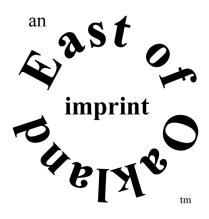


Gift of the Krampus

J. Manque



fiction

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Where they burn books, ultimately they burn bodies- Heinrich Heine

Gift of the Krampus

It was already the worst Christmas Eve of my life. Harold and I had planned to spend it together alone, dinner and a show. You know, that kind of show- just the two of us, sweaty, fleshy. It was a tradition, if you can establish a tradition in the three years we'd been together. It was always romantic. It was always fun. It was always unbelievably filthy. Now we knew his business trip would keep him away until the afternoon of the 24th, but Harold was an experienced tarmac hopper, always cutting it close, always making his connections with minutes to spare and a story about bribing a skycap or hijacking some old guy in a wheelchair and pushing him to the front of the security line so officiously they're just waved through. But we hadn't counted on the snowstorm delaying his flight. It meant a white Christmas for some, but for us it meant

separation. It looked like he wouldn't be home until Christmas day, which meant I wouldn't be able to see him until Christmas night at the earliest- family obligations. I love my family, but holiday get togethers can be worse than a trip to the dentist. There's too much stress, which is why I adored my time with Harold- if anyone ever knew how to eliminate stress he was the man. But since I don't control the weather, at least not yet, I went to bed alone, dreading the Christmas morning to come.

It was late when my phone rang. I was already warm and snuggled in, nearly asleep. "Hi, Kathleen," the voice cooed. It was Harold. "I'm back. I just landed."

"How did you manage that?" I asked, rubbing the sleep from my eyes.

"A congressman on the FAA oversight committee always gets the first flight out," he said. "And they bumped me to first class to boot."

"Not bad for a guy who sells plumbing supplies," I told him, then added, "I missed you."

"Did you eat?" he asked.

"Hours ago, and you?"

"First class... I was thinking," he said, "Are you ready for your Christmas Eve spanking? I can be there in an hour."

The truth is I'm almost always ready for a spanking, and Harold, and not necessarily in that order, but Christmas was going to be a long day, and if he came over... I sighed. "You know I have to get some sleep if I'm going to deal with my family tomorrow. Why don't we get together tomorrow night?"

"What are you wearing?" Harold asked; his voice was dripping. He'd definitely been thinking about me.

"My little baby doll nightie, the white one, with the frilly little panties with the little pink bow at the front," I told him in my most

innocent voice. It was a lie. I had flannel pajamas and heavy socks on. It's cold in bed without Harold. But I wanted him to want me. And I wanted him to go to bed horny thinking about me. I wanted him to imagine lowering my panties, taking me over his lap as I 'struggled' to escape his strong grip and reddening my round little bottom- all the time knowing he couldn't have me. I know I'm not always a good girl. Sometimes I earn my spankings.

"I can be there in forty-five minutes if I don't stop at my place for the handcuffs," he said. "I'll bind you with the silk tie my mother gave me for my birthday. It'll ruin it, but I don't care."

"You've never offered to do that before. You shackle me like a common criminal, spank me like an insolent little girl, then have your way with me like a prostitute bought and paid for. Do you think I like that?" I teased.

"I know you do," he told me. "But if you want to feel silk binding those sexy wrists it has to be tonight."

"Like you said, I do like steel. It's so cold. It's so unforgiving. Call me tomorrow."

"If you're not careful you'll end up on Santa's naughty list," Harold warned. I knew he was disappointed, but he understood. I could hear it in his voice. That's why I loved him. And if he didn't understand I would have swallowed my pride, invited him over, let him spank me red and fuck any hole he wanted as often as he wanted then begged for more and meant it.

I kissed the phone and ended the call without another word, drifting off to sleep happy, thinking about poor Harold masturbating feverishly as he thought about me, both of us knowing it was no substitute for the real thing.

I awoke to a terrible crashing noise. At least I thought there was a noise. Or was it a dream? I listened for the longest time but there

was only silence. Just as my eyelids started to droop I heard it, the sound of boots- no, something heavier, much heavier, coming down the hallway slowly, rhythmically.

Wide awake now I yelled, "Harold," hoping for a Christmas surprise. But Harold didn't have my key. I'd meant to give it to him earlier. I'd given so much of myself to him so fast I held onto my apartment a little longer than I should have. The truth is the key was in a small box wrapped in gold paper under the Christmas tree. If it wasn't for the snowstorm he'd already have it. If it wasn't for the snowstorm he'd be jumping out of my bed ready to defend me.

