

The Dark Angel at Christmas

James Lynn Smith

(23 min)

At least 6 Performers: Narrator, Jack, Host, Mary*, Dark Angel, Waiter, Vendor, Bartender, Letter, Recording (Short roles by Host, Waiter, Vendor, Letter, Recording may be voiced by the same person. Others should be unique. Mary's voice reads her note)

Narrator: It was three weeks before Christmas and Jack Flan was bored with all the celebration and talk about the *joy* of giving. He endured the party he was now attending because of the wine. But it also loosened his tongue and made him more open about his skepticism of the holidays. His wife chose her comments to others carefully as though the wrong suggestion might cause Jack to jerk the rug from under their social graces at any moment. The host approached them.

Host: Jack, Mary, glad you could be here with us. I suppose you have bought all your gifts by now, huh?

Jack: We don't put all that much stock in this gift giving scam that comes around each year.

Mary: Oh Jack, please.

Host: How's that?

Jack: Christmas is for the merchants. We are supposed to kowtow to the god of commercial sham. But I've had enough. If any of Mary's family gives me something, I'll send it right back. And I'm not dumb enough to waste good money on things they will never use, either.

Host: But Christmas is actually about new birth, new hope. Gifts are just symbols that express the Christ spirit.

Jack: Don't need new hope. I'm OK with the way I am. Symbols are inane signs for the Lord of Commerce. Rituals are simply a cover for an empty-your-pockets ploy for suckers.

Mary: Jack, think of all the children who expect Christmas toys.

Jack: Adults let the dreams of kids hold them hostage to this hullabaloo. If we had any kids, it'd be stern lectures on self-sufficiency they get at Christmas.

Host: Well, you two, carry on. Hope you—uh—*enjoy yourselves?*

Mary: Jack, you embarrassed me. This is always happening. You are so negative.

Jack: Yes, I know. But you are one of those people who fall for the scams of pundits who advocate waste and irrational spending.

Narrator: As you might imagine, Jack Flan was not a giver. He was not a bad man, knowing one should receive fair compensation for what value they added. But he saw no advantage in supporting the leeches of society, as he called them. There were always those asking for a handout so they would not have to work. Yes, some were actually victims, but he felt it far from likely that most were. He wished that Mary could understand. Friction between them over this issue had become a strain. One evening he came home but Mary was out and he discovered a note from her:

Mary's Note: Dear Jack - I can't take it anymore. We never seem to see eye to eye. You are so negative and non-giving that I feel guilty about things I want. We make each other miserable. Jack, I am leaving.

Jack: What the hell? I can't believe it. She never had it so good. This really hacks me off. Jeez, did I ever marry a loser—big time!

Narrator: Jack went to the wet bar and indulged. He fumed and paced for a while. Finally, he walked out onto the balcony of their high rise condo. He was still brooding, and it was his third scotch and soda.

Jack: It would suit me fine if no one *ever* wanted me to give them anything. If it's not money it's time and attention. I'd rather just keep what's mine and tell 'em to back off.

Narrator: At just that moment, Jack stumbled and the glass flew from his hands as they thrust outward to break his fall. But something else caught him. He felt arms wrap around him from behind and tug him to his feet. Upon turning, he saw a darkly draped figure. He could not see the face under the cloak's hood.

Jack: Who are you? How'd you get here?

DA: I go by many names. Some call me a messenger, an angel.

Jack: I never heard of an angel dressed in a black cloak.

DA: Perhaps it would be convenient to call me your Dark Angel. As to how I got here, let's say I came on the wind.

Jack: Congratulations in making absolutely no sense at all. But why are you here?

DA: To grant your wish. Your mental emanations reached our domain and we are able to grant you the wish that no one would want things from you in the future. You would be free to accumulate things without concern about others wishing to take them from you.

Jack: Well that *sounds* good, but ...

Narrator: Jack thought about this. He had been a CPA in the past, but found that managing his *own* investments could earn him more than a regular job. He

was one of the lucky ones in this respect. He was now a successful day trader. Without other people's demands on him he could become very rich.

DA: Do you accept our grant?

Jack: Yes, that's truly what I want.

DA: Your wish is *fully* granted.

