

THEN...  
37 YEARS AGO...

**“Dear Parents of all the good little boys and girls around the world!**

**Greetings from the North Pole! Christmas time is almost here once again, but Santa needs your help this year! Due to budgetary restraints and there being soooo many good boys and girls around the world to deliver toys to, we’re asking you to limit your Christmas lists to four toys this year!**

**Thank you and Merry Christmas!”**

**\*\*\*Please note: Due to logistical problems as well, some delivery of toys shall be made via U.P.S.\*\*\***

“So, what do you think?”

The other six members of the board sat silently. Finally one of them said, “This is going to cost us *a fortune!* Millions!”

“Billions, actually,” said Peter, “and billions more over the next three to four years.” He continued, “But ten years from now we’ll have made it all back and ten times as much as that! This is a long-term investment, gentlemen! It takes money to

make money, remember?

“Next year the postcard will read that they should, again, limit themselves to four choices, but could they please enclose a check for five dollars to help defray the enormous costs of shipping. An insignificant fee, really, for the happiness of the children. The year that follows we’ll ask that they limit the choices to three but that the fee shall remain at five dollars.

“It’s the shipping that’s going to cost us the most. We have the castle and the means to produce the toys...it’s the delivery that’s the real cost. And that’ll be explained as well.

“Listen,” Peter continued, “people just want their kids to be happy...to shut the hell up and leave them alone for awhile while they hit the eggnog. They’re not going to balk at five measly dollars! Five bucks for three or four nice toys, *delivered?!...It’s a bargain. And anyone with common sense could make that ‘leap of faith’ and realize that, ‘Heck, I guess it would be tough to deliver all them toys by hisself in one night! Makes sense he’d need a little help.’*

“Eventually the postcards will get to the point, over time, where the parents will be presented with two choices...*our* choices! A truck or army men for the boys, or a doll or makeup kit for the girls. And the fee will be ten dollars.” The others seated around the large boardroom desk all listened intently to Peter. They were beginning to see where he was going with all of this. Their demeanors changed.

“After a couple years of the ‘bland,’ limited choices we offer, the next phase of postcards will be seen by them as something of a relief!” Peter continued triumphantly. “By the tenth year we will present them with some truly remarkable ‘Package Deals!’ They will be presented with several choices,

## THE LIST

at several different package prices. We'll have the 'Silver, Gold and Platinum Packages' offered for both girls and boys! Each package will consist of a variety of toys, the better the package the better the toys. And, of course, the price will reflect the better choices. The Silver package will be the old choices and stay at ten bucks—Gotta have something for the poor folks to pick—but the Gold package will have some nicer toys and cost fifty bucks! The Platinum package'll be for the folks with the *real* money! Five hundred bucks and their little brats are treated to a smorgasbord of wonderful little toys, gadgets, trinkets... *whatever!* You just wait and see how many parents, when given the choice, go for that Platinum deal! They're creatures driven by guilt, parents, and they don't want to feel cheap when it comes to their kids."

"We're going to be rich, gentlemen." It was Sir Stephen who spoke now.

"We're already *rich*, Sir Stephen," answered Peter. "We're going to be *gods!*"





N O W . . .

“I found it in my parents’ dresser when I was twelve. They’d saved them all, I guess. I only took the one, hoping that that way they wouldn’t notice. It was the first, I guess. I remember it really bothering me.” Randall continued, “I was only twelve but everything started making sense to me now. For years we were told that you had to be a ‘good’ boy or girl or you wouldn’t get any Christmas presents, and it worked. Most kids were good. And the bad ones didn’t get presents. Simple.

“But over the years I started noticing that the bad kids were getting gifts as well as the good. And sometimes *better* gifts. I remember it really pissed me off. Why be a good kid all the time if it doesn’t matter? I guess other kids noticed as well. You started seeing more and more bad behavior exhibited.”

“Yourself included?” he asked, still sitting in the large chair behind the desk.

“I guess so,” said Randall. “Nothing too terrible, though, really. Just little things...mouthing off more, stealing candy and junk. And whattaya know, come Christmas time there they

were, all wrapped up from Santa. Didn't matter a bit."

"You lost it, didn't you? The spirit of Christmas."

"I suppose I did."

"And in me?"

"Yes. I'm sorry."