"Harold is that you?" I yelled, trying to keep my voice steady. I turned on my little reading light, the only one within reach, and knocked my phone off the nightstand as I did. Just within reach I snatched it up. I swiped desperately at it, but it wouldn't wake. I yanked the nightstand drawer open and grabbed the little five shot revolver my father gave me when I moved out of the family home and wished I was back there. I had just enough composure to swing the cylinder out and make sure it was loaded, and saw the five gleaming brass head-stamps reading 'S&W .38 SP ++P' wrapped around five un-dented primers. It took me two interminable tries, but I managed to swing the cylinder back and get it to snap into the frame. I gripped the gun with both hands, pulled the hammer back until it locked and pointed it at the door. "I'm armed. I have a gun!" I screamed, terrified both that it was and wasn't Harold on the other side.

I wasn't sure if I'd be able to pull the trigger if it wasn't, if a stranger came in, but if I had to- maybe... The hall fell silent. Half a minute passed, then a whole. Just when I thought I'd scared off whoever was out there, there was a sound, a sound no human could make. It was an icy howl that rattled the windows and ended with a low growl that would have sent a lion shrinking away, and left me

trembling like a leaf. I couldn't hold the gun steady. I could barely keep it pointed towards the door. "Go away," I tried to yell, but barely whispered.

A moment later the door exploded. I screamed. Splinters bounced off the walls and shattered panels collapsed onto the carpet. Something moved in the darkness. Then a leg covered with matted black fur, a twisted hoof at its end, crossed the threshold and moved into the dim light. The doorway filled as something hideous crouched to fit through. I closed my eyes and pulled the trigger, but there was only a soft metallic click, then two more as I tried and tried again. My eyes flashed open. My mouth gaped. I wanted to scream again but couldn't, could barely breathe. The thing in my bedroom was more terrifying than anything from my nightmares- a goat's hind legs, but much larger, a grotesquely muscled and hairy torso and arms, vaguely human in shape, and long fingered hands ending with short hooked claws in place of nails. It had a goat-like head with a short wide snout, and an old carnivore's yellowing teeth, so long they couldn't be covered by its peeling black lips. Monstrous spiraling horns crowned its head, and dragged across and left deep gouges in the ceiling and falling plaster chips in its wake as it moved

I recognized the creature instantly. My grandfather had warned me about it. He warned me about it every time we were alone from as far back as I could remember until I was a young adult, until he died. He was German, and homeless and penniless after the war his parents, not implicated in the horrors of a culture imploding, were allowed to immigrate. For longest time I thought he was just passing on Germanic folklore designed to scare children, something he thought would be lost in my generation.

The thing standing at the foot of my bed was the Krampus.

In most of the world they don't mention that Saint Nicholas has a dark counterpart, a yang to his yin. While the saint is out rewarding the good the Krampus is punishing the wicked, and not with anything so banal as lumps of coal left in stockings. It's a horrific beast that can whip children red with birch branches for mischief, or cast the truly evil to hell for an eternity's punishment, or do anything in between to save the souls of those who've sinned.

My grandfather swore that when he was ten years old, just after the American army had rolled through their bomb ravaged town, it stepped out of the shadows one night and chased him up a steep snow covered hill. When he thought he'd escaped, when he was out of breath and lost and scared it appeared from nowhere, grabbed him, and viciously crushed an orange in his face, rubbing the juice in his eyes and forcing pith up his nose. He knew instantly it was punishing him for stealing one from a soldier's knapsack. Then it pointed him towards the ruined town and he never stole again. As the years passed I began to believe him- not that there actually was such a creature with fruit readily to hand, but I believed he believed it because his story never varied, because there was real fear in his watery gray eyes the last few times he told it, because an eightythree year old man slowly dying of congestive heart failure told it to an adult woman and made her promise to be careful or it would come for her.

And in parts of Germany and Austria there are still places where the Krampus makes yearly visits before Christmas. And just like the Santa Claus you see at the mall they're nothing but men in costumes- the Krampus' 'helpers.' A cursory online search will prove that some of these costumes are quite elaborate, but are, nonetheless, when you look carefully, nothing but the innocent Christmas fakery that causes so many to lose faith later in life. That's what I thought my grandfather experienced when he was a

hungry child- a good costume seen by torchlight reflecting off snow, coalescing with collective guilt over something far worse than a stolen orange, something a child couldn't understand that wasn't his fault.

