

DOCTOR WHO



What I Did In My Christmas Holidays - By Sally Sparrow

Written by Steven Moffat

We present Steven Moffat's short story - originally published in the 2006 Doctor Who Annual - upon which Blink is based. Illustrated by Martin Geraghty.

My name is Sally Sparrow.

I am 12 years old, I have auburn hair, braces you can hardly see, a dent in my left knee from where I fell off a bicycle when I was ten, and parents. I also have a little brother called Tim. My Mum told Mrs Medford that Tim Wasn't Planned, and you can tell because his nose isn't straight and his hair sticks up and I can't believe you'd do all that on purpose. Or his ears.

I am top in English, and Miss Telfer says I have an excellent vocabulary. I have sixteen friends who are mainly girls. I haven't taken much interest in boys yet, because of the noise.

This is the story of the mysterious events that happened to me at my fat Aunt's cottage at Christmas and what I discovered under the wallpaper of my bedroom, which caused me to raise my eyebrows with perplexity.

I was staying at my fat Aunt's cottage because my Mum and Dad had gone on a weekend away. Tim was staying with his friend Rupert (who I don't think was planned either because of his teeth) and I found myself once more in the spare bedroom at my Aunt's cottage in the countryside, which is in Devon.

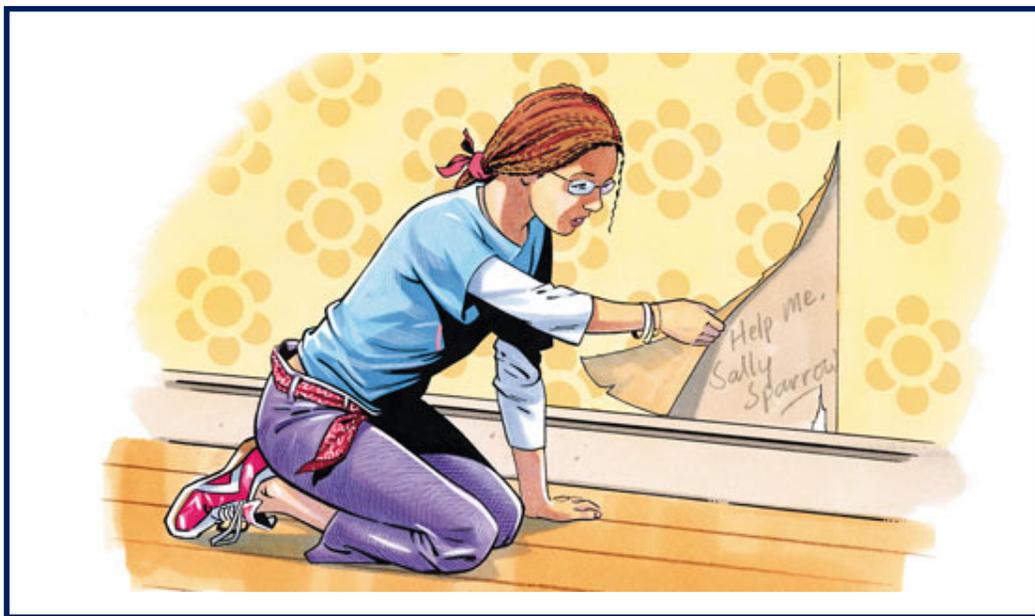
I love my Aunt's cottage. From her kitchen window you can only see fields, all the way to the horizon, and it's so quiet you can hear water dripping off a leaf from right at the end of the garden. Sometimes, when I lie in bed, I can hear a train far away in the distance and it always fills me with a big sighing feeling, like sadness, only nice. It's good, my bedroom at my aunt's. Really big, with a wardrobe that rattles its hangers when you walk past it and huge yellow flowers on the wallpaper. When I was little I used to sit and stare at those flowers and when no one was looking I'd try to pick them, like they were real flowers. You can still see a little torn bit where I tried to peel one off the wall when I was three, and every time I go into the room, the first thing I do is go straight to that flower and touch it, just remembering and such. I've talked about it with my Dad and we think it might be Nostalgia.

