

Fat chance

Mrs M reluctantly accepts that liposuction might be a Christmas wish too far

Gifts are a conundrum. Before you all write in and tell me what the definition of "conundrum" is, I will quote from the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary and tell you that the definition I am using is "an intricate and difficult problem".

Don't get me wrong, I love the process of giving - and receiving - gifts. And this time of year is a great opportunity to indulge in doing so. It is just that the issue of what to give, and to whom, is preying on my mind. I find myself making lists in the back of my notepad during business meetings and then wondering where I will find the time to go and get all the items listed.

At the office we have for some years adopted the so-called "Secret Santa" system. Everyone draws a name out of a hat and then has to buy a present costing less than £10 (which is refunded by the company) for whomever they have drawn. On the day of our Christmas lunch we ceremonially open these presents one by one and see who has managed to buy the most original and amusing gift for the randomly selected recipient. The pressure to outdo each other in originality and amusement grows each year, and so I have been wrestling with what to get for my recipient, which is certainly an intricate and difficult problem.

As if that wasn't bad enough, my in-laws have now decided to go in for this practice. Christmas this year will be spent 12,000 miles away. Rationalising why we are flying five of us 12,000 miles at the most expensive time of the year to spend quality time with my mother-in-law is an even more intricate and difficult problem. My sister-in-law, in whose establishment we will be celebrating Christ's birth, has sent a full agenda and menus for our stay, including an instruction that we should only buy presents for the children of the family. Adults will be allocated a single random recipient, in the same manner as takes place at my office. I have drawn my brother-in-law and my husband his father. I have no idea what we shall purchase for them, but I am not so worried about that as the intricate and difficult problem of deciding what our children are going to perform at the family concert on Christmas Eve. I find watching my own children give public performances excruciating at the best of times, so how I am going to find watching my nieces and nephews, I cannot think.

What I really want for Christmas is £5,000 worth of liposuction. I have thought this for

some time, but the final confirmation came when exercising under the harsh regime of Holly the Sadist, who puts me through my paces in the gym each week. At one point HTS looked me up and down and then, after some thought and consulting her notebook, said with a decisive tone, "15 kilos". I immediately agreed with her and promised that I would try to lose 15 kilos as soon as possible.

She looked at me in exasperation and then pointed out that she was deciding what weight to give me to bench press.

HTS has received a jolly nice gift recently - a substantial square-cut diamond. This was from her boyfriend, when he asked her to be his wife. For some reason the marriage is going to be in 2008. I am all for diamonds as gifts, but what is it with long engagements? I just don't see the point. I was a serial fiancée, getting engaged four times, and frankly it wasn't so great an experience that I needed it to go on for 18 months at a stretch. And I don't care what people say about engagements being a time of preparation for marriage; nothing prepares you for picking someone's laundry off the bedroom floor for 18 years and more.

In the meantime, HTS is sporting the diamond, which has forced her to take the time to have a proper manicure. She rather begrudges the cost of a manicure but I maintain that this is completely unreasonable. Any girl who is given a substantial diamond ring owes it to the donor to spend £20 every now and again to show it off; peeling nail varnish is too tacky for words.

As for the Girlfriends, if only the shops stocked a variety of solvent, single and heterosexual men

On the same principle I should really buy a Wellington boot bag to house my £200 wellies instead of carting them around in a bin liner. (Mr M, if you are reading this, and the liposuction is a tad expensive, I would like a John Chapman Wellington boot bag for Christmas. That's given him the solution to an intricate and difficult problem.) Other suggestions for him and/or the Cost Centres are new shooting gloves (I left my mittens behind on a shoot earlier in the season and it has just become cold enough to miss them), some pink shooting socks and some suitably expensive hand cream (to combat the damage done by all those shoots I have been on recently without gloves).

And what am I going to get for Mr M? And the Girlfriends? (This last would be easier if the shops in the West End stocked a variety of solvent, single and heterosexual men.) Gifts are indeed an intricate and difficult problem. Or in other words, a conundrum.

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