But the thing standing before me was no man in a holiday costume. It took a step towards me, shaking the bed, then another, its dead eyes glowing a dull red, never blinking. As it got close it extended its mucus dripping tongue slowly. It was thin, tubular, like an insect's proboscis, mottled red, and more than three feet long. Moving like a curious snake it tentatively probed around the gun's barrel, then thrust it deep inside. I opened my hands and tried to look away as it easily supported the weapon at the end of that disgusting thing, withdrawing it with the dexterity of an elephant's trunk into its black hands. Then it caressed the gun with that horrible appendage, poking every little crevice, giving contented little sighs before tongue fucking it in earnest with greedy little growls. When it was done the barrel was bent, the bore horribly stretched and covered with a viscous yellow liquid that reeked of rancid custard.

That's when its eyes caught mine. They flashed a brilliant red, as if the creature had been sleepwalking and had awakened with a start for some dread purpose. In a flash it grabbed both my wrists with one of its huge hands and pulled them over my head. Its slimy tongue darted out and wrapped around my neck. It felt like an algae covered rope pulled from a hot spring, both rough and slimy at the same time. Then it began to constrict.

"No... no," I begged as the living noose tightened. The beast pulled a large darkly stained burlap sack from its back, the filthiest thing I'd ever seen, and threw it on the bed, then yanked me from beneath my warm comforter, all the while steadily increasing the pressure on my neck. With amazing precision for something so large it peeled my nightclothes from me in seconds, slitting them with the razor sharp claws on its free hand without so much as nicking my skin even though I squirmed in its grip.

"Please," I begged, my nipples hardening in the cool night air, but the muscular ligature around my neck continued to tighten inexorably. I felt a horrible pressure behind my eyes. I felt like I was about to vomit. "No," I managed to choke out as a strange sound filled my ears, the sound of my own blood rushing through them like a distant ocean. I tried to plead again, but only coughed. My peripheral vision began to darken. My brain was starving from lack of oxygen and all I could do was experience it- unbearable, humiliating, unthinkable. The Krampus had to know that this kind of thing didn't happen to people like me, that I was supposed to be able to cross my legs or thrust my breasts and change any mind, but it showed no interest in my naked flesh jiggling in the night, only its grim mission.

It wasn't until it swished the sack open that I knew true terror, though. Yet my failing brain interpreted every stimulus as intensely sexual. My vaginal muscles contracted involuntarily and I rushed towards orgasm when I realized the only certainty in my life was that burlap hole- and that there might never be anything beyond it. But before I could will that pleasure, make it the last thing I experienced before the void, my strength ebbed like spilled syrup and the world darkened, tilted. The last thing I remember before the blackness claimed me was feeling my useless legs collapse at the bottom the sack, seeing its black horizon rise over what was left of my vision as I slumped into it like a slaughtered animal.

I came around slowly in the bouncing sack. I'd been stuffed in curled into the fetal position, the top cinched down and tied off so I

could barely move. I could tell I'd been slung over the creature's shoulder, and it was walking with grim purpose. We were outside. From the sound of its hooves on soil, and the occasional branch brushing the sack, I knew it was walking through the woods, and we were already deep in them because no light shone through the burlap. All there was, was the odor of the bag's previous occupants. It was heavy, musty, sickening, but somehow still enticing, old sweat mixed with the stale sex odor of thousands of terror struck sinners- women who despite themselves found their sexes wet and parted as the Krampus carried them to their doom, and equally horrified men, erect and dripping clear seminal fluid as they, too, were taken to their fate like so many sacks of potatoes.

I wanted to be disgusted by it, by them, but I was as excited as any of them ever were, as wet as I'd ever been. And I tried to resist doing what I knew they did, but I was just as weak, just as hopeless. At first I just put my hand on my sex, feeling its warmth, but soon a finger found the wet cleft, the familiar slippery flesh, and I held it there, letting the motion of the creature cause the movement, pretending I wasn't really masturbating, but soon that wasn't enough. I was rubbing my burning slit as best I could with my legs pressed so tightly together, far too scared to try to part them, crying too hard to care, and too ashamed that I was adding to the sack's odor to believe myself worthy of the one thing that could relieve my tension and let me think clearly. I pinched my right nipple as hard as I could with my left hand. Harold could sometimes bring me to orgasm that way when I got stubborn, but it didn't help. "You bitch," I told myself as I managed to slip a finger inside my burning sex, then a second. "You stupid bitch."