Narrator: Jack felt dizzy and the earth seemed to reel beneath his feet. Then he was in his bed. Abruptly he opened his eyes. It was daylight and the time was 7:00 AM. He felt strange and thought he must have been dreaming. What happened the night before? He must have been in a drunken stupor—again. Never mind, he had to get up and face the day.

Jack: Where's Mary? She didn't come in, at least while I was awake.

Narrator: Then Jack remembered her note, she was gone. A pang of alarm briefly stabbed his belly as he picked the note again.

Jack: Ooh dammit ... What's this? *Another* page to her note. Where are my glasses?

Mary's note: Jack, I don't want anything of yours so there is no need to contact me. I can manage on my own with the help of my family back in Michigan. Let's

just get a simple divorce through a mutual lawyer and finish up by mail. I'm sorry it didn't work. Mary

Jack: So she wants a quickie divorce. And she ... She does *not* want money?

Narrator: It seemed that Jack's wish that no one would want anything from him had begun to manifest. He thought about this for a moment and along *with* the sadness of Mary being gone, a wicked thrill passed through his mind. Things were definitely going to be different. Can dreams cast magic spells on the wakeful world? It didn't make sense, but he was determined to go along with the dream.

One of the obligations in Jack's day was to call once again about a dispute with a contractor for installing a dehumidifier system. They had installed the wrong one and had to take it out and repeat the job. He was receiving charges for two installations, the company claiming that he had changed his mind about what he wanted. Another concerned a tax refund he expected weeks ago but received notice that his filing was questionable; he may actually need to pay more, not receive a refund. Yet another obligation was to check on his brokerage accounts and move money, if necessary. Jack went on-line and began his work, but he was distracted with thoughts about Mary. When time for mail delivery passed, he went down to the mail room to pick it up.

He had three pieces of mail. One was a brochure of some sort and the others riveted his attention. One was from the contractor and the other from the

IRS. He tore open both envelopes with shaky hands on his way back up the stairs. He read that the contractor had resolved *not* to charge him for the extra installation and offered apologies for the misunderstanding. He then saw that the IRS *had approved* his refund claim and enclosed a check. He was overjoyed.

Jack:

Yesss! This calls for a *celebration*. I'm going to my favorite Bistro tonight for one of their tasty fillet mignons.

Narrator: Jack not only had fillet mignon, but wine and a sizeable dessert. When he had finished, he asked for the bill. Though rare nowadays, this particular establishment received payment on the way out at the cash register. Jack stood and, for a tip, pulled a twenty dollar bill from his wallet and tossed it on the table with an obvious flourish, hoping the waiter would see his generosity. His waiter was nearby and did see.

Waiter: Oh no, sir. That is not necessary. Please no tip tonight.

Jack: What? What is this? Something special I don't know about?

Waiter: No sir, it is just that I do not require your tip.

Jack: Well, I never heard of this. Take the money. I'm not a celebrity or anything.

Waiter: No sir, I do not want to have your money. Good night sir.

Narrator: Jack left the bistro confused. On the rare event he felt like giving, it was refused.

Jack: I don't know what's with him, but...Oh well, there's more left for me. I think I'll stop by the produce stand on Market Street and take something home.

Narrator: He approached the produce stand and began looking for Braeburn apples but found only one. He asked the vendor if he had more. The vendor disappeared for nearly three minutes and came out with more. Jack only wanted two, but the vendor had obviously gone to a lot of trouble, so he offered to pay the price and then some.

Jack: Here you go, keep the change.

Vendor: No sir, I want only the price of the apples. You keep your change.

Jack: You're kidding me.

Vendor: No sir: Only the price of the apples plus tax. So here you go. Now move along sir. I have other customers.

Jack: You're too good for my money? Well, just keep your apples then! They're probably rotten anyhow.

Narrator: He stormed off angry and traipsed down to Cooper's bar and grill. He entered and took a stool at the bar. Behind the bar, an attractive but obviously downtrodden young woman approached.

Bartender: So what are you having, sir?

Jack: Gimme a scotch and soda. Heavy on the Scotch; I've got things weighing me down.

Bartender: Tell me about it, my son's dad just ran off and left me holding all the bills. Landlord's dunning me for cash I don't have, and my kid asked for cantaloupe this morning. I could only give him stale Cheerios ... Here's your drink ... And now I've got to walk home through that bunch of bikers celebrating something or other on the next block. They are going to be there tonight and be back in two weeks; some of those guys give me the creeps ... The drink is six fifty including tax.

