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Warnings We Do Not Heed

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769 Words

*A Christmas Themed Flash Fiction Short Story Challenge from Reedsy.com

The Prompt: Write a Christmas or Holiday themed short story in any genre, in 1000 words or less, in which someone doesn't get what they wanted.

Not so Naughty, Not so Nice

When he noticed the chill in the air and eggnog lining the supermarket shelves, Carl knew it was time to go online and download the annual Naughty or Nice list assigned for the upcoming season. Better now while he had time to review the decision matrix changes. The choices could be important. Particularly to the ten people on the list he'd be responsible for this year. After, he'd send his seasonal partner, Tim, his decisions so Tim could prepare and execute them on Christmas Eve.

This fall season, Carl knew, at some point Tim would bring up the mystery of who was behind the list. Who wrote it. Why. Even though they never knew. Would never know.

"It has to be aliens!" Tim always insisted. "Some kind of cross between a benevolent Santa Claus and an all seeing "Cerebro" like in X-men."

"More like the CIA," Carl sighed knowing the redundancy of discussing who pulled their strings – without access to new information - was futile. Still, they never refused the honor of participating each year. Because, in addition to the pay, you couldn't argue with the expansive benefits the list produced in society.

“Oh man, I hope they don’t give us more sex offenders this year,” Tim said. “Those fat fucks were the biggest whiners! You’d think they’d have a little more backbone considering their crimes. But no, they cried like little babies the whole time being punished.”

“Worse than the year we worked the accountants from the Enron Corporation? Didn’t you say their *‘I was just doing my job’* excuses pissed you off to no end? Especially considering the decision matrix that year didn’t provide very harsh penalties.”

“Hey, what do you think our chances of getting a “Nice” list are? We’ve been working Naughty a while and I think it’d be cool to provide a few rewards instead this year.”

“Not very. You remember that organ donor fiasco years ago with number three on the list?”

“Oh, man. Yeah, I do. Mike Espinosa. I messed up there. I still regret that fuck up. But I appreciated you going to bat for me. Sticking up for me and all.”

“Bad news, Tim. He died this year.”

“Aw man, that sucks. I hope his family’s doing okay. Maybe we should start a go fund me account or something for them.”

“Sure. That would be nice. But, Tim, ahh, I have something to tell you. Maybe I shouldn’t say...”

“Hey man, we’re partners. We’ve been together a while. You can tell me anything.”

“I downloaded this year’s list.”

“Yeah? How’s the list? How bad? Who do we go after this year? I hope it’s them politicians from Florida. They really need and deserve a good ass whupping. Lotta problems coming out of Florida.”

"No, not politicians."

"Well, who man. Spit it out."

"Tim, I don't know how to say this. I don't know if I even should, but you've been a friend."

"Just say it already. I'm dying with suspense."

"I downloaded the list and you're number seven on it for this year."

"What?!"

"You're number seven on this year's Naughty list for 'Mistakes that Cost Lives.' I've been re-assigned a new teammate and she'll be working the execution end. She'll be coming to see you Christmas Eve. But don't worry. The punishment I selected isn't too severe. The decision matrix allowed for some fairly lenient options. Nothing you can't handle. It'll hurt, but nothing you can't recover from."

"Aww, man. Me? Really?! Shit! We have to protest this. It was a mistake. I never intended for that guy to have his donor kidney rejected. It was just...what do you call that whatsit...an oversight. Who do we get in touch with? What number or website do we call to tell them it was an oversight?"

"No number or website, Tim. They don't allow for any contact up the chain once the list has been issued. Just the list coming down each year. Sorry, buddy, I thought you'd want to know. It's been great working with you."

"That's it? I'm out? For one little mistake after all the years I served! Oh, that sucks! I never meant to harm that guy! Isn't there anything you can do? We're friends!"

"Sorry, Tim. I wish I could. You know I would if I could, but that's not how it works. The list is the law. I hope you recover and get back onto the team. It's been great working with you but I have to go."

"Aww, man. That's not nice. I'm screwed."

“Bye Tim.”

The END.