Then everything changed. The creature's hooves began sounding against rock, echoing. We were in a cave; we were in its lair. Dim flickering firelight shone through the burlap's weave. It walked for

what seemed like hours, steadily downwards. There were distant echoing screams, close groans, the sound of chains- other prisoners, male and female, who'd arrived in exactly the same way, some that night, from places all over the world, the Krampus bending time and space like another Christmas visitor, some from Christmases long past who hadn't yet been adequately punished before their release, some who never would.

I came.

I came long, hard, and loud, panting, moaning, and shaking. It was as intense as it was pitiful, and as painful as it was pleasurable. My stomach muscles cramped. I felt like I was going throw up because of the sickening stench in the air I managed to force through the burlap and into my lungs, and pass out from the lack of air I couldn't. The creature paused for just a moment to listen and feel me writhe against its back. I could swear it gave a little grunt of satisfaction before beginning its trek again. The hoped for clarity returned, but all that was left was fear, humiliation, the choking stench, and two fingers buried deep in my sex that I was too frightened to withdraw, and so tried to push them in further. I would have gladly followed them, crawled into my own womb if I were able- and though my whole perception of reality had been challenged that night I knew it wasn't possible, or if it was, that the Krampus would just crawl in after me, the tip of its tongue following my anus until we became an obscene intertwined ouroboros-esque mass of flesh writhing in eternal disgust and pleasure.

It dropped the bag roughly and without warning. It opened above me and a huge rough hand reached in and yanked me out like a piece of meat. I could see we were in one of the cave's alcoves. It was enormous, the size of a ballroom, illuminated by several torches, and small pools of burning pitch that seemed to ooze from the craggy walls and drip from the ceiling. The flames danced dimly across their surfaces, providing barely enough light to see by, the high ceiling vanishing into flickering shadows above.

At first I thought we were alone in that huge space, all the other prisoners shackled somewhere else in that endless cave. Then I saw them, two young women as naked as me. They were identical twins, gorgeous, rail thin, with porcelain white skin and the longest, straightest, most luscious jet black hair I'd ever seen. They hung next to each other by their ankles, each from a single rope at the opposite side of the alcove, their heads a dozen feet from the cave floor, their arms limp and stretched. An immense hat pin skewered each of their nipples, the blood around them dry and scabbed. Their eyes were open, but glazed, and they took no notice of me or the monster; they just moaned softly to themselves.

The Krampus grabbed my wrists and lifted me off my feet. It sniffed the fingers I masturbated with. Then its tongue darted out and licked them greedily like an excited puppy, leaving them far slimier than when it started. It pushed me against one of the rough walls and focused its eyes directly on mine. I've had more than my share of lovers, but I've never seen lust like that in any man's eyes. It wanted to fuck me. It really wanted to fuck me. And though I tried not to look down I couldn't control my eyes. Its throbbing penis was bigger than my forearm and as hard as the bones within, something straight out of a Freudian nightmare, black as night and covered with gnarled ridges and grotesque horny warts crowned with tufts of mangy hair. Half a dozen dull yellow barbs jutted from just behind its dripping glans forming a vicious collar still adorned with pieces of rotting flesh from its previous victims. It pressed the thing to within millimeters of my sex, so close I could feel its heat. And its testicles, the size of grapefruits, pulled high in their crinkling gray scrotum, quivered and buzzed like a pair of nests

filled with increasingly angry hornets.

I closed my eyes and waited for the inevitable, to be impaled, to have my womanhood torn apart as it satiated its lust. And just when I thought it couldn't wait one second longer it did, and another, and another. I opened my eyes. The beast's face was contorted with anguish. It tilted its head back slowly and let out a pitiful howl that echoed for the longest time as dust floated down from dark stalactites above. In an instant I realized- it couldn't fuck me; it knew I was Harold's. And it also meant it was going to punish me the way desire was punishing it. It lowered its head and looked at me with a mixture of lust and hatred, and then its expression changed just a little, the hatred ebbing, replaced by a hint of anticipation, and I knew it had formed its plan. A chill ran down my spine, and I swear I saw the edges of its twisted mouth pull up just a little.

The thing carried me to a rock outcropping it used as a shelf and laid me there among piles of wicked looking devices and materials I didn't want anywhere near me. It took a length of thin sisal rope; it was rough and dirty; it had been used before. My wrists were tied to my elbows behind me. Next the thing began wrapping more lengths around me, binding me tightly around my torso, fashioning a makeshift harness. The ropes around my waist were tied impossibly tight, tighter than any 19th century corset. Two lengths ran from its front between my legs, one on either side of my sex, and up the crack of my ass to the waist rope, then up and under my armpits and back around my neck so that it formed a snug collar so long and thick I could barely move my head. Next it wrapped each of my breasts with its own rope, starting right at the base of my chest and proceeding towards their tips, multiple turns reshaping them into two horrible narrow stalks projecting from a flat chest where their broad bases had once been. As it continued to wrap them they

stretched, elongated, and swelled as small balloon-like breasts bloomed from their stalks, then flopped down my chest under gravity's pull like obscene nipple topped mushrooms. The ends of these ropes were pulled behind my back and down, then woven into some part of the harness I couldn't see, making the horrible appendages the Krampus created spread and sag further than dozens of years braless jogging ever could.

