

Bad Christmas



Chapter VIII

The Dream of Stolen Peaches

A. A. A. Hartvisen

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Chapters VIII: The Dream of Stolen Peaches

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Cover art by A. A. A. Hartvisen

Genre: Fiction–Family/Christmas.

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Burns, Oregon

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BAD CHRISTMAS

CHAPTER VIII : THE DREAM OF STOLEN PEACHES

The sound of girls' laughter twinkled through the tall trees' rough, brown stems. Meagan moved predatory over the rise. When he came to the top, he hid behind a tree and spied the girls below.

Six women in their early twenties laughed and giggled on six multicoloured blankets laid over pine needles. A food basket sat between them. One of the girls held in her hands a bright yellow boombox and turned the dials on its face.

Music and light began to radiate out from the speaker-plates in a circular direction. The song was vaguely familiar. Meagan could not quite recognise it. Some guy kept chirruping *Ah, ah!* in a funny voice.

It's one of those lazy days. I got nothin' to do. Let the wind blow round my head. Let a cloud be my bed.

Gay, thought Meagan and regarded the girls once more. *Dumb chicks.* He carefully navigated around them and continued on his way. Presently his target came into view. It was a big tan recreational vehicle. He crept up to the door and listened.

Here come the girls! Here come the girls! Just let the breezes blow through your mind...

It was more of the same song he heard at the girls' picnic. *Must be something on the radio.*

Meagan tried the door. It was unlocked. He made his way in. A closet door was open, blocking his view toward the cab. He crept up on the small refrigerator and pulled it open.

Here come the girls... up the road! What they wanna do they can't do cuz it's a... dry county!

He scanned the contents. There it was, on the second shelf. He reached back and grabbed the two jars he sought, and silently closed the refrigerator door. He turned to go, and the closet door which had blocked his view fell away. A big fat man in a dirty sweater stood there scowling.

"What you doin'?" he demanded.

Meagan held up his hand.

"Back off, Man," he said. "This doesn't concern you."

The fat man laughed and lunged. Meagan pulled the tire iron out of his jacket and swung. He struck the man across the shoulders and knocked him to the floor. The fat man grunted and latched onto Meagan's shoe. Meagan swung the iron again and again. Still the

man clutched and tugged.

Kickin' stones. Laughin' low. Nowhere to go, cuz it's a... dry county.

As Meagan swung harder and harder, the man's grip grew weaker and weaker. Finally he let go and lay there, bleeding all over the vinyl. Meagan looked around the little room. He took a cushion off a tiny couch and put it over the man's head. The fat man's struggles were too spent to withstand Meagan's grim determination.

Meagan pulled his father's m-15 out his pocket and carefully aimed it, as well as he could through the pillow, at the man's forebrain.

"No, Paullus!"

It's so hot. It's so hot! It's so hot. It's so hot!

Charisse, Paullus' wife, stood in the doorway.

"I told you not to follow me, Charisse!" said Meagan. "This isn't like other jobs!"

"Look at him, Paullus," she said. "He's done for. Look how he's bleeding? He's gonna die anyway. Why shoot him? It's unnecessary, ugly, and leaves too much evidence."

Meagan paused.

"You got the peaches?" she asked.

"Yeah," said Meagan. "In my pocket now."

"Then let's just go," she said. "He'll be dead within the hour."

Meagan considered, then stood up, leaving the pillow over the man's face. He pushed past Charisse and went up to the cab. He turned off the radio and tossed the tire iron on the driver's seat. He took Charisse and they left.

As they left, a small white sportscar entered the parking lot. It drove up to the trail leading to where the camper was parked and turned down it. Meagan looked at Charisse. She

was white as a sheet.

“What is it?” he asked.

“It’s his wife.”

They went home glum and sullen. They peaches were dry and leathery, hardly worth the effort. And the same thing was on their minds. The fat man would not be dead by the time his wife found him. She probably would not save his life, but she would get enough information to hang Paullus Meagan.

“I’m sorry, Charisse,” he said. “I love you.”

He pushed a wad of hundred dollar bills into her wet palm.

“Go on,” he said roughly. “I’m on my way down!”

He went outside and walked down to the courthouse.

Today was the sentencing of Sarah Cagles. Meagan had a sort of infatuation with her when they were children, and he had since kept in touch with the development of her career, which was similar to his. And now it seemed their careers would also end the same way.

She was caught last week and put on trial and convicted. If the fat man’s woman squealed on him, it would be the same for Meagan. He would get the same judge, a woman named Sarrett, so he slipt into the back of the courtroom and watched the judge pronounce Cagles’ doom.

Cagles was more beautiful than ever as she stood to accept her punishment. Meagan listened attentively to Sarrett’s pronouncement. The female judge was a softie. She went on about how Cagles had not meant to hurt anyone and so forth, and so she gave her the minimum sentence for the crime: thirty years hard labour. For this crime the criminal was often sentenced to death.

Meagan decided his best bet was to turn himself in and claim it was all a tragic accident. He would plead guilty and throw himself on Judge Sarrett's mercy.

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