BLACK XMAS

The Final Bargain

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Black Xmas: The Final Bargain

Mister Hartman got the chicken out of the oven and placed it on the table, after he cut it in six parts. Then he served a bowl of mashed potatoes with the ladle still stuck in the middle and that would be it, their Christmas dinner, a chicken divided in six and a spoonful of mashed potatoes.

Mister Jeremiah Hartman sat at the head of the table, facing the rest of the family. James, his oldest son, was sitting on his left, right beside his sister, Jessie, while on the opposite part of the table sat their other two siblings, Jordan and Edward. Their mother, Beth, she was sitting at the table’s other end, staring down at her feet, dressed in a white wool jacket over some old pyjamas and her hair looked dirty and all messed up. Everyone else was dressed in their casual, everyday clothes. It was nothing formal about that Christmas dinner.

For a long while no one talked. The children were all enjoying their small

dinner slowly, each seemingly distant and lost in their own thoughts. Jeremiah had barely touched his dish, as he preferred to gulp down a large glass of whiskey he kept handy and Beth had hardly lifted a finger, perhaps because the evening dose of her antidepressants must had kicked in by then. The first one to break the ice was Jordan. He was a smart twenty-five year old man that always took initiative in tight situations.

"Aunt Ruthy called earlier, she wishes you all a Merry Christmas," he said.

"Do you know who else called? The eviction service. The ninety-day notice comes to an end right after New Year's. Can you believe how time flies?" said Jeremiah, in a tone that was making it clear for everyone that he was now officially drunk as a skunk.

Jessie rolled her eyes and got up to refill a bottle with water. She had her headphones on throughout dinner time, but she could still listen to what the

others were saying, she just wanted them to believe that she couldn't. She didn't want to get tangled in stressful arguments about money or making it through another day any more. She had been dealt a bad hand herself since last year when she finished high school. She couldn't afford to go to college and the couple of jobs she got to support herself and family, didn't end up that well, since one boss sexually harassed her and another refused to pay her any money down, after a month and a half of working for him as a lousy dish-washer. Like her two older brothers she was at the time unemployed and lost for hope.

Edward, the youngest one, he didn't show any response to his father's intimidating talk. He sat there silent like everybody else, just glad that he didn't have to go to high school because of the holidays. To him anywhere but school was the place to be, even that sad, depressing dinner with his maladaptive family. His last

grades report was nothing but a rampage of D’s and F’s and he wasn’t that popular among the kids either. He didn’t want to return to that place ever again.

After dinner Jessie and James helped their mother up and back to bed. Edward went in his room and stayed as quiet as a mouse, while Jeremiah threw himself on a couch, finishing the rest of the whiskey bottle and ultimately falling asleep. Jessie, James and Jordan cleaned the table together and washed the dishes and the two men stepped outside on the porch to get some air, while Jessie turned up the volume in her headphones and set the TV on to watch whatever was on, without having to listen to the audio.

From their house’s front porch James and Jordan could see for miles into the small town’s landscape, including the big, imposing building standing out, that was the Megastore, a twelve-storied shopping mall where you could find almost everything, from buttons to movie theatres. It was

all lit up with Christmas lights and huge ornaments on the outside and they could even slightly hear in the distance a bit from the Christmas jingles it was blasting out from its external speakers, although it was closed on Christmas day.

"It looks like it's open for business," said Jordan.

"It's not. It opens at eight in the morning, there are probably employees in there right now, prepping for tomorrow," answered James.

James was the oldest, tallest and strongest of the children. At twenty-nine years of age he had been working at his parents store all his life, until it was forced to close down, knee deep into debt, only a year after the Megastore opened in town. For James that business was all he knew how to do well, the only thing he wanted to do. Him and Jordan had worked tirelessly, helping their parents, knowing that they would eventually some day take over and make an honest living out

of it. Both men haven't worked since and for them, as well as for the rest of the family, everything has gone downhill.

"Are you sure about this?" Jordan asked.

"Of course I am sure. We've gone through it a thousand times," James replied.

"I guess I am just over-thinking what is going to happen to mom and dad," Jordan added.