"Please," I begged, but the creature ignored me. It was preparing a crudely formed iron hook. It was huge, the size of a cane's handle, with a ball an inch and a half around molded into its tip. The Krampus had already secured a length of rope to the other end and was greasing the ball with something dark, awful, and viscous. It bent me over the outcropping and spread my cheeks. Then the hook's cold ball touch my anus and the pressure began to increase.

"No," I whispered. I didn't think it would ever fit, but I knew better than to fight it. I tried to relax my straining sphincter muscles. I took deep breaths, and to my surprise it began to move slowly, irresistibly in, stretching me painfully. Then, just when I thought I couldn't possibly be opened anymore without being torn, the widest part of the metal sphere slipped past the elastic ring of muscle, and its involuntary contraction pulled the rest of the ball inside me shockingly quickly. After that the Krampus had little trouble forcing the hook deeper into my rectum, seating it all the way so that its crook followed the curve of my body, and its outside end rested against the small of my back. As I squirmed trying to get accustomed to the odd feeling of the thing inside me the Krampus tied the rope off into the rest of the body harness, and lifted me by it. The weight was taken equally by the two ropes between my legs and the hook in my ass. The former spread my thighs and opened my sex to the cold dark air; the later made me feel like a freshly caught tuna struggling on a line.

I was carried to the center of the alcove and the rough rope harness was tied to a line already dangling from the shadows above, leaving me open, exposed and humiliated, my feet at least two feet off the cave floor. Even so I still wasn't eye to eye with the monster, which had retrieved a small bunch of white birch branches from its stores. They were so fresh I could smell their distinctive leathery odor. The creature bent them before my eyes to show how flexible they were, then with a sudden burst of energy whipped them through the air. The sudden shrill whistle made me start, made my nipples tighten, made my sphincter grip the shaft of the ass hook, made me shiver. I shook my head, but there was never a question of mercy.

The beast took a stop back. The birch came down on my ass like half a dozen stripes of fire, then my belly. It began circling me slowly, hitting every inch of exposed skin below my neck.

Somehow I knew it wouldn't strip my flesh. It wouldn't bruise or welt it. It wouldn't make me less attractive for Harold, not in the long term, and I thought it my trump card, that there would be a limit to the pain. But as the creature worked it turned my ass, belly, thighs, the exposed ends of my breasts, even my lower lips a bright, festive, holiday pink. Within minutes each stroke became more unbearable than the last, and when I thought nothing could hurt more than the previous one the creature proved me wrong yet againand then did it again, and again.

I begged. I cried. I screamed as the blows landed- then listened to my own terrified echoes linger for seconds in the dank air, knowing that other prisoners were reliving their own nightmare encounters with the Krampus as my screams twisted through the cave system. As it circled it worked itself into a state of lust fueled frenzy. Its erection, which had never softened, seemed to grow stiffer and higher by the stroke. The ring of barbs behind its glans

took on such an intense color that they seemed to glow, and the oddly shaped hole at its glistening black tip began to drip a disgusting mucus-like slime.

My skin was on fire everywhere the birch touched. I couldn't take anymore, but was powerless to stop it. There was no safe-word, and mercy is an utterly foreign concept to a thing like the Krampus. I thrashed in the harness but could barely move. I begged myself hoarse. Hair stuck to my tear stained face, to my eyelashes, but I didn't have the energy to shake it off anymore. The Krampus seemed to be absorbing the energy I lost, and the black dread of what would happen to me if it gave in to its lust was nearly as bad as the pain. I began trembling uncontrollably and gagging on my own sobs as the creature whipped me with increasing fervor.

"I'm sorry," I choked out. I don't know why I said it. I don't know why I didn't say it before, but it stopped the beast dead in its tracks, its arm poised to deliver another blow to my throbbing sex. For the first time since it began it looked me in the eye, its expression contempt or disgust, I couldn't tell which.