Narrator: Jack pulled out the necessary funds but after the story she told, he felt a sense of obligation to put money in the tip jar. He peeled off two extra bills and started to put them in the jar.

Bartender: What are you doing? Don't touch that! That's my tip jar. You think you can just lend an ear and then start *giving* me stuff like that? That's just being *too familiar*—

Jack: Oh! Well I ... Okay, please keep your voice down. I wasn't trying to start anything ... Have it your way. I'm going.

Narrator: Jack turned and left, face flushed and ears feeling hot. He was exceedingly embarrassed and surprised at how low this refusal made him feel. He went home depressed and couldn't sleep well that night.

For the next two weeks, Jack encountered one event after another in which attempts to give something was refused. You may not think two weeks of this type of rejection is serious, but Jack tended toward moroseness so this was bad. He felt very low and decided to keep by himself as much as possible. He finally realized that being able to give above necessity somehow mattered to his mental health. Jack felt himself sliding into one of his depressions, only this one was *much* more severe.

There was one thing Jack had been doing for a long time that he felt was giving, in a way. He wrote a monthly investment column in a periodical called Downtown Publications. It paid very little but it was a matter of pride for him. One morning he went down to collect his mail and found a letter from the publication. It was in a different looking envelope than usual. Jack opened it and read.

Letter: Mr. Flan: Downtown Publications has realigned its adjunct staff and determines that your services for the "Flan's Column" will no longer be required. In accordance with our contract, we remit a severance of Five hundred dollars, check enclosed. Please do not submit further material to our editors, as it will not be accepted.

Jack: I can't believe this; *another* slap in the face. Everywhere I turn, I am rejected. I feel cursed. This spell cast by the dark angel in my dream—or whatever-it-was—is crushing me. I feel isolated and useless to anyone else.

Narrator: Jack stood and went to his wet bar for a dose of courage to do something he had grown to feel was his only way out. Finally he walked out onto his balcony and climbed over the balcony rail. Standing precariously on the remaining concrete shelf, with arms back holding to the railing behind him, he faced the opposing buildings and the street far below.

Jack: This is the end. I can't go on ... I can't.

Narrator: Suddenly there was a loud swoosh-swoosh sound as the beating of heavy wings. Something grabbed Jack, lifted him up and dropped him behind the railing. Then the rescuer touched down behind Jack. As a dark hooded cloak fell around the figure, Jack turned and saw it. The dark angel.

DA: So your life of freedom from solicitation and giving did not bring the relief you wanted?

Jack: It's you! Why did you grab me? I *want* to die. This spell you cast has destroyed me. I feel like a disgusting, self-gratifying insect no one wants to come near.

DA: You want to give of yourself, but an external barrier seems to be there. Is this what you mean?

Jack: Yes, and I must be the loneliest man in the world. I had no idea there could be so much misery in this.

DA: But this pain is good if you learn from it and release who you really are.

Jack: How? I tried, but no one wants anything from me. I'm poison.

DA: Jack, deep inside you want to give, but you had become blocked by fear of exploitation, of being taken for granted. What I did was arrange an *external* addition to that blockage. Now you *fully* know the consequence of never giving.

Jack: Yes, and you want me to continue suffering. You won't even let me die.

DA: On the contrary, Jack. I can free you from the external part of the spell. The inner part was always your own decision.

Jack: How could you do that? You're some kind of spirit of darkness, or something; A creature from hell itself.

DA: Jack, we must appear in a form that our client can relate to before letting us start the process.

Jack: Process?

DA: It's the healing of spirit, Jack. I am from the *other* side ... And now, it *is done*.

Narrator: The dark angel threw back the hooded cloak and underneath were the whitest, glowing wings Jack could ever imagine. As the dark cowl fell back from the head, a most beautiful smile melted the remaining hardness in Jack's heart. The face glowed with a mysterious iridescence. The features kept changing, in sequence resembling the waiter, the produce vendor, the bartender and others. Then powerful wings lifted the angelic being into the air. Jack saw the dark cloak discarded and falling from the ascending shape.

Jack felt dizzy, followed by a sudden jolt. He rolled over and saw a broken glass, the smell of Scotch on the balcony deck.

