

GIFT OF THE KRAMPUS

III



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fiction

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

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Chapter I

Success isn't all it's cracked up to be. It's better than failure, that's for sure, but there's something about the status quo that makes my feet begin to itch no matter how good that status quo is, and it's been good. I knew I wanted the finer things in life when I was quite young. When you grow up and don't have them the world is a candy store and you're locked outside- in the rain. So I worked my ass off, body and soul. I made them open the candy store for me; more than that, I made them hold the door and let me in first. It's not really that

difficult if you're prepared to treat everyone in the world the way the worst people treat you. And when I had the money, and the things, and the best body money could by, I married up, to Miranda, a woman who looks good, and more importantly, looks good standing next to me. More than my Rolex or Feragomos, she is the perfect accessory for my annual Christmas Eve party, the ideal venue to let everyone know the end of the year score. As Scrooge learned at the end of *A Christmas Carol*, generosity is a tool, and you can buy love.

Am I being cynical? No, I'm being honest. Dickens would be pleased. At least I think he would. I've never found the time to read his stuff, but I think I've got the gist of it. Any good TV writer can put a novel's worth of ideas into 22 minutes of program time, 44 minutes if it's long. If they can't the producer will find a hack who can.

"Is everything all right?" Miranda asked as we stood at the top of the formal staircase. As usual, that Christmas Eve, she was close to perfection in her shoulder baring formal gown. There's nothing wrong with Miranda, other than, if you'll excuse me for saying it- being a bit Miranda-ish. She grew up with the trappings of wealth. She expects them. But other than that, as trophy wives go, I can't complain. She holds up her end of the bargain. She looks great. I don't know how long she spends on the tanning bed she had installed in the gym I had built at the end of the garden near the guest house, but nobody's trophy wife is more deeply bronzed. I don't know how many salads she eats or how much time she spends on the

treadmill sweating, but nobody's trophy wife is trimmer. I don't know how much she spends on teeth whitening, but nobody's trophy wife's gleam brighter. The only fault I could find as I stared at her at the top of those stairs was that she was another year older, but as I said, she was still the best of the bunch, and probably would be for a few more years.

"Show me your teeth," I said, and as she bared them I did a last check for food debris and lipstick particles; the whiter they are the more that stuff stands out. "You're fine," I said and gave her a pat on the ass. Maybe it was a little higher a few parties ago, but it was still nice and firm, still good enough to make most men envious, and that was the important thing. She looped her arm through mine and we descended as the clock struck eight, making our entrance exactly the way our party planner planned.

So Miranda was everything she was supposed to be, and we were arm in arm, slowly descending into a sea of the best people who weren't quite as good as us, and I fully intended to fuck her after the party because I couldn't stop thinking that besides the clingy gown and expensive jewelry the only thing she was wearing was a pair of ungodly expensive shoes that flashed nearly her whole foot with every step, as her tits were still high enough that she could get away with a braless gown design, and her mother taught her that panties can leave look ruining horizontal lines under expensive fabric. Yet somehow as the perspective changed, as we went from towering over the crowd to being just above it, I found my eye wandering. And when I looked at Miranda when we'd become part of it, in that

instant before her face turned to mine radiant and loving and happy and content and knowing what would happen after she put her face away and I helped her out of her gown after the party, I could swear I saw her's roving as well. Then she leaned into me, and told me how wonderful it all was and thanked me.

“You deserve it all and more,” I said, squeezing her hand, both of us well aware the party wasn’t for her.

Our custom home, dramatically set at the base of Mt. Diablo, just outside Blackhawk’s gated community of cookie cutter McMansions, was the best I, Miranda, her mother, and two architects could imagine. The room we entered was nearly the size of the house I grew up in. And it truly was a spectacle decorated for the winter holiday, its focal point a Christmas tree glittering in gold and white and crowned with a crystal top star that nearly brushed the sixteen foot ceiling. When I say crowned I mean there’s a crystal star suspended above the tree giving the appearance of it being on top. Our tree topper is far to heavy for any tree to hold, so it’s held above with some extremely fine high strength wire and it looks like it’s sitting there to anyone who gazes up to the top of that perfect tree.

But I didn’t put a single ornament or light on it. I called the interior decorator in mid-October and let her coordinate it all with the party planner and caterer. It magically appeared one day in early December while I was a work, and would vanish before New Year’s Eve by which time nobody can stomach another chorus of Joy to the World even if they can just about stand it before.