Then, after what seemed like an eternity, it slowly pulled back its lips, revealing every one of its curved and stained teeth. It raised the birch bunch even higher and swung again with unimaginable force. The shriek of the branches through the air was deafening. The sound of the impact was like shattering rock. But I wasn't the target- the flail came down on the Krampus' own pulsing erection, ripping half a dozen thick strips of hide from its weaponized penis, and triggering an orgasm so terrifying it defies description. Enormous jets of hot gelatinous semen shot through the air like putrid yellow ropes decomposing before my eyes- bending, stretching, breaking into wobbling droplet shedding globules. Several of them hit a burning pitch pool and ignited like napalm, illuminating the alcove with blinding white flashes that stabbed my eyes.

I shook. I screamed so hard I thought I'd rip my vocal cords. Then the Krampus, either enraged or satisfied, let loose with a roar so loud I couldn't hear my own terror, so loud I thought my ears were being ripped from my head. The rope I was suspended from vibrated in sympathy with that sound. It forced its way through the hook and into me until I heard it with my entire being. My head got light. My vision faded, and mercifully, I passed out.

I awakened with a jolt. I was still bound in the rope harness, still suspended, but the air was warm. The smell was neutral. I wasn't in the cave anymore. But I couldn't open my eyes, and my mouth was forced open, my chin and chest wet with drool. My head was wrapped in a web of thin sisal rope. Two knots pressed against my eyelids, forcing them shut. A large knot, wet with my own saliva, filled my mouth. It was scratchy against my tongue and kept me salivating heavily, yet it also prevented me from swallowing, so drool ran down my chin and onto my chest more or less continuously.

"What, pray tell, is a Krampus?" It was Harold's voice asking the question.

I started, then moaned into the gag in relief. I was in his house. I don't know how I knew, but I knew.

"Whaff?" I managed to say through the gag, almost cheerfully. "The gift tag," he said. From the tug I knew it was tied to my right nipple, "it says, 'Merry Christmas from The Krampus."

"Nouoof," I cried. The shock was genuine. I twisted futilely in the ropes. Though I was thankful to be out of that cave I didn't want to be a gift; I wanted to give myself to Harold, not to be given like an ugly sweater, half novelty, half joke. He yanked the tag from me. I moaned; it felt like he'd ripped my nipple off, but I knew from experience with the little clamps he often used on me that it was just

the blood rushing back into pinched tissue.

"How did you get in here? How did you do all this?" Harold asked, genuinely, but not unhappily, perplexed. Two fingertips touched my dripping chin, then ran down my neck and through the saliva running down my chest. Everything changed. My relief was instantly swept away- to be there, to be with him like that, naked, bound, and soaked in my own drool was suddenly the most embarrassing thing I could imagine. My face got hot and my cheeks joined the other parts of my body in their blush. Harold paused a wet fingertip into my bellybutton. He ran it around. He pushed it in and out slowly several times before withdrawing it, leaving me empty and desperate for any touch.

I threw back my head and moaned, "Pleassph," through the gag. "Have it your way," he said, and before I could utter another sound his fingers were on my sex, then inside me. I hadn't even noticed how excited I was, but this was by far the most insulting thing he'd ever done- he was looking the gift horse in the mouth. He thrust them in without fanfare, first one, then another, as deeply as he could reach. And it was obvious; he was checking for semen, and not subtly. He knew someone else had spanked me and left me there for him and he was feeling to see if other liberties had been taken aw well. I can't say I blame him, but it was so humiliating to be examined instead of asked. The burning started in my cheeks and flowed down my chest as I felt myself redden. When he found nothing but my own sex fluid he began finger fucking me slowly. Then he touched me with his thumb just above, rubbing around my clitoral hood gently. I couldn't help but respond, melting there in the harness, hoping for a safe orgasm at last no matter how humiliating it was. But when I was so close I could taste it he withdrew his hand and wiped his fingers in my hair. I mouned in desperation, but Harold had other things on his mind. He spun me slowly.

"What's this?" Harold's voice asked, tugging the rope at the end of the hook in my ass.

"A hookph," I said through the knot gag.

"That's what I thought," he said, suppressing a chuckle.

He touched my burning cheeks and stroked my breasts so gently I shivered. "I don't know who this Krampus is, but he knows exactly what I wanted for Christmas. I think I'm going to start writing to him instead of Santa," he joked, still believing it all a Christmas hoax, that I was offering myself instead of being offered.

I shook my head and tried to say, "No," again.

