know, often it's 'Uncle Peter behaved in that way. Well, I don't ever want to behave in that way.' And so that reinforces your resolve in a good direction. So, I would advise going into Christmas actively looking forward to any great new grudges that you might accumulate over the festive season.

Nic, do you have a seasonal grudge tip to give?

**NA:** *I do. I think it's not dissimilar to yours, in that it's dependent on the fact that you know there are certain people who are going to do things and say things – who, at certain points, are going to push your buttons. And as well as collecting them, which I think is lovely advice, I would also like to advocate the concept of the grudge ally. So, my grudge ally is my wife. On any occasion where I have seen in someone a predictable sort of behaviour that I could get steamed up about, once the door's shut, once we're...*

Once you've made it to the safety of the guest bedroom.

**NA:** *Exactly. Once the washing up's done and everyone's gone up to bed and the door's shut, you then have that lovely moment of being able to do the post-mortem on all the dreadful behaviour of the day. And I find that sort of giggling mischievous alliance is a position of such warmth and strength that you can use*

*a grudge in that way, in a way, to bring you and your grudge ally closer together.*

Yes. And actually, if you get – you know, you sort of say goodnight to everyone else, and you go up to your room and close the door, you can almost do a sort of grudge comparison ...

**NA:** Yes. [laughs]

... with your grudge ally. It's like, 'Right. I've got five grudges today. How many did you get? Oh, I wonder whether we got any of the same ones.'

**NA:** *It's like bingo.*

Because my grudge ally is my husband. And we often have completely different grudges from the same occasion, where I'll notice things that he doesn't notice or things will bother me that don't bother him, and vice versa. So, that is really good fun. And it is, you know ... usually, your grudge ally is somebody who is in a sort of grudge exemption zone for you.

**NA:** Yes.

I mean, my husband is in a grudge exemption zone.

**NA:** *Yes, absolutely.*

And he has to be in order to be a good grudge ally. And what that means is not by any means that he never annoys me, but that anything he does that annoys me or any argument we have or whatever happens, I don't ever want to have a grudge about him.

**NA:** *Exactly so. And ...*

And you do need to have at least one person in your life with whom you have a proper 'clean slate no matter what' policy.

**NA:** *And the value of grudges is that grudges held against others, I suppose ... it can serve to confirm ... certainly with me and my wife, it serves to confirm, in a very pleasing way, that we sort of view things the same way, and do look at the world the same way, and share the same values, and the fact that we are ...*

Yes, and that you've chosen the right person as your life partner.

**NA:** *Exactly, exactly.*

Because, imagine how awful it would be ... Oh, it's actually quite chilling to even imagine it. But if you were married to someone who, every time you said, 'Oh, I was so annoyed when Mary did whatever' ...

**NA:** *Yes.*

... if your partner were to go, 'Don't be ridiculous' ...

**NA:** *'What do you mean?'*

... and defended Mary, that would be awful.

**NA:** *Yes, it would spell the end, I think.*

*[General laughter]*

Brilliant.

**NA:** *They should put that thing about grudge alliance in the marriage vows, shouldn't they?*

*[Laughs]* Yes. 'Will you, forever, until death do you part, act as a grudge ally to this person...'

**NA:** *'...against all others.'*

Yes. Maybe that can be my new thing, after the book and the podcast. I can do grudge-based wedding services. *[General laughter]* Okay. Now, Nic, you probably hadn't thought that much about grudges consciously until I invited you to come on this podcast and told you I was writing a book about them.

**NA:** *I confess I hadn't.*

Now that I've forced you to think about grudges, and you've thought about them quite a lot, would you say that you have any New Years' Grudge Resolutions?



**NA:** *Oh, God. Well, I mean, I'm ... I suppose I'm just a convert to your way of thinking about them. I think ...*

Brilliant! The first one!

**NA:** *I think ... Avoid the negative cycle by embracing the grudge, knowing you can do nothing about it, and channelling it to your advantage, seems such a brilliant and wise way of thinking about the world. I shall do it for evermore and try and cultivate as many grudges as I can from January 1<sup>st</sup> onwards.*

[General laughter] *I can't think of any specific ones, but I am, broadly speaking ...*

No, that's a great resolution. I hope many people listening to this podcast will make that same resolution.

So, I have a New Years' Grudge Resolution, which is ... I want to try and make sure that, for the whole of 2019, whenever I am the grudgee of somebody else's grudge, that that's a situation where I am quite happy with whatever I've done to make me the grudgee of that grudge. So, I don't want to be the grudgee of any grudges where I agree that I've behaved badly. Which is a very roundabout and long-winded way of saying, I want to behave well in 2019.

So, if somebody forms a grudge about me when all I've done is write a Poirot novel, for example, because that person doesn't think anyone should write Poirot apart from Agatha Christie ... well, I'm happy with my decision to write Poirot novels. So, I'm happy with being the grudgee of that grudge. That's absolutely fine. But I don't want anyone to be able to have a grudge about me where I agree that I've done something objectively grudge-worthy.

**NA:** *That's good.*

So, it's a resolution for me to behave better. I want to try and behave better, so that wherever I'm the subject of a grudge in 2019 ... I mean, unless it's a backdated one because I haven't always behaved brilliantly in the past. [*Nic laughs*] But I want to try and behave better from now on. And, actually, for anyone who does want to try and behave better than they previously have for the future, being aware that you might be someone else's grudgee is a useful way to think.

Because, you know, any interaction you have, anything you might be thinking of doing, you know, you might think, 'Am I happy with the way I'm behaving?'

Might I be offending someone? Might I be upsetting someone?' And if you decide that they're completely wrong and bonkers to be offended, then you should still do the thing. But if you think, 'No, actually, if I ended up a grudgee in this situation, I wouldn't feel quite happy with my behaviour.'

I guess what I'm saying is, the behaviours that you do, hoping no one will notice or remember *[laughs]*, those are the things I never want to do in 2019.

**NA:** *That sounds a sensible idea. Would you ever have a sort of a New Year grudge audit? To go through ...*

I have regular ... well, that is a brilliant question. I have regular grudge audits.

**NA:** *Okay.*

One of the things I say in the book, where I'm talking about how to be a responsible grudge-holder, which is one of the chapter titles, one of the things I advocate doing is regularly looking through your grudge cabinet at all your grudges and seeing if there are any that you no longer need or want, or if there are any invalid ones that have snuck in there. Sometimes, you might look at a grudge that you've had for years, and think, 'What on earth was I thinking of? This is not grudge-worthy. This is not a thing I need to remember.' And that grudge then gets cancelled out. So, yes, absolutely. Regular auditing.

**NA:** *Okay. But not just once a year, for new year? That's all ...*

No, no. Quite ... You know, my grudge cabinet, I like it to be in tip-top shape, with only the best grudges in it. The most useful and relevant.

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So, I hope you will have some New Years' Grudge Resolutions of your own. If any of you are not yet following the Grudge-fold Path, then you could have as a resolution, 'Follow the Grudge-fold Path.' Join me and Nic in our Grudge-fold Path wisdom and new way of living. *[Laughs]*

Anyway, happy new year to all of you, and I will see you next year for season 2 of this podcast.

I'll be announcing the start date of season 2 on my Facebook author page, on Twitter where I'm @SophieHannahCB1 and @grudgesaregreat, and in my

newsletter. Details of how to sign up to receive my newsletter can be found on the homepage of my website: [www.sophiehannah.com](http://www.sophiehannah.com). Talk to you all soon.