I wasn't completely ignorant of my celebration, though. I knew what was in some of the gifts under the sparkling tree, all in matching gold wrapping paper with contrasting dark ribbons in varying shades of burgundy to give 'the scene' some 'life.' At least that's how the designer explained it when I signed off on the sketches. She seemed to think those dark ribbons were quite important, but back to what was under them and the shining paper. My personal assistant spent a couple of days going through the catalogs and came up with a short list, gifts Miranda might like, and I made selections from that. And I did personally take an afternoon to go to Shreve & Company to select the diamond and platinum necklace that would be Miranda's 'after church' gift and shimmer against her olive skin whenever she wore it. If you want to be successful in America you not only have to choose the right jeweler, but the right church as well, usually one where the Minister -and it does have to be a Minister, not a Priest, and not a self avowed Preacher- doesn't stress that 'eye of a needle' stuff and like-minded people can worship their God and network with the right parishioners as they see fit. The right Rabbi will work as well in some parts of the country, but its easier with a Minister, and conversion can be a bitch if you're not already circumcised.

"We should mix," I told Miranda softly.

She inclined her head, detached herself from my arm, and we each went our separate ways greeting business contacts, neighbors, and acquaintances. She worked the room counterclockwise, and I did the same clockwise, as per plan.

So everything was just fine, couldn't be better, except I hated the party and had itchy feet and was scanning the crowd like a lion looking for that perfect impala to invite for dinner. So I don't know why it came as a surprise to me when my eyes latched onto something incredibly pretty in the distance. Short, alabaster skinned, perky, she was everything Miranda wasn't, and best of all she was dressed like a Christmas present- not the kind of present you'd find under my tree, the kind you'd see in a holiday display at a store that ends in 'mart.' Her dress was green, sequined, and short, very short, showing off shapely legs clad in red hose. Her pumps were shiny, gold, and perfectly garish with heels three inches high if they were one, which matched her handbag and little pillbox hat.

I spent several minutes wading through the crowd, saying my hellos to people I didn't give a rat's ass about, getting closer to her with each strategic move. Her makeup was as bad as her clothes. Miranda would have called her a clown. Miranda's mother would have called her a whore. Her lipstick was too red; there was too much of it; her base was visible from ten feet away, and her blush wasn't blended at all well.

"Thank you so much for coming. It means the world to me. And your name is?" I asked when I finally got to her.

"Finley."

"Have we met?"

"No, I came with Erica, the Lester's daughter. We go to Stanford together."

"Oh, the Lester's, such dear friends," I said, broadening my

smile- didn't know them, didn't care to- and that's nothing against Stanford. It produces some world class money makers.

Miranda was on the far side of the room, stuck talking to a bodybuilder type, the kind of guy she hates, probably somebody's personal trainer there as a hanger on, but she was doing her part, pretending to hang on to every word he said, laughing, touching his shoulder.

I made my move. "Stanford, you must be awfully bright," I told Finley. She was probably a legacy.

She beamed. I think I saw a hint of a blush under her makeup. "Thanks."

"So I imagine you know you're standing under the mistletoe."

She looked up. We were a good two feet away, but I leaned in and kissed her anyway. To my surprise I felt her tongue graze my lips just before she pulled away.

"This is a great place you have," she said.

"Would you like the grand tour?"

She nodded, giving me a smile that was anything but innocent. It took a minute for me to get her to a door, through a hall, the pantry, and finally into the garden, which though decorated, wasn't being used because it was a fairly cold night and the planner thought those portable propane heaters were too down market. It was alive with fairy lights, though. I don't know how many tens of thousands there were, but it takes two Mexicans the best part of a week to install them every year, and like everything else at that house they were tasteful, all white, and only on tree trunks and the heaviest branches- none

on the lawns, or the house, or the bushes. Like everything else around me it tasteful, not fun.

“Where are you from?” I asked.

“Concord.”

“A local girl.”

“Yeah, but... our house isn’t anything like this,” Finley told me as we made our way down one of the winding paths towards the guest house. “Is that one yours, too?”

“Bought and paid for,” I said.

“Who lives there?” she asked.

“Nobody... Kato moved out a long time ago,” I told her with a laugh.

She replied with a blank face.

“You don’t know what I’m talking about, do you?”

She shook her head.

“It’s a guest house,” I said.

I smiled, and her expression went from child-like to womanly in an instant. “I know what an empty house means, guest or regular,” she told me.

We stopped at the front door. “Would you like to see inside?”

Chapter II

I open the door. Finley seems surprised it isn’t locked. She turns and stares up at me, lips parted. I touch her hair, then

pull the little hat from her head and drop it in one of the two immense flower pots framing the door, an arch covered with wisteria, now just a mesh of bare branches, between them.

