

## Thursday Drop-In: The Gifts Under the Tree

**System:** Shadowdark RPG

**Location:** Any isolated village

**Theme:** Winter folklore, moral horror, helplessness

**Recommended Level:** 1–3 (scale numbers, not stats)

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### Background

In the village of **Northvale**, every home keeps a small evergreen tree inside through the winter months. Beneath it, families carefully place gifts — food, tools, coins, handmade toys.

The villagers call it *tradition*.

What they do not say is that on the **Night of Red Footsteps**, the forest answers.

Redcaps come in numbers too great to fight. They collect the offerings and carry them back to their master — a creature known as **Klaus**.

If a home's gift is judged *insufficient*, the redcaps **take a child that same night**, stuffing them into the sack alongside the offerings. These children are **transformed into redcaps themselves**, bound to serve Klaus for all time.

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## Arrival

The party arrives one or two days before the Night of Red Footsteps.

Signs something is deeply wrong:

- Every home has a tree, no matter how poor the family
- Children are kept indoors **at night**, even before the festival
- Parents argue in whispers about gifts
- The forest edge is avoided entirely

A successful **CHA check** or shared kindness earns broken truths. Failure earns silence and fearful glances toward the woods.

## Optional Flavor – False Protections & Superstitions:

- Extra locks, turned boots, or hidden gifts accomplish nothing.
  - Burning pine resin or over-gifting draws redcaps faster.
  - Clever PCs can experiment, but outcomes are always grim.
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## The Scale of the Threat

This is not a raid. It is a **harvest**.

On the Night of Red Footsteps:

- There are **1d4+1 redcaps per home** in the village — they are never alone
- Redcaps move in loose groups
- There are **far too many** to stop all of them

Make this clear to the players early. They can:

- Protect **one home**
- Delay a few redcaps

- Change the fate of a single family

They cannot save everyone.

### Optional Table – Village at a Glance:

Home	Offering Quality Redcaps Assigned Notes		
Widow's Hut	Poor	5	Redcaps return twice
Miller's House	Adequate	3	Mock but move on
Tanner's Family	Good	2	Boots linger outside
Elder's Home	Excellent	2	Klaus is watching
Cheater's House	Hidden	4	Sack already empty

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### The Night of Red Footsteps

As night falls:

- Snow begins, even if the season has been mild
- Hearth fires sputter and dim
- Doors feel heavier to open

Then it starts.

From the forest comes a steady sound —

**the clink... clink... clink of iron boots on frozen ground.**

The sound grows louder.

Closer.

Every direction at once.

After midnight:

- Redcaps emerge from the tree line and alley shadows
- Iron boots scrape on stone and wooden floors
- They enter homes without breaking doors
- Each carries a sack already darkened with old stains

At the forest's edge, far beyond torchlight, a tall shape stands motionless among the trees.

Bells do not ring on it.

Boots do not move.

A successful **WIS check** (DC 15) notices a figure watching the harvest — head cocked, sack slung over one shoulder, iron staff resting in the snow.

This is **Klaus**. He does not intervene unless approached or attacked. He is here only to judge.

The sound of iron does not stop until dawn.



### Redcaps (Collectors of Klaus)

#### Redcap

AC 11, HP 5, ATK 1 iron boot +0 (1d4), MV near, S +0, D +1, C +1, I -1, W -1, Ch -2, AL C, LV 1

**Unwelcome Guests:** Redcaps may enter any home, even if it is locked, barred, or guarded. Doors open for them as if unlatched, and windows frost over as they pass through.

**Servants of Klaus:** Any child taken by a redcap is **transformed into a redcap** and added to Klaus's forces, increasing the horde for future Nights of Red Footsteps.

Redcaps mock, bargain, and retreat when injured — there are always more.



