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Frank Brennan
Excerpt
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Spam

Time: five years from now
Place: England



‘Oh no!’ said Joe Turner. ‘When I go on the computer, all I get is spam – email that nobody wants. It’s all from people who are trying to sell you things. Email which is trying to get

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money from you. Email that says it can help your love life. Email that says it can make you rich. It's just stupid! And do I ask for any of it? No! It's all spam, spam, spam! I can't get emails from my friends and from my work because I've got too much spam. All I get is spam, spam and more spam! It takes a long time to get spam off my computer too. Sometimes I lose important emails because I get so angry!

'Dad, don't get angry,' said Louise, his daughter. She loved her father. He made her laugh, but he didn't like computers. They made him angry. 'Everybody gets spam, Dad. There's nothing we can do about it. Just live with it,' Louise said.

'It's easy for you, Louise,' Joe answered. 'You're a teenager. Fourteen-year-old girls all use computers these days. You know all about them. But not me. I remember when there was no spam. I can even remember when we didn't have a computer. Oh, happy days!'

'Dad, I live with spam, that's all. Everybody lives with it now. I don't know why you don't. Mum does.'

Joe laughed. 'Ha! You know why? She doesn't use the computer much. That's why. And what does she do when something goes wrong on the computer? She asks one of us to do something about it. Remember last week? She opened some spam and it had a virus! You can't use a computer when there's a virus on it. We worked for hours to make it OK again.'

'What do you mean, *we*?' said Louise. 'You mean me, Dad. You just watched. I did all the work.'

'I was there to help,' replied Joe with big, open eyes. 'I'm always there to help you. You know that.'

'Thanks, Dad,' Louise answered with a smile. 'That's good to know.'

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Two weeks later, Joe looked at the news on the internet and ate his breakfast. His wife, Inez, was there with Louise. It was eight o'clock in the morning.

'Yes!' he shouted. 'They did it! This is what we need!'

Inez often heard her husband shout when he read the news. 'What did they do, Joe?' she asked.

'Computer experts can stop spam!' laughed Joe. 'That's what they say in the news. And the good thing is – it isn't going to cost us anything! The computer experts say spam's going to stop. Isn't that great?'

Louise sat up. 'Just a minute, Dad. Do you mean that we aren't going to find spam on the computer again? And we don't need to pay anything? That's really good! But how can they do that?'

'I don't know,' said Joe. 'Is it going to work? That's the important thing!'

Inez looked happy, too. She didn't like computers, but she *hated* spam!

Joe and his family hated spam. But it wasn't only them. There were many people everywhere who hated it too. Millions of them got the free software and used it to stop spam. It worked. People only got the emails that they wanted. Everybody was happy. Spam was gone.

That's what they thought.

* * *

Louise went on a camping holiday with her school friends. 'No more computers or television for three weeks! What am I going to do?' she laughed.

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When Louise was on holiday, her parents heard some news about a new internet shopping company. This company sold everything. ‘Wait for emails from our internet company. Our prices are cheap and there’s something for everybody. We’re the best internet shopping company in the world!’ said the person on the television.

That evening, Joe and Inez read the emails from the internet shopping company. Lots of people from all over England read the emails. Everyone wanted the cheap prices.

Three weeks later

‘Now why did you buy that?’ asked Joe Turner.

Inez looked at her new salad bowl and put it on the kitchen table. There were four more bowls on the table. They were all the same.

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‘I don’t know,’ she said. ‘But when I see a salad bowl like this, I want to buy it. I feel bad when I don’t. I don’t know why. Funny, isn’t it?’

‘What, more things for the garden, Dad?’ laughed Louise. She was at home again, after her holiday. ‘Our flat’s on the fourth floor, remember? There’s no garden here!’



‘I just forget when I see them,’ said Joe. ‘I can’t stop. I want to buy them all the time!’

And that wasn’t all. Joe and Inez had lots of other things, too. They didn’t need any of them. Louise saw that. But it