"Mom's probably going to end up in a mental institution, it would be the best for her. At least they'd take good care of her there. Aunt Ruthy will take dad. I know she doesn't have much space, but she won't leave her brother on the streets to die," James said, trying to reassure Jordan and wipe out any sign of hesitation he might had shown. Jordan nodded his head and went back in, but James didn't follow. He stayed on the porch, gazing at the beautiful Christmas night sky above the sporadic lights that were shining all over the small town.

The morning after revealed a clear, sunny day and although it was freezing cold, dozens of shoppers, adamant they could grab a bargain, had lined up outside the big mall, waiting for its doors to open. The Megastore had a sale event on the day, which they'd been advertising for months and after finally opening, swarms of anxious shoppers surged in. It looked like the whole town's population, as well as people from nearby towns and elsewhere, were there for the event. The line to get in seemed like it would never end.

Half an hour after the doors opened, outside the mall a black transit van speeded up with the breaks skidding to a halt. The door on the passenger side slid open and out came a tall, hooded man, dressed in all black with his face painted in black and white make-up to resemble a skull. Three other counterparts followed, appearing just like him. They were armed with batons and flick knives

and they made their way to the store doors like scapegoats, walking steadily and slowly in much confidence. The first skull face-painted thug, looking as if was their leader, pushed the security guards out of the way, while flicking the knife blade to warn them.

"Back off man, do yourself a favour and stay out of the way, okay?" stated the ringleader, who was taller and more masculine than any of the startled guards.

Among the gang of four was a young woman, who followed after the leader, skipping gayly, before singing the same verse over and over again, at random changing the lyrics to what she thought fitted the occasion.

"Deck the halls
With bells of holy
La la la la la.
Deck the malls
With bells of holy
La la la la la."

The four of them went straight inside towards the electronics section. The leader pointed his finger and gestured strategically, calling his crew into some kind of formation. Like before, the first to follow was the young woman, who with feline flexibility climbed up a tower of plasma TVs, kicked one down and smashed it open. It was that moment they had the whole crowd's attention too. The ringleader, like the protagonist of a sick play, enjoying every minute, he raised his arms, as if presenting a show that was about to begin.

"We are here to raise hell!" he announced in his deep, loud voice, validating the other members of the gang to cause mayhem and so they did, proving wrong the security guards who initially thought they were there to loot. Violence was the only thing they were interested in, not the TVs, the computers, the actual goods. What they seemed eager for was to fight like rabid dogs and smash

things up. Some shoppers got in the way, attempting to claim the goods for their own and possibly get a chance to steal and so it got worse, as fists flew, the violence became uncontrollable. The gang had triggered animal instincts in the crowds and the biting, the pushing and the punching was worse than the sickest mind could imagine, as the whole building became a battlefield. You could hear bones snapping as the brawl went out of control and parts of the floor were then slippery wet, covered in thick dark blood.

One of the dressed in black gang members was gripping a male shopper by the throat, with the flick knife to the shopper's cheek, threatening to stab him. The shopper, a local chubby man in his late fifties looked his attacker in the eye and after a couple of seconds he thought he recognized the face behind the ghastly make-up.

"Jordan?" he struggled to whisper as he still had him by the throat. "Jordan

Hartman?" He didn't get a reply. "I know your father, son..."

"Well, sir, I'm afraid I won't be able to pass on the regards, as I'll be dead in while," the trouble maker spoke softly into his ear and then stabbed him swiftly in the throat, adding "So will you."

The police had arrived on scene but they looked like rabbits in the headlights. Small town cops weren't used to situations like this and it took them some time to organize.

As the whole scene was a pandemonium of blood mixed with flying TVs, a tactical aid unit arrived to assist the police and backed up armed with machine guns. The tactical officer put the megaphone to his mouth from outside the store, calling for some calm and order. He gave them a warning and one minute to calm before they'd take action, with no choice but to start using brute force.

It wasn't hard for them to locate the

main perpetrators inside, as they were standing out in those clothes and make-up and they chased them down the shopping aisles, using the security cameras and mirrors to their advantage. The gang have split into four, but the cops managed to take tactically the gang members out one by one, who at that point were provoking and offending against the police force, but showed showed little to no resistance, it looked like they were almost walking into their fire. A thousand bullets flew into the chest of each member, flesh and bone flew out everywhere. A few others were killed too and dozens of arrests were made. The sale event the store had been planning for so long was a complete disaster.