It's because of that flower and the Nostalgia that I first met the Doctor.

It was three days before Christmas. I'd just arrived at my fat Aunt's house, and as usual, I'd hugged her and run straight upstairs to my room, to hang all my clothes in the rattley wardrobe. And as usual I'd gone straight to the torn yellow flower on the wall, and knelt beside it (I'm bigger now) and touched it. But this time, I did something different. I don't know why. I heard my Aunt calling from downstairs that I shouldn't be too long, because she'd cooked my favourite and it was on the table, and usually I'd have run straight down. Maybe it was because I knew she'd want to talk about school and sometimes you don't want to talk about school (sorry, Miss Telfer) especially if you've got braces and frizzy hair and people can be a bit silly about that kind of thing, even if they're supposed to be your friends. Maybe it was because I was thinking about being three, and how much smaller the flowers looked now.

Actually I think it was because Mary Phillips had made up a song about my hair and I was feeling a bit cross and my eyes were all stinging and blurry the way they get when you know you're going to cry if you don't really concentrate. Anyway, my fingers were resting right on the torn bit, and I was thinking about the song, and frizziness and such, and suddenly it was like I just didn't care! And I started to tear the paper a little bit more! Just a tiny bit at first, I just sort of tugged it to see what would happen. And I kept going! And you know sometimes it's like you're in a dream - you're doing something, but it doesn't feel like you're doing it, more like you're just watching? Well, I went right on and peeled the whole flower off the wall. A whole streak of wallpaper and I just ripped it right off!

And then, oh my goodness me! I just stared!



I once read in a story about a girl who got a fright and the writer said she felt her hair stand on end. I thought that was rubbish and would look really stupid, like my brother. I thought the writer was probably making that bit up, because it couldn't happen. But I was wrong. I could feel it happening now, starting up my neck, all cold, then all my scalp just fizzing and tingling.

And here is what was written under the wallpaper. 'Help me, Sally Sparrow'.

I looked closer, trying to work out if it was a trick, and noticed something else. More words, written just under those ones, but still covered by the wallpaper. Well, I thought, I'd already ruined it so I had nothing to lose. As carefully as I could, I tore off another strip. Beneath the words was just a date. 24/12/85.

Twenty years ago, someone in this room, asked for my help. Eight years before I was even born!

'Christmas Eve, 1985? Sorry love, I don't really remember.' My Aunt was frowning at me across the dinner table, trying to think.

'Can you really try, please? It's ever so important. Maybe you had guests, or friends staying or something? Maybe in my room.'

'Well we always had Christmas parties, when your uncle was still alive.'

'He is still alive, he's living in Stoke with Neville.'

'You could check in the shed.'

'Why would he be in the shed, Auntie, he's very happy with -'

'For the photographs.' She was looking at me, all severe now. 'If we had a party we always had photographs. I always keep photographs, I'll have a look around.'

'Thanks, Auntie!'

'What does it matter though? Why so interested?'

I nearly told her, but I knew she'd laugh. Because really, if you think about it, there was only one explanation. Coincidence. There must have been another Sally in the family I'd never heard about, and whoever had written that on the wall twenty years ago, they hadn't meant me, they'd meant her. They'd meant that mysterious other Sally from twenty years ago. I wondered what she was like. I wondered where she was now, and if her hair was frizzy. And I wondered most of all why she'd been kept a dark secret all these many years. Perhaps she'd been horribly murdered for Deadly Reasons!

As I was about to go to bed, I looked hard at my Aunt - the way I do when I'm warning adults not to lie to me - and asked, 'There was another Sally Sparrow, wasn't there, Auntie? I'm not the first, am I?'

