

WHEN HAPPY MET SALLY

By

Lindsey Harrington

The giant animatronic tree shimmied its halting, mechanical dance. Its high-pitched, syrupy voice cut through the Avalon Mall's clatter.

"Merry Christmas, everyone." Lights pulsed in time with the recording. The crowd oohed and aahed.

They started chanting "Happy, Happy, Happy!"

Sally kicked the camera bag. *Bob's covering a ten-car pile-up on the TCH for Chrissake.* And on her way out of the station, she had heard Debbie was getting the anchor job over her. *Seriously? Freaking Debbie?*

Smiling people laden with bags clogged the escalators. Tinny speakers blasted, "Have a Holly Jolly Christmas." *Not bloody likely.*

Jimmy, the camera guy, bounded over to Sally wearing an idiotic grin.

"I loved coming to see Happy as a kid!"

Happy was a St. John's fixture. A few years back he'd been getting a little rough around the branches and the mall retired him. There were protests.

Preposterous headlines took over the news.

What's Christmas Without Happy?

Give Me Happy or Give Me Death!

This year, the mall had announced his triumphant return: bigger and better than ever. Citizens had wept and hugged in the streets. Sally had rolled her eyes.

Happy gave her the creeps.

At first, her manager had asked her to interview the freaking tree.

"Absolutely not. I'm a journalist."

They settled on children.

"Let's get this over with." She nodded for Jimmy to roll the tape. "I'm Sally Turner, reporting live from the Avalon Mall. Little boy, are you excited Happy is back?"

"That tree's mean. I don't like him."

Sally searched Happy's new 3-D printed face. Of course, it couldn't change. Yet it seemed to shift. She gave her head a shake—she had a broadcast to do.

Laughing, she ruffled the kid's hair and moved to the next segment.

When the mall closed, Sally and Jimmy were packing up.

"Can you handle this stuff, Sally? I wanna get home early—for the kids."

“No pro—.” He left before the words were out of her mouth.

“You’re gonna die alone.” A distorted voice rumbled from deep within the tree. One of Happy’s mechanical eyelids gave a slow, shuddering wink.

“What the hell?” Sally moved towards Happy.

“You’re an untalented hack,” he growled, his toothy grin menacing.

“Oh yeah!?”

Sally stormed into the tangle of plastic branches and Happy began to dance. His boughs jerked her back and forth like a doll being fought over Christmas morning. They scraped her face and tore her clothes. But she made it. A black box of lights flashed in the centre console: Happy’s dark heart.

Sally yanked it out, leaving a mess of coloured wires like spent Christmas ribbons. The tree lurched to a stop.

“Y-y-you’ve been a n-n-naughty girl, Salllllllllly.”

She stuffed the box into her oversized purse. Despite her bloody nose and birch broom hair, she marched out of the empty mall smiling triumphantly. Happy’s vacant eyes stared after her clicking heels.

I’m gonna demand that anchor job, damnit. Merry Christmas to me.

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