

## **PHAM NUWEN**

The Man from K.R.A.M.P.U.S.

250 words

"Timmy Claus... Over here!" I called, raising my pistol. He looked up from the pile of day-old cookies, crumbs spilling down his tangled beard.

"Ho? Ho ho ho?" he grunted, disoriented by the change.

I squeezed the trigger, left the body where it fell behind the bakery. By morning, the body would dissolve down to a gingerbread-scented goo.

I called it in on the radio: "KRAMPUS HQ, this is Agent Blitzen. Timmy Claus has been neutralized."

The snow crunched under my feet in the quiet streets. This year was a bad one. The Kringle had planted their agents through many of the city malls, infecting anyone who sat on their laps with the Claus Virus.

"What's ho-ho-happening?" came a small, desperate voice from the window of an old apartment building. The stairway was dark, the door unlocked. Mom and Dad weren't home, maybe they were last-minute shopping.

"Ho-ho-who are you?" she asked. Her hair was already white, the beard was coming in, but her skin hadn't started the hideous transformation into that damned red "suit" yet.

"I'm Santa's little helper," I said. "Afraid you're getting coal this year."

She didn't like taking the charcoal tablets, but they'd kill the virus and leave her with nothing worse than permanently white hair.

My radio crackled. "Agent Blitzen, Claus pack sighted at Eastmont Mall."

I stood up from the bedside. "I have to go now, but you'd better watch out--Santa Claus is coming to town."

## **Guiness13**

Flicker 238 Words

Jack tore open his presents in the flickering glow of Christmas lights and his father's smile. He held up the sleek tablet with a grin and flung his arms around his father.

"Thank you!" he whispered.

That night, in the pale green glow of the screen, his eyes opened wide and unfocused. He sat that way for a long moment. Then the screen went black. He fell slack and slept, the tablet clutched in his hands.

#

In the still hours before dawn, footsteps padded down to the kitchen. A drawer opened and shut. Metal glinted in the night.

#

Jack woke late. He opened his eyes and winced at the buzz in his head. The kitchen was still. The coffee-maker sat empty on the counter. He fixed himself a bowl of cereal and ate, waiting for the creaks and groans of the floorboards upstairs.

There came nothing but silence.

He stood at the foot of the stairs and called up. He crept to his father's door. The door whispered open over the carpet and he saw the mound on the bed. Saw the slashes, saw the knife. He opened his mouth to scream.

Instead, he went slack. In his room, the tablet flashed.

#

In the quiet morning air, Jack stepped out of his door and joined the lines of blank-eyed children shuffling in their pajamas and slippers. Each of them clutched a knife, and quirked their heads to listen.