My Aunt looked at me really oddly for a moment. I half expected her to stagger back against the mantelpiece, all pale and clutching at her bosom, and ask in quivery tones how I had uncovered the family secret and have terrible rending sobs. But no, she just laughed and said

'No, of course not! One Sally Sparrow is quite enough. Now off to bed with you!'

I lay in my bed but I couldn't sleep! There had to be another Sally, there just had to be. Otherwise someone from twenty years ago was trying to talk to me from under the wallpaper and that was just stupid!

When my Aunt came in to kiss me goodnight (I always pretend to be asleep but I never am) I heard her put something on my bedside table. As soon as I heard her bedroom door close, I jumped and switched the light on! Maybe this was it! Maybe this was her dark confession - the truth about the other Sally Sparrow, and her Dreadful Fate. Sitting on my bedside table was a box. I gasped horrendously! I wondered how big a box would have to be to contain human remains! I narrowed my eyes shrewdly (and also bravely) and looked at the label on the lid (though I did think labelling murdered human remains would be a bit of an obvious mistake).

The label said 'Photographs 1985'.

The Christmas party ones were right at the bottom, and took me ages to find. They were just the usual kind, lots of people grinning and drinking, and wearing paper hats. My fat Aunt was there, still with Uncle Hugh, and my Mum and Dad too looking all shiny and thin. And then I saw it! My eyebrows raised in perplexity again, slightly higher this time. Because standing right in the middle of one of the photographs was a man with a leather jacket and enormous ears. He was in the middle of a line of grown-ups laughing and dancing, but he was looking right at the camera and holding up a piece of paper like a sign. And on the sign it said 'Help me, Sally Sparrow!'

I gasped in even more amazement. There was another Sally Sparrow and obviously she was taking the photograph. And probably she was a bit deaf, and you had to talk to her with paper signs, because hearing aids hadn't been invented yet.

And then I looked at the next photograph. And that's when everything changed. Suddenly it was like the school bell was ringing in my ears and I could feel my heart thudding in my chest so hard you could probably have seen the buttons bouncing on my pyjamas.

There was the man again, at the back of the photograph, holding up another piece of paper. And this one said 'Look under the wallpaper again.'



As I reached for the wallpaper again my hand was shaking away like when you try to do your homework on the school bus. The next bit of writing was much longer and this is what it said.

'This isn't a dream, and by the way you should never try to do your homework on the school bus. I'm going to prove this is real. Think of a number, any number at all, and then get dressed, find a torch, and see what's carved in the bark of the furthest tree in the garden.'

When people think of a number, they always think of ten, or seven or something. They never think of a really big, stupid one. So I did, I thought of a big, stupid one. Then I halved it. Then I added my age. Then I took away Tim's age. Then I added four, just because I felt like it. And then a few minutes later, I was standing in the garden, shivering, staring at the furthest tree.

And there it was, carved like it had been there forever. No one ever thinks of the number 73. Except me. And the man who had carved the furthest tree in my Aunt's garden twenty years ago.

I sat on my bed for ages, just shaking and wondering what to do now. But it was obvious really. I tore off the next strip of wallpaper. This time, it just said 'Top shelf in the living room, right at the back.'

The top shelf was where my Aunt kept all her videos. She hardly ever watched television, never mind videos, so they were all very dusty. And right at the back,

jammed half way down the gap at the back of the shelf, was a tape that looked like it had been there for a long time. And stuck on it, a post-it. It said 'FAO Sally Sparrow'.

I slipped it into the VCR and kept the television volume really low, so as not to wake my Aunt.



And there, grinning like a loon from the television, was the man from the photographs. 'Hello, Sally Sparrow! Any questions?'

He was sitting in my bedroom! Only the walls were bare, and there was a pair of ladders in the middle of the room, like someone was decorating. I could hear party music coming from somewhere downstairs, and I wondered if it was the party in 1985.

'Well, come on, Sally!' the man was saying, 'You've gotta have questions. I would.'