Harold put his hands on my sore ass and squeezed. Then I felt the head of his warm penis pressing at my sex. I moaned for him to wait. My body was ready, but I wasn't. I didn't want him having me like that. I wanted to explain everything first, but I never got the chance. The penetration was sudden, almost violent. I screamed more from shock than pain as I found myself impaled on his shaft balls deep in one thrust. And before I could come to grips with the sensation he was fucking me, genuinely fucking me- hard.

"Nooooo," I finally managed to whine through the gag on his third or forth stroke, but I was too proud to use my safe-word. I genuinely wanted him, needed him, but I didn't want to be a Christmas sex novelty, not from a thing like the Krampus. By the sixth stroke I'd come. It was a horrid little burp of an orgasm, the kind I used to get when I tried to force one when masturbating. "No," I whined again like a broken record, this time crying. Even at his most dominant Harold had always been considerate lover, but he'd accepted the gift; it was Christmas morning and he was playing with his toy and I couldn't blame him.

But soon I didn't care, because something was growing inside me, an orgasm so intense was building that it frightened me, the kind that even Harold could only give me a few times a year, the kind that made me scream, the kind that left me breathless and reeling, the kind I hated to have in bondage. And the Krampus was watching; I could feel it- maybe it was standing unseen directly behind Harold, too big to be noticed, or maybe it was at the window, or deep in its lair staring with its mind's eye, but it could see us. We all have a hidden fear, a desire inside the darkest part of our souls, that yearning for the degradation we hope we'll never get, but secretly believe we deserve in our darkest moments, and believe should be witnessed so we can never deny it. And at that moment I knew all I wanted on this earth was Harold in me, deeper and harder with every thrust. I needed him. And I needed to wrap my arms around him. And I needed to kiss him. And I needed that damn hook out of my ass. And I needed my aching breasts freed. But most of all I needed to say, 'I love you,' and I didn't need to hear it back because I knew it, because I felt it.

But I had to settle for the fucking, and when I did I began to lose myself in the sensation, in that marvelous feeling of just being the fuck-ee that I rarely find because I can't turn my brain off, but the approaching orgasm was far more powerful than any Krampus. It threatened to take my soul and I wanted it to, and it was close, so close.

Harold thrust into me one last time and froze. Then he started rocking me with vicious little thrusts as he came, as he grunted and ground his teeth, as his hot semen splashed against my cervix. I was so close to the edge, to dropping off in an orgasm that would have rocked the whole world- but it was over. Harold was gasping, leaning against me so he wouldn't collapse as I hung from I knew not what. And inside me he was shrinking. He'd had his gift. He withdrew and some or our juices fell to the hardwood floor with a splat, and some ran hot down the fatty curves of my inner thighs, leaving cold trails as they advanced.

And he was gone.

I hung there alone in my blackened world for the longest time as he recovered, standing a few feet away panting, and I knew he was staring at me the way men do after they've come, wondering why they've just done such a disgusting thing to such a strange creature, trying to find a way to leave, or turning on the TV so they don't have to think about it. Every woman has to deal with that, and with men pretending it doesn't happen- but I didn't care about any of it. Harold loved me.

A minute later something cold pushed between my cheek and the rope holding the gag. The distinctive sound of a scissor and the sudden freedom to speak came like an epiphany. A few snips later my head was free. I could see. I had to blink my eyes a few times to focus. I was in Harold's living room suspended from a crude wooden frame next to his Christmas tree. He kissed me gently on the lips.

"How did you arrange all this?" he asked softly. He was wrapped in the luxurious red patterned robe I'd given him for his birthday. It was more of a smoking jacket than a robe, trimmed in black satin. He looked like a young sexy version of Hugh Hefner in it.

"You wouldn't believe me," I said.

Harold took my full weight from the ropes, reached up and cut them, then gently set me on my feet. He unwrapped my aching breasts. He freed my hands and untied or cut away all vestiges of the harness, except the one rope holding the hook in my ass. He grasped this firmly, and smiling, pulled me to my toes.

"Hey," I complained.

"You're a filthy, filthy girl," he told me. "You need a bath." He wrapped the hook's rope around his hand several times to shorten my leash until his fist was in the small of my back, then marched me

to the bathroom dancing at the end of it like his little puppet.

"Hey," I repeated, trying to up the offense in my voice.

"You're the genius who ended up at the end of a hook- not exactly the smartest fish in the sea, are you?" Harold asked. "And I do have to wonder just what bait they used, because it's set hard," he told me, forcing me to pivot left and right, making me feel very naked, uncomfortably conscious of the arousal signals I was sending to a satiated man.

I gave him my best petulant look, but he just chuckled to himself.