"Don't be...I can't blame you," he said. "When did you start working for them?"

"I started working for Halcyon right after I graduated from college. Data processing. Entry-level job, decent pay, and quickly moved up the ladder...the 'fast track.' I worked in their New York offices for the first six or seven years until I was asked if I wanted to relocate—supervise their shipping and receiving. I didn't really, but the pay increase was phenomenal."

"The North Pole?"

"At first I thought they were joking!" said Randall. "They weren't. I had the whole thing laid out to me—well, their version, anyways. It was explained to me how Halcyon was approached by you decades ago and asked to 'carry on' in your absence...that you were dying. Halcyon was well-suited, you said, for carrying the mantle and continuing the tradition. They told me, and many others, that they did it for the good of the children...the good of the entire world. I even had to sign a 'letter of confidentiality.'

"I'll admit, it sounded good. A bit far-fetched, sure, but I told myself, 'Hey, I'll be doing something good here...something important.' And looking at my paycheck at the end of each week didn't hurt any either."

"How did they explain that?" he asked.

"Not too many asked. I didn't. I just figured we all deserved it...that *I* deserved it."

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“I see.”

“I know. Like I said, I’m here to help now. I’d like to put things right.”

He paused for a bit, digesting all of this. It had only been six months since they pulled him from the desert floor. For the first three months he couldn’t even feed himself, so weak he was. After that it took him weeks to regain his speech and motor skills. Weeks more to fully understand what had happened. Thirty-eight years they had him buried. Thirty-eight years they carried on making billions of dollars in his name. He was furious. Angered beyond belief.

Finally he spoke, “And no one could do a thing to stop them.” It wasn’t a question.

“No,” said Randall. “They couldn’t.”

“Because of The List.”

“Yes,” answered Randall. “Halcyon had The List.”





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“They’ll never let us get away with it.” It was another shareholder who spoke. Todd Lange was his name. His family’s fortune was made in aviation. “The other governments.”

“What are they going to do to stop us?” spat Peter. “We have The List! Even if we didn’t have our army, we have The List.”

The List. Santa’s List. The thing that so many had come to him asking him for for so many centuries. The thing he had refused to give away so many times. Every time.

The List. *‘Who is naughty, and Who is nice.’ ‘He Knows... He has a List!’* A magical book with every single person on the planet’s name in it. Their name and one of two simple words beside it; either *‘Good’* or *‘Bad.’* A powerful tome of information.

Information is Knowledge. *Knowledge is power!*

Halcyon had what everyone else wanted, and wanted for the same reason...POWER!

And if anyone tried to usurp them—any country or government tried to stop them—all Halcyon would have to do is use that

power to thwart them. Share with the people of the world the information within this powerful book. Show them The List. Show them exactly who is *Naughty* and who is *Nice*.

There wasn't a single government on the planet that wanted that information made public.

They would be powerless to stop Halcyon—powerless to stop their takeover of Christmas. They would do the only thing they could do. Look the other way. Cover it up. Comply. Politics.

“No,” said Peter with a smile, “they’ll leave us alone.”

N O W . . .

“So they had taken over Christmas. And no one could stop them.”

“Not with you out of the picture,” said Randall.

“Yes,” he said, pausing, looking around the room at Randall and the others. Finally he continued, “How did you find me?”



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They buried him in the Nevada desert—a vast, barren expanse of land owned by Halcyon. They couldn't kill him. They tried. But it was as they suspected, Santa was an immortal...he wouldn't be killed. So, they buried him: deep in the desert floor encased in a block of concrete. They didn't know what else to do with him, really. The ocean floor was suggested by someone, outer space by another, but it was decided that they should know where he was at all times and have access to him in case they needed to retrieve him for some reason (besides, shooting him into outer space would be extremely expensive). They didn't know what that reason might be, but they thought it a sound decision nonetheless.

The burial site would be guarded at all times. Fenced in and monitored by an elite, highly trained unit of armed guards and the best detection devices money could buy. Most didn't even know what it was that they were guarding. They simply thought they were a communications station or some such thing. Very few knew what was at the site, and why.

Very few.

Sir Stephen, Peter Valentine, the other five shareholders and a small handful of subordinates in charge of the security of the body.

But people talk. Eventually someone talks.