Jack: What? ... A dream? So real. What's happening?

Narrator: He rose, noted his bruised hip and elbow and went for a mop and dustpan. After cleaning up the floor, Jack grabbed his jacket and went out. Once down on the street, he felt like a new man. Even if this "healing" were merely a dream, it nevertheless cured the malaise and severe isolation he had been feeling. He turned into an alley and came out on Market Street. The produce

stand beckoned as usual with fruit and vegetables displayed before the vendor. Jack picked up a cantaloupe and sniffed.

Jack: Where does this come from?

Vendor: Beats me Bub. But it's not from around here. Shipped from far off, I'm sure.

Jack: Here's a ten. Keep the change.

Vendor: What? Hey, thanks, man. And a merry Christmas to you too.

Narrator: Jack sacked the cantaloupe. As he started to pass by Cooper's Bar and Grill, he stopped. He did not want a drink but went in anyhow. The sad looking young woman was on duty at the bar. He spied an empty stool and sat down.

Bartender: And what will you be having, sir?

Jack: I'll have a ginger ale on the rocks, please.

Bartender: Well, aren't you the big spender. Did you get religion or what?

Jack: No, I just—well maybe. Remember you said your son liked cantaloupe? Well I'd like to give you one. I need to lighten my load anyhow, I've got places to go on foot tonight.

Bartender: I can't be taking things from customers like that.

Jack: There's no "like that" about it. Please, he would like it.

Bartender: Okay. But this is not –

Jack: No expectations. Free gratis, as they say.

Bartender: Well, thanks man. By the way, what's your name?

Jack: I'm Jack. Jack Flan, Flan spelled like the dessert.

Narrator: For the next fifteen minutes, Jack and the Bartender swapped a few comments between her serving duties. He learned that her name was June. He encouraged her concerning her problems and she listened. When he was ready to go, he gave her two twenties.

Jack: Keep the change. Take a cab through that area with the biker celebration you were concerned about.

Bartender: Wow. I appreciate it, and Happy holidays to you, Jack.

Narrator: As Jack was leaving, June stared after him. A faint smile came to her lips. Her spirits were lifted and a new hope began to buoy her soul. It seemed

that good things could happen after all. Maybe more things would add to it, if she only expected it.

That night, Jack visited a number of places where he previously left a bad impression. Mostly, his gift was of himself. He listened, encouraged and complimented.

Upon arriving back at his condo, he noticed someone had called him. He pushed the phone's playback button and listened.

Recording: Mr. Flan, this is Eric Cross at the Times. Got a call from someone who said you were finally free from that onerous contract at Downtown Publications. If that's true, come by and see me in the morning, I have an idea how we could use your talents.

Jack: Oh man, that's great. I had almost given up on the idea of writing a column again.

Narrator: Yes, it was good news, but Jack was limited in *how* good he could feel. He settled into a big chair and leaned forward, placing elbows on his knees and propping his head in his hands. Then he rubbed his brow with his fingers and muttered to himself.

Jack: But Mary is still gone. Gone! ... Oh how can I blame her, though? She wrote she didn't want anything, but I know that won't work—not really. I'll get a lawyer first thing next week and start working on a fair settlement.

Narrator: He took a deep breath and leaned back. He had finally begun to doze when the phone rang. He reached to the side table and brought the receiver to him. It was Mary.

Mary: Jack, are you alright?

Jack: Mary? *Mary*, yes I'm Okay, at least right now. Why are you—

Mary: I've been thinking Jack, maybe I was a little too rash in leaving. Can we try to work this out?

Jack: If you mean that baby, come on home! I'll leave the light on and welcome you with open arms.

Mary: I've been wanting to, yet I was afraid we would fall into the same old pattern. But this evening the *strangest* thing happened. I got a call on my cell phone about you. It said I should contact you; that something had happened. At first I wondered if you had been in an accident.

Jack: Who called?

Mary: I don't know. But there was a definite sound behind the voice: it was like the swoosh-swoosh of big wings flapping or something.

Cast will slowly raise hands overhead, palms outward. Then place palms together and lower until upward directed finger tips are just under chin in Namaste/prayer position. Bow slightly and hold until Narrator says "Thank you fellow performers" (This gesture is a gentle tribute to Transformative Spirit.)

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