### **Klaus, the Redcap Master**

#### **Klaus**

AC 15, HP 45, ATK 1 iron staff +5 (2d8), MV near, S +3, D +0, C +4, I +1, W +2, Ch +2, AL C, LV 6

**Judge of Offerings:** Klaus instantly knows the value and sincerity of any gift placed beneath a tree in the village. Klaus always attends the Night of Red Footsteps in person, to witness the harvest.

**Master of the Horde:** All redcaps within the forest obey Klaus's commands without question.

**Blood-Fed Power:** Each accepted offering and each child transformed into a redcap restores 1d6 HP to Klaus (to a maximum of his normal HP).

**Burning Hate:** Klaus has disadvantage on all rolls while on fire.

**Bound by Words:** Any bargain struck with Klaus cannot be broken except by ending the pact or destroying Klaus.

**Klaus's Nature:**

Klaus is not a raider. He is a **warden of winter pacts**.

Long ago, Northvale begged for protection — from famine, wolves, or worse things in the dark. Klaus answered. He promised survival through winter, but demanded remembrance, generosity, and sacrifice in return.

He wants:

- To be **acknowledged**, not forgotten
- To ensure the village **gives as much as it keeps**
- To punish those who hoard while others starve

Children are not taken out of cruelty — they are taken because Klaus believes the village has failed them first. Each offering strengthens him. Each broken tradition justifies the harvest.



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### Klaus's Bargains (d10)

When the party approaches Klaus during the Night of Red Footsteps, he watches the village and speaks without turning.

Roll **1d10** or choose:

#### d10 Klaus's Offer

- 1 **"One house will be spared. Name it."** Redcaps avoid that home entirely. Another home elsewhere suffers double collectors.
- 2 **"Bring me a better gift before dawn."** If delivered, Klaus calls off collectors from one street. If not, he takes a child personally.
- 3 **"Choose the child who walks back out."** One taken child is returned... already marked. They will vanish next winter unless the pact is broken.
- 4 **"Stand with me and watch."** If the party does not interfere further tonight, Klaus reduces the harvest slightly. The village will remember who did nothing.
- 5 **"Give me a name."** Speak the name of someone who has wronged this village. That household is judged harshly. Others are spared.
- 6 **"Break the rule."** Klaus ignores one insufficient offering — but next year, *all* offerings must be greater.
- 7 **"Leave me a memory."** Klaus takes an object of deep personal value. That character has disadvantage on CHA checks in Northvale forever.
- 8 **"Carry my gift."** Klaus marks the party. Redcaps will not attack them this night — but villagers will see the iron frost on their boots.
- 9 **"Choose who is not judged."** A specific child is exempt from future Nights of Red Footsteps. Klaus demands another in their place tonight.
- 10 **"This is not your winter."** Klaus spares the village this year entirely. Next winter, he expects something *far greater* — and he remembers faces.



### **Bargain Rules:**

- Klaus never lies.
  - Klaus never explains the full cost.
  - Bargains bind the village as well as the party.
  - Klaus accepts counteroffers, but always worsens the outcome elsewhere.
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### **A Home Worth Saving**

Choose or roll:

1. A widow with two children and almost no tribute
2. A family cheated by neighbors pooling gifts
3. A child hiding a broken toy beneath the tree
4. A household already missing a child from years past

This is where the party can make a difference.

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### **Complications & Twists**

Roll or choose:

1. Redcaps deliberately draw the party away
  2. A villager sabotaged another home's offering
  3. Klaus was once human, bound by an older pact
  4. Destroying a tree enrages nearby redcaps
  5. Saving one home marks the party for future nights
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### **Resolutions**

- **Hold the Line:** One family survives — the village remembers
- **Face Klaus:** Ending the pact stops future nights, but costs lives now. Winters will be more cruel, harvest less bountiful, etc.

- **Strike a Bargain:** Klaus accepts a different price
- **Flee:** The iron boots echo long after the party leaves
- **Death of Klaus:** All redcaps immediately retreat into the forest, never to be seen again.