I frowned. Not a lot of point in asking questions when the man you're asking can't hear them!

'Who says I can't hear you?' grinned the man.

I stared! I think I probably gasped. My eyebrows were practically bursting out of the top of my head. It was ridiculous, it was impossible. I hadn't even said that out loud.

'No, you didn't,' said the man, checking on a piece of paper, 'You just thought that.' He glanced at the paper again. 'Oh, and yeah, you did gasp.'

'Who are you?' I blurted.

'That's more like it, now we're cooking. I'm the Doctor. I'm a time traveller and I'm stuck in 1985, and I need your help.'

I had so many questions racing round my head I didn't know which one to pick.

'How did you get stuck?' I said.

'Parked my time machine in your Aunt's shed. Was just locking up, and it... well... burped.'

'Burped??'

'Yeah, burped. Shot forward twenty years, I hate it when that happens.'

I looked out the window to where my Aunt's shed stood at the end of the garden. And I noticed there was something glowing at the windows. Suddenly, I was just a little bit afraid. 'So it's here then?'

'Exactly. Nip out to your Aunt's shed, you'll find a big blue box, key still in the door. Could just stick around for twenty years and pick it up myself but I don't want it falling into the wrong hands.' He leaned forward to the camera, and his eyes just burned at me. 'And I know you're not the wrong hands, Sally Sparrow. So I want you to fly it back to me!'

I swallowed hard. This was totally freaky.

He glanced at his paper again. 'You've got another question, I think.'

He was right. 'You're just on video tape. How can you hear me??'

He smiled. 'Actually, I can't. Can't hear a thing. I just happen to know everything you and me are gonna say in this whole conversation.'

'How??'

'Cos Mary Phillips made up a song about your hair.'

I could hardly breathe for all the gasping.

'And you punched her, didn't you, Sally Sparrow?'

And then you got a punishment?'

My face was burning. How did he know all this?'

I hadn't even told my Mum and Dad.

'You got Christmas homework. An essay about what you did over the Christmas holidays.' He grinned. 'And I've got a copy!'

And this is freakiest part of all. Because he held a copy of the actual essay I'm writing right now!!

'I know everything you're gonna ask when you see this tape, cos I've read the essay you wrote about it. That's how I knew what to write on the wall - you'll have to show me exactly where, by the way - and that's how I knew what number you were thinking of.'

'But... but...' I could hardly think for my mind racing. 'How did you get a copy of my Christmas homework! I haven't even written it yet!!'

'Told you, I'm a time traveller. I got it in the future. From a beautiful woman on a balcony in Istanbul.' He smiled, like it was happy memory. 'She was some sort of spy, I think. Amazing woman! I'd just had a sword fight on the roof with two Sontarans, and she saved me from the second one. Then she gave me your Christmas homework and told me to keep it on me at all times, cos I'd need it one day.' He grinned.

'She was right!'

A spy, in the future, was going to have a copy of my Christmas homework? Talk about pressure!

He was looking at his watch. 'Okay, that's just about time up. Gonna need you to go to the time machine, and fly it here.'

'I can't fly a time machine. I had stabilisers on my bike till I was nine!!'

'Sally, I absolutely know that you can do this. And do you know how?'

'How?'

'Because I've read to the end of the story.' He laughed. 'Also - you hear that noise?'

Coming from the television, a terrible wheezing and groaning.

'What's that??'

He was still grinning.

'That's you!'

Behind the man, a huge blue box just appeared out of thin air. I stared at it. There were words over the door and I squinted closer to read them.

I should've known. He looked like a policeman!

'That's your time machine?'

'Yep. Like it?'

'But who flew it there?'

