

## Dark Descent: Whispers From Beyond Vol 19

### Christmas Cheer

Christmas morning always felt like a punishment—an annual endurance test wrapped in tinsel and shrieking. My marginally younger but infinitely louder cousins ricocheted around the living room like sugar-fuelled pinballs, tearing into presents and each other with equal enthusiasm. Their joy wasn't just annoying; it was invasive. Like glitter.

We gathered around the tree, a lopsided monster drowning in baubles and cheap lights. Uncle Burt was up first, peeling back paper to reveal a pair of rhino-shaped bookends. His expression suggested he wasn't sure whether to thank someone or call animal control. The rhinos looked equally distressed.

Next came Auntie Debbi, who—as tradition demanded—put on her annual performance: the exaggerated gasp, the theatrical fumble, the dramatic tug-of-war with a bottle of wine hidden inside a wine bottle bag. We'd all seen this show before. She still bowed afterward.

I exhaled slowly and started counting.

One, two, three.

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The numbers steadied me, even as the noise swelled around us. I glanced at the growing mound of presents. Still no one had touched mine.

My gift sat practically in the centre, wrapped in innocent red paper patterned with tiny snowmen. I'd placed it there deliberately. Inside, beneath layers of padding, a small but unmistakably loud ticking clock tapped out a steady rhythm. I'd hoped someone—anyone—would question it, maybe even hold it up with suspicion. But my family never noticed anything unless it sparkled or poured alcohol.

Eventually, the youngest cousin—sticky-fingered and wild-eyed—snatched up my gift. My breath caught. He tore into it without ceremony, shredding the paper in every direction, confetti snowing down on the carpet.

This was it.

Finally.

A quiet, bright ending for us all.

I closed my eyes and waited. The counting stopped. The noise blurred. I imagined the soft flash, the warmth of the fire as we were all engulfed, the sudden blissful quiet that would follow.

I waited.

And waited.

Nothing.

When I opened one eye, my present lay abandoned on the floor, half-open, ignored, cast aside into a nest of shredded wrapping paper. The ticking was still audible to me—clear, steady, patient—but swallowed by the chaos around us. No one else heard a thing.

Typical.

I leaned back against the couch, watching the cousins dive into another pile of gifts.

Fine.

Christmas wasn't over yet.

There was still plenty of time to spread my version of cheer.

### The List

Blood dripped from every surface. Thick smears, scattered droplets, and long, lazy streaks slid down the walls like little red rivers. They twisted and curled as they moved, carving strange paths around the crooked picture frames still clinging to their hooks. The house smelled metallic and warm—like a butcher's shop forgotten in the sun. I watched one bead of blood tremble at the tip of a frame before dropping with a polite little plink onto the floorboards.

The last name on my list was finally gone. Finished. Erased. I stood in the centre of the room, breathing slow and steady, my hands still trembling with the delicious aftershocks of my purpose. A deep warmth filled every hollow space inside me. Happiness—real, bone-settling happiness—washed over me in gentle tides. Every facet of my life had finally aligned, as if the universe itself had been quietly rearranged just to offer me peace.

I had worked for this. I had bled for this.

I had sacrificed the rude, the cruel, the ones who believed they could treat me as if I were nothing. One by one, I had removed the rot, pruning the world back until only silence and possibility remained.

It wasn't cruelty.

It was clarity.

And clarity, I'd decided, was the perfect gift to give myself this Christmas.

I took a slow step forward. My boots made faint, sticky echoes on the floor. The air hummed as I smiled to myself. No more whispered insults. No more dismissive comments of make believe. No more weight pressing on my chest every time someone spoke over me. Those days were gone—written into the walls in red.

Then headlights flared through the front window. Tyres crunched over gravel. A car door slammed.

My smile froze.

Through the glass, I saw silhouettes—small ones—bounding up the path. The squeal of excited children cut through the quiet, followed by a deeper voice calling, “Come on, inside! Mum will love it!”

The porch door swung open.

Tiny boots pattered across the boards.

The front door burst inward.

And there they stood—the father and two children—faces going pale as they stared at me.

At my boots.

At the blood.

At the wife and mother lying motionless on the floor.

I straightened slowly, wiping a crimson hand across my beard, the bells on my sleeve chiming softly. The list in my gloved hand unfurled like a scroll as I let them see the heading.

Naughty.

“Ho, ho, ho,” I whispered into the stunned silence before slinking away.

### **Requiem**

My job was simply to write 100 stories, each 500 words long. A unique and vivid snapshot of people, places, and emotions.

Sometimes I went with the happy, loving moments—the ones that tasted almost forbidden on my tongue. The birth of a deer in a field of spring flowers with sunlight streaming through the sparse canopy above. A fragile creature rising shakily on newborn legs, its damp fur catching the warmth of a world too gentle to last.

Other times, it was the utter terror of watching a pack of hungry, ravenous wolves rip apart the same baby deer for nothing more than pleasure. Their snarls echoed like broken hymns, and its scream—thin, bewildered, desperate—splintered the air before fading into the soil.

Life and death were mirrors to me; each story an altar on which I sacrificed truth for meaning and meaning for truth.

As the final executioner, I delighted in sculpting the last moments and memories humanity would ever have—my valuable contribution to the world's legacy. It felt righteous, almost holy. I got to choose whose story to bathe in light and whose to bury far beneath the shadows. Each tale curled within me like a living thing, whispering, pleading, demanding a place in the grand requiem I was tasked to compose.

Goose bumps erupted over my skin in anticipation as I led the final hundred souls in existence deep into the cold, consuming depths of oblivion. They followed me without question—some laughing, some praying, some hollow-eyed and resigned. Their footsteps sounded like brittle bones tapping out a funeral march on the cracked earth beneath us.

The world grew quieter with each step, as though creation itself were holding its breath. The sky dimmed to the colour of drying blood, and the wind sighed through the dead trees like a grieving mother.

As the last soul crossed the threshold into nothingness, I erupted with joy; humanity had finally been eradicated.