

Bad Christmas



Chapter X

Happy Christmas

A. A. A. Hartvisen

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Chapters X: Happy Christmas

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Bad Christmas, Chapters I-IX

BAD CHRISTMAS

CHAPTER X : HAPPY CHRISTMAS

Happy Christmas, he thought to himself again. It was strange that he could be so happy now, the day after all the mainstays of his existence had been so systematically removed. After he dried himself a little, he went to the sink looking for a comb.

There it was, lying out on the edge of the sink. And right beside it was a new tooth brush, still in its package. Obviously, Cagles left it for him. It reminded him of Christmas as a child, back when he lived with his mother and his father and Sissy and Bubby. Along with an orange a few other tasty titbits, the children always found in each stocking a new toothbrush. He ceremoniously unwrapped it and brushed his teeth.

Wrapped in a towel, he came out into her bedroom. She was sitting on the edge of the

bed in a white robe looking through a thin magazine.

“Hi,” he said.

She looked up and smiled. Her loveliness broke against him, and its sharp fragments passed into him.

He came to her, bent down and kissed her. Then he knelt down between her legs.

“Sarah,” he said. “I love you. And I always have.”

“I know,” she said, then added, “Since you told me this morning.”

“I did not say so,” he said.

“Not in so many words, but it was clear.”

He wished she would say she loved him also, but she did not.

“You have flattered me, Paul,” she said. “And you charmed me. I have not made love in six years. I haven’t even been close to a man in four. It is a choice, albeit an easy one. But you broke so strangely into my life this Christmas and ignored my choices. And changed them. I don’t know what I’m trying to say. It’s something like *thanks*, but that is certainly not right either.”

It had been a long time since Meagan had a woman as well. He had little interest in pursuing frivolous relationships and had felt, up until today, a certain distaste for serious love affairs. Cagles’ and his lovemaking had been the culmination of years of unconscious desire and cunctation, but neither of them was much good at it. It served its purpose, but, now, in the afterglow, Meagan could not see the future. At the same time, however, he was more certain than ever, and determined, that fulfilment lie in Sarah Cagles’ arms.

He would marry her, and they would dwell together. He would deal with all his practical problems as necessary. The important thing was to be near her, to remain near her,

forever. She was perfect in some way that went beyond the physical, and he was a fool for brushing it off as *the artless pangs of love* so often before.

“Sarah, marry me,” he commanded.

She put her hands on his shoulders and laughed. Then her face drew serious.

“Paul, I’ve been thinking about your situation.”

“So?” he asked, annoyed.

“Well you know what would explain it all quite well? That your suspicions that your father was murdered are true!”

“What?”

“They get Norm Vincik to take the body so quickly, steal the guns. Of course, do not try to notify you. Then Vincik’s unhappiness when you want to take the body. In fact, he does everything in his power to prevent it. Why? Just for the money? Or is it something else? You mentioned how your father looked with his head wrapped up. When my mother died they didn’t wrap her head. Why? Maybe if you had the body you would know the truth.”

“No!” he said.

“Yes! Paul, you’ve got to go get it. Nothing matters except what matters to us. I mean, we define our own truths. This matters to you. I know it. You *will* go back. I don’t have to say all this. It will happen. It’s just a matter of getting to it and not dicking around trying to go somewhere that you’ll never be able to get.”

“But now things are different, Sarah—”

“Are they? Are they, Paul? You tell me. Are they really different for you?”

Her words struck something hard and bright inside him.

“Yes, Sarah, they are different. But not all of them.”

He put his head against her abdomen.

“I am different. My life is different. I wish I could go back and start over. I’m still young. I could. But you’re right. I must go back to my father. But when this is over—”

She massaged his damp skull with her fingertips.

“Don’t worry about it, Paul. When it’s over,” she said. “I’ll be here. I’m not going anywhere, Paul. Paul, I love you, Paul.”

When he looked up, her eyes were shut and swollen, and her face was wet with tears.

“I’ll need my coat,” he said.

She knew what he meant.

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