

# Bad Christmas



Chapter VI

The Body Thief

A. A. A. Hartvisen

# *Bad Christmas*

## *Chapters VI: The Body Thief*

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Genre: Fiction–Family/Christmas.

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## BAD CHRISTMAS

### CHAPTER VI : THE BODY THIEF

“Why in hell *can't* I take him? He's my father!”

“Yes, yes, yes, yes,” said the undertaker. “No.”

“So?”

Vincik sighed and rubbed his hands on his sweater again.

“Mr Meagan, there are a number of impediments aside from the rather compelling fact that this is a highly unusual request.”

“How is it unusual? I know lots of people who've had private funerals.”

Vincik shook his head.

“First of all, you can't take the body without a death certificate.”

“You said that the doctor would sign one right quick,” said Meagan.

“Yes, I did. He would sign the one *we* prepared! But if you don’t want our services...”

“What in tarnation is this?” asked Meagan. “If you don’t fill it out, we can’t get one?

Why can’t I get the doc to do his own?”

“*That*, Mr Meagan,” said Vincik. “Would be *very* unusual. This sort of thing is always done through the funerary artist.”

*Funerary artist?*

“So, what you’re saying is that you’ll stonewall me if I try to get one myself.”

“No, Mr Meagan. It’s just that, well, if you don’t want our services... you see?”

Meagan turned away from the undertaker and paced around the room. He glanced at the secretary. She looked away. Meagan took a deep breath and turned back to Vincik.

“Okay, so how ’bout I do want your services, Norm? But only for a certain limited scope of affairs.”

Vincik smiled.

“We’d be glad to help you.”

“Alright, this is what I need,” said Meagan. “Whatever you need to do to release the body to me, then give it to me. How’s that?”

Vincik frowned and thought it over.

“Yes, yes, yes,” he said. “No problem with that. Just come into my office.”

He turned and led Meagan past Miss Mordini through the door to his office.

As Vincik situated himself at his desk, Meagan looked out the window. *Still no snow.* There was a little thermometer in the window. 5 ° it said. Meagan wondered how long his house would hold what heat was left from before the heaters ran out of juice.

“Alright, Mr Meagan,” said Vincik. “I’ll just need you to fill out these papers.”

He pushed three sheets of paper across the desk to Meagan. Then he carefully selected a pen from a container on his desk and laid it on the paper.

Meagan picked up the pen and looked over the top sheet. *Name, address, social security number, place of employment...*

“What is this?” asked Meagan.

“Standard forms drawn up by our lawyer.”

“I’m not gonna give you my s. s. number... What are you gonna do? Pay my taxes for me?”

“The number is necessary to verify your identity,” Vincik explained.

“Verify my identity? What, you think someone else would want to pick up my father’s dead body? My state I. D. isn’t good enough? My social security number isn’t a valid form of identification anyway.”

“Please, Mr Meagan. If you don’t fill out each and every one of those fields of information, we simply can’t go any further at all!”

“You can’t deny me the body because I don’t give you my tax information. That can’t be legal.”

“I assure you it is very legal,” said Vincik. “Our lawyer wrote these papers, and no one else has ever refused.”

The undertaker stressed the words *no one else* as though they held some deeper meaning. His expression said that Paullus’ failure to conform to everyone else in this respect was only symptomatic of a deeper malaise of much grander proportions.

“Oh, well then, I suppose you’re right, Norm. If no one’s ever said, ‘No,’ before, then it

must be right.”

Meagan put the first sheet aside for the moment and looked at the next. It was a bunch of disclaimers, with an *x* for his signature at the bottom. Then he looked at the last sheet. It was an itemised billing form.

“What the fuck is this?!”

“Please, please, Mr Meagan,” said Vincik.

“*Five hundred dollars transportation fee?* How could it possibly cost you five hundred dollars to ship the body six blocks?”

“We use very specialised equipment, Mr Meagan. And, ultimately, we’re in this to make a profit. We *are* experts, you know. Not any clown with a hearse and a walk-in can move remove a vessel.”

“A vessel? What are you talking about, Norm?”

Norm Vincik pursed his lips and plucked at the buttons of his Christmas-coloured sweater.

“What is the body but a temporary vessel for the immortal soul, Mr Meagan?”

Meagan snorted and looked further down the list. There was a \$250 “pickup fee” as well—and a \$100 a day holding fee for one day. All this in addition to a few minor administrative fees came up to nine hundred dollars and change.

“Okay, Norm,” said Meagan and dug out his checkbook.

“Oh, Mr Meagan, I’m *sorry*. But we can only accept cash. It’s a policy.”

“Oh? A policy. Well now, I wouldn’t want to fuck up a *policy!*” said Meagan. “Well it’s Friday night. The banks are closed. I can’t get cash right now. Can we make some sort of payment arrangement?”

“Yes, yes, yes.” Vincik rubbed his hands together for warmth. “No, I’m afraid not. You’ll have to come back on Monday with cash. Then we will release the body.”

“And this *holding fee*? Does it count for weekends or business days only?”

“I would have to charge you an additional three hundred dollars, Mr Meagan. I’m sorry. It’s not my choice. We try to handle these things more subtly, but this case is not normal.”

“You’re damned right it’s not ‘normal’, Norm.”

Meagan knew that there was no way he could come up with the money now or next week.

“So you need my social security number to verify my identity, but you can’t take a check? Seems like a tough way to run a business. And with these prices, it strikes me as odd that very many of your clients would be able to pay you in cash. You know what this is. It’s a fucking racket. You’re keeping me from getting the body so that you can build up a bigger fee or something.” *Or something* rattled away deep in Paullus Meagan’s brain. “If I won’t use *all* your services, you won’t release the body. Well fuck you, Vincik. You have no choice? You’re the fucking *owner!*”

“Please, Mr Meagan. I’m sure we can work this out.”

“Why should I have to go through all this rigmarole and pay you something like a thousand dollars for a service I didn’t even request? Who *asked* you to come take my father? I was on my way. You should have just left him there.”

“It’s standard procedure, Mr Meagan, and if we had not taken the body away, someone could have come in and corrupted the tissues!”

“Yeah, maybe, but I bet he wouldn’t charge me a thousand bucks for the privilege!



This is theft. No! It's fucking ransom. You've kidnapped my father's dead body and hold it ransom to me. Well, you know what? I'm not gonna pay it. Not one cent. You can keep him. You wanted the body. It's your baby now, Norm! Happy Christmas!"

"Yes, yes, yes—"

Meagan turned and stormed out of the office.

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