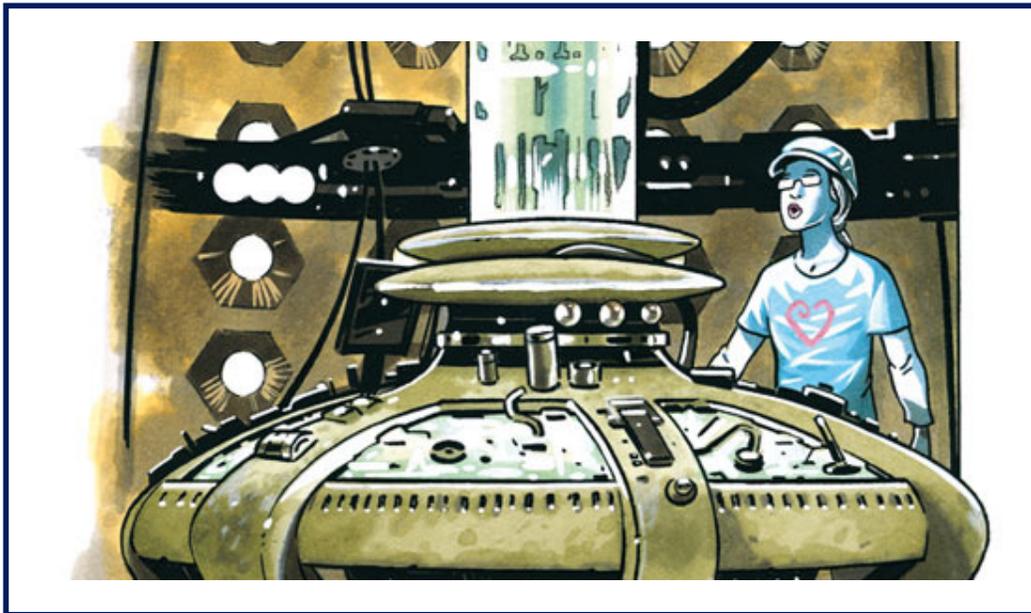
You could almost get tired of that grin. 'You did!'

The doors on the big blue box were opening. And then the most amazing thing ever. I stepped out of the box!! Me! Sally Sparrow! Another me stepped out of the time machine and waved at the camera.

'Hello, Sally Sparrow, two hours ago!' said the other me. 'It's great in there, you're going to love it. It's bigger on the inside!'

'See?' said the man. 'Told you you could fly a time machine.'

'Yeah, it's easy!' said the other Sally, 'It homes in on his watch, anyway. You just have to press the reset button next to the phone.'



'Who told you that?' I asked her.

A frown clouded her face. 'I did,' she said, and looked puzzled.

The man looked a little cross about that.

'Yeah, well before you set off any more time paradoxes... Sally Sparrow!' he gave me a Teacher look from the television. 'Go and do your homework!'

'Yeah!' said the other Sally, 'You've got to write the essay before you can fly the time machine. It'll take you about two hours.'

'That's enough, both of you!' said the man, 'Got enough paradoxes going on here, without you pair having a chat!'

'But, listen, it's going to be great!' said the other Sally. And she gave me the biggest, most excited smile ever.

And oh goodness! You can see my braces!

And so here I am, finishing my essay. It's nearly two o'clock in the morning, and in a minute I'll be fetching the shed key from the kitchen drawer and setting off across the garden on the trip of a lifetime.

A big, amazing adventure. And not my last one either, oh no! Just the first of lots and lots, for the rest of my life probably. Suddenly I don't care what my Aunt is going to say about the torn wallpaper or what Mary Phillips thinks about my hair. I'll go back to school after the holidays and just be nice to her, and she can make up all the songs she wants. I'll join in, if it makes her happy.

You see, I know the best thing in the world. I know what's coming. I asked the man one more question before the end of the tape. I asked how a beautiful woman spy in the future could have a copy of my Christmas homework.

'Can't you guess?' he smiled. Not grinned, smiled. 'Her name,' he continued, 'Was Sally Sparrow.'

The big blue box is waiting in the shed at the end of the garden. And I've finished my homework.

THE END

bbc.co.uk/doctorwho
not to be reproduced or sold