"Now get it ready," he ordered, giving me just enough slack to draw the bath. I knew how he wanted it, three inches of water in the tub, quite hot, with just a pinch of bubble bath, enough to make foam and wash away my sex smell, but not enough to offer even a hint of modesty. I'd done it often enough, sometimes on a leash, but never at the end of a rope like that.

"Good girl," Harold said when it was ready. He had me lean over the edge of the tub and spread my legs.

The hook, its lubrication long since dry, didn't come out easily. It didn't hurt as much as it did going in, but it certainly opened my eyes as the ball stretched my anus before it popped out.

"I'm not even going to ask where you got this," Harold said, examining it, "or the sounds you made when it went in, but I'll save it so I can hear for myself later."

As I stepped into the tub I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror. I was covered with rope marks- ghostly ruddy impressions in my skin that almost made it look like I was still tied. They were deepest in my breasts, which had again taken on their natural shape, but I'm convinced were hanging half an inch lower than when I went to bed Christmas Eve. Their ends, where they'd been

ballooned for maximum exposure, and my ass and sex, were still swollen and glowing pink from the birching.

I looked Harold briefly in the eye then down quickly. I'm not normally self-conscious around him, but I instinctively covered my breasts and turned away. It seemed to amuse him.

"Hands down," he ordered. He never allowed me to cover myself in his presence. "Now sit."

I lowered myself slowly into the water. It burned my sore ass for a few seconds; then it began to feel good. Harold put his hands on me, soaping, rubbing. I felt like a little girl being bathed by Daddy for the last time; neither wants things to change, but both are getting uncomfortable with her naked body as she slowly outgrows Eden. But Harold wasn't my father, and as he gently washed me and massaged my rope marks away I began to feel like a woman again. He leaned in. He kissed me. He gently fondled my breasts until my nipples tightened unbearably.

"Masturbate for me," he commanded easily. It was part of a ritual to be done for ritual's sake- at least that's what I thought when he trained me to do it. Looking back I see he was just making it easier for me. Before Harold I almost never masturbated even though I rarely came with previous lovers. I gave myself to them while maintaining my freedom, and didn't get much pleasure from either act. When I gave my all to Harold he made it clear that my orgasms brought him pleasure, and that I wouldn't be allowed to say, 'I don't need to come every time,' as I'd taught myself. I'd come when it pleased him- and it pleased him often.

I spread my legs as far as I could, pressing them against the smooth porcelain walls of the tub, opened my sex with the first two fingers of my left hand, and rubbed slowly next to my clitoris with the tips of two fingers of my right. Sometimes Harold allowed me to close my eyes if I asked, and if it had been a hard night. "May I …" I

started, but he knew what coming.

"Keep your eyes open. Look into mine," he ordered.

I hated that as much as I loved it, but the most humiliating part of the ritual was having to say his name when I came. I wanted to say it. I longed to say, but I hated having to say it. Soon, very, very soon, that was a moot point. Not even a minute had passed when the waves threatened to break over my consciousness.

"May I come?" I asked.

Harold waited only a few seconds before nodding and saying, "Now," softly.

My shoulders hunched involuntarily. "Harold... Harold..." I repeated, my voice cracking as time slowed, as I melted, as the waves of passion washed me clean. I had to fight to keep my eyes open, to maintain eye contact, and when the tide finally began to ebb I added, "I love you."

"Merry Christmas," Harold said, pulling my right hand to his mouth, gently licking my fingers, then leaning in and kissing me on the lips tenderly.

That was last Christmas. I've questioned my sanity more than once since then, more than once even sitting in that warm bath water knowing Harold loved me. And sometimes it seems like it all happened a lifetime ago. Yet when I close my eyes and think about it for even a moment every detail comes flooding back like I'm watching a movie and I'm the star- and strangely, though the terror is there, and the ecstasy- even the glory, it all seems strangely tinged with ambivalence. I guess that's because I don't know where the story ends. It's all a continuum, and that makes life hard to fathom.

One thing I do know is that Harold still thinks I set the whole thing up, that the frame I was hung from, the hook I was impaled on, even the filthy sisal rope he washed and still binds me with sometimes before making love, were all Christmas gifts from me, given to him in a tableau created with the help of some unknown confederate who knows all our secrets- and he's half right. I never tried to tell him the truth, and I doubt I ever will. Even as a child I didn't believe my grandfather. Monsters don't walk the earth at night, not even in the service of saints. Our world has moved beyond monsters, which means it's moved beyond heroes, but both are real in their own way. We just have to open our eyes to see them.

the end

(with credit to Titivillus- for his usual contributions)

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