“That’s a dare, isn’t it?” Finley asks.

“This is just for tonight,” I tell her.

She smiles. “Kick me to the curb when it’s over. I’ll still come back if you call.”

“Cross that threshold and I’m going to make love to you,” I warn.

Her face is so unlike Miranda’s, round, white, not a hint of a cheekbone showing, but more importantly it’s open; it’s eager. Finley jumps backward over threshold, kicks off her shoes with a grin and says, “If you can catch me,” then takes off running down the hall.

I’m behind her instantly. By instinct she turns into the largest of the three bedrooms, the smallest of which is my home office which Miranda won’t have in the main house. Finley launches herself towards the bed like a base runner in squeeze play. She seems surprised when we land on the bed simultaneously, my arms and legs straddling her. We bounce once before I pull her dress’ zipper from her neck to the crack of her ass.

“Hey,” she protests, rolling over, but all she does is assist me in rolling her upper torso out of the garment, and as I stand I manage to slide it down her legs and off before launching it into the corner. She stretches for it before remembering she isn’t wearing a bra and covering her chest, not that she has need to. Her breasts are young, high, firm, and natural. She’s

nowhere near fast enough to keep me from getting a good look, but with her hands on her chest I can grab for the waistband of her pantyhose. They're gone in one, no, two firm tugs, accompanied by the sound of tearing- looks like she'll be making the walk of shame bare legged- and the rended garment sails towards her dress, leaving the girl naked on the bed.

“You dick,” she tells me with a laugh, scrambling to reach the head of the bed and get under the covers.

As she turns I get a look at her bare ass for the first time, round, wonderful, jiggling as she moves- then I see them. I grab her ankles and stop her cold. She looks over her shoulder, and her smile vanishes when she sees the look on my face, the wide eyes, the open mouth. Her milk white skin is marked with the distinctive red stripes of a single tail whip expertly applied in near perfectly spaced parallel stripes, and I should know. I’m an expert on the subject, or as much of an expert as a man who’s never held one in his hand can be, but I do have a high speed internet connection and a Black Card that lets me pay for the depravity Miranda won’t join me in. I’ve sat in front of my computer in my office 20 feet away, the door locked, and gone on virtual private interactive tours of The Foundry, the internet’s most notorious website, where I’ve slowly looked over half a dozen naked women in cages, selected the specimen of my choice (always the one who looks most like Miranda) and had her stripped, tied, reddened or even welted with the whip of my choice- and then fucked, all live via webcam, all at my direction. It’s a bit pricey, but I’ve

never minded paying for quality. What other good can money do?

Finley smiles nervously. “I’ve been a bad girl,” she tells me.

I pull her closer and examine her ass carefully. “You sure have.”

“Look, I’m not a pervert, but...”

I shut her up with a good hard slap on the ass. “Oh, yes, you are,” I say. “You practice the worst kind of moral depravity.” I hit her again, leaving a pink hand print on her cheek, “and I’m going to punish you for it, you loose moraled little tart.” I hit her again.

I think Finley sees me wince. Miranda doesn’t exactly welcome spankings. The ones I’ve given her have been mostly playful in nature, so it comes as something of a surprise to know Newton’s physics still apply to corporal punishment- for every action there’s an equal but opposite reaction, or, in simple terms- it hurts your hand as much as the victim’s ass to spank someone.

“Maybe you should use something stronger,” Finley suggests. “Otherwise I’ll never learn my lesson.” Her little purse is just within reach. Folded within is a small flogger made entirely of a twine-thick, but silky cords. Bundled together and tied they form a handle. Projecting from it are dozens of tails about eight inches long, each with a tiny hand tied knot in the end.

“Stand,” I order. She does and I sit on the edge of the bed. “Hands behind your head.”

“Put a finger in me while you whip me and I’ll come,” Finley tells me, her firm nipples hardening from medium to well done as she speaks. “It all depends on whether you want me to love or hate it. Me? I love to love it and I love to hate it. Just fuck me like a bitch when it’s over and I’m happy... or don’t and I still am.”

“Suck it,” I say, offering my left thumb to her. I get the idea, and right now I just want her to shut up.

Finley takes the proffered digit in her warm moist mouth.

“Get it nice and wet.”

She starts performing fellatio on it like it’s a tiny dick. I’m tempted to smile, but keep my face stern, pulling my thumb from her when it’s soaked and slick. I help to ease the girl over my lap, lowering her with my right hand while I slip the moistened thumb of my left into her sex, sliding a finger on each side of her clitoris as I do.

Finley gasps.

“Spread your legs a little,” I tell her. “I don’t want you to clench... There, that’s good.”

I pick the flogger up from the side of the chair. I’m light headed. I have to fight not to tremble. It seems like an unseen door has opened and I’m living a whole new life, the life I always wanted but was too scared to pursue. It was so much easier to get a house, and a guest house, and a pool, and a BMW M for weekdays and a Ferrari for weekends, but Finley got the flogger- and she carries it with her.

I knew I had two choices. Hit her with it or pass out. I chose the former, and I knew what to do. I’d seen it a hundred

times. Start slow. Ease her into it.

I alternate one cheek, then the other, mesmerized as the tails break against her ass like waves. As her page white skin takes on a pink tinge Finley's sex gets warmer, wetter. She squirms a little, moans a little, satisfaction and discomfort combined, and it's the subtlety of that sound that I'm not prepared for, that you don't hear when watching it on the internet. Combined with the sound of the flogger it was almost overpowering. The initial impacts were soft, almost musical, brushes on a snare drum, but not quite. As I swing progressively harder the sound takes on an angry sound, not loud- brief impulses, almost sizzling, like steak cooking fast in the next room. Finley jumps with each impact. She squirms, but keeps herself centered on my lap, her sex impaled on my thumb, and I'm actively masturbating her to mask the pain, a finger on either side of her clitoris. She's returning the favor, though not intentionally, her thigh rubs my erection through my pants with every movement.

The pink in her cheeks is almost angry now. She's slipping away, losing herself in the pain and pleasure. I have to be careful not to overdo it, to balance one with the other. That's the way the game is played.

“Filthy... filthy.... whore,” I say, forcing the words, punctuating each one with my hardest stroke yet.

On ‘whore’ Finley comes.

It's not a subtle orgasm. She trembles. She cries out. She tries to ride it, but I'm not having any of that. I throw the flogger aside, pull my hand from her sex and raise her to a

standing position. She's blushing. I can read the humiliation and anger she feels at having been 'cheated,' but that's the point. I grab her beneath her armpits and push her back on the bed, then rip my clothes from my body and fall on her. I know I should use a condom but I don't care. I find her sex and press- hard, until it opens.

Finley winces. "That hurts."

"You love it, bitch," I whisper in her ear, then bite it gently.

She's tighter, hotter, and wetter than Miranda, and that mental comparison is the kindest thought I've had of her since slipping away from the party and I don't care. She's different from the wife I'd been sentenced to monogamy with for the last ten years and I find that unbelievably liberating as I push myself balls deep, as I begin to pump, as the woman beneath me begins to respond. She wraps her arms around me. She squeezes with her legs.

This isn't for her, though. It's for me.

"Wait," Finley says.

I ignore her. I don't care if her hair is pinched. I don't care if she wants to pivot her hips or rearrange her breasts. She's getting fucked right now and that's all there is to it.

"Please," she says, loosening her grip.

"No."

"I thought I heard something."

"Shut up," I tell her, increasing my pace, taking deeper, faster strokes. She gasps once or twice then grips me harder than before, punctuating each of my thrusts with a little sigh. She's still distracted, still trying to reposition herself, still

trying to delay me, so I think we're both surprised when she comes- loud and deep. She shakes. She drives her fingernails into my back. "Oh, God."

"That's right," I tell her, pounding her like a jackhammer.

I'm seconds away from unloading when there's a blinding flash and unbelievable pain in my testicles. It's as if they've been slammed in a door and that door is moving, pulling them off. At first I think something's gone wrong with my body, testicular torsion if I'm lucky, but it has to be a stroke or some kind of seizure to feel like this. Then I feel the irresistible tug and know it's real, physical, external. Something is behind me, pulling them, pulling me. Before I can turn my head I'm yanked off Finley like a stray dog caught on a pure bred. I ejaculate all over the dark jacquard duvet as I'm dragged backward, humiliating failed pleasure mixes with the pain and my mind flashes to Miranda, but even in an adrenaline fueled rage she isn't that strong, and whatever is gripping my scrotum isn't one of her soft well manicured hands; it's rough, and hot, and slimy.

Finley lets out a shocked yelp as she's emptied. Her face curdles and her hands rise instinctively to cover herself. Eyes wide, mouth open, there's the briefest moment of silence before her scream fills the room, but this is no act, no sex play- it's genuine terror, something I've never seen before, not in person. I claw impotently at the bed, but I'm still going backwards. My head pivots as I fall to the floor and I see something out of a nightmare, but in mid-struggle I can neither question whether I'm dreaming nor if I've gone insane. It's as

real as Finley, my Christmas tree, or my Ferrari, and it is very much a monster, so large it has to stoop to avoid the ceiling. It stands on a pair of hooves beneath legs of rippling muscle that are easily seen even through their covering of filthy matted black fur. Its torso is half human, half animal, with powerful arms ending in dark human-like hands, but larger, and tipped with mottled yellow claws so threatening they'd give a lion chills. Its head is goat-like, but larger, much larger, with black and red eyes that seem to flash with every movement, and giant rippling horns. But the thing's snout is no grass eating goat's. It's long and pointed, that of a carnivore or carrion eater, filled with jagged yellow teeth that look strong enough to cut through bone. None of that is as bad as what it's pulling me towards it with- not its hands, or teeth, of which I'm still out of reach. No, what it has wrapped securely around my scrotum is its tongue- a green, slimy, fully articulated organ many feet long that looks like a pond rotted rope- green, rough, and covered with slime, but hot, nearly steaming.

I try to scream. I try to speak, to beg, but nothing comes out, and as the fear grows it becomes harder to move. I have no word for the thing that has me. I've never heard of the Krampus. It wasn't part of my culture, and if it had been, I would have thought it a myth, something to scare children, to make sure they grew up timid, prevent them from becoming competitors of men like me.

As I begin to hyperventilate the thing turns its head and slides me across the hardwood floor on the fallen duvet, letting its tongue extend to almost a dozen feet, letting it go slack

everywhere but its grip around my balls which it tightens, doubtless a warning not to resist or interfere as it leaps to the foot of the bed in one floor shaking bound. It grabs Finley by the neck with one of its monstrously clawed hands. It begins to squeeze, but the hand is so large the massive claws close behind her neck, not in it. She lifts her hands to try to free herself, but it's a futile gesture. The creature may not even notice her hands on his. The girl's eyes widen. Her mouth opens. She tries to speak, but only gurgling sounds and a half voiced moan escape it before she slumps over, unconscious.

Then the creature's head turns towards me. It begins to draw its tongue in, taking up the slack until its taught. I'm already trembling like a child as it starts dragging me slowly across the floor towards it mouth. I can't fight it. I can't escape it. I'm too scared to speak and know by the look on its face that pleading will do no good.

"Please," I finally manage to whisper. My voice cracks. I raise my hands and knees to my chest as I'm slid on my back. I try one more time. "Pl..." I manage to say.

It cuts me off with a snort of disgust. Its breath passes over me like a warm gust. It smells of sulfur and death. Then the corners of its mouth at the back of its snout rise in a kind of smile that isn't a smile. There's another snort and a bulge of contracting muscle races down its tongue like a basketball forced down a gun barrel in a cartoon, but it's all too real. It takes a fraction of a second for it to get from the beast's mouth to my tightly gripped scrotum, which it hits like a hammer accompanied by a sickening sound, like a gloved fist into a

heavy punching bag. The pain is instant, white hot, and sickening at the same time. The scream I hear is my own and the room flashes white, like a dozen old fashioned flash bulbs going off. Then everything fades to black.

Chapter III

I awaken in near blackness. At first I think I'm dreaming, but the pain in my testicles radiating into my lower abdomen is all too real. I'm in a stinking burlap bag, its top knotted, and the world beneath me is alive, undulating, occasionally gasping, or moaning as it moves. In the distance I can hear screams and wailing echoes. Through the weave of the bag I can sometimes see firelight, but it flickers, and things block it occasionally, leaving me mostly in utter blackness. As I try to fight off an upwelling and sickening terror something rolls on top of me. I'm fairly certain it's some other poor soul in another bag, maybe even Finley, but I have no mercy. I'm not about to allow myself to be buried. I begin to flail. As I do I lose my balance roll down the writhing slope. It's a slow tumble, but there's no way to extend my limbs, to arrest the fall, and I accelerate, tumbling head over feet until deflected, then side over side until I stop with a jolt against something solid.

The burlap tears with sickening sound. As it does the bag falls away and I see the creature standing above me. It's nine,

ten, eleven feet tall, maybe more. It's wielded one of its immense claws like a knife, tearing the bag, but not me within.

I have no idea where Finley is or how long I've been unconscious. All I know is that I'm in a cavern so large and so dark I can neither see its other end, nor tell how high it is. Behind me is a steep slope of sacks I was part of until seconds ago, each containing a struggling sinner, piled so high it disappears into the infinite darkness of the abyss above. Ahead of me is the creature, holding a bundle of flaming birch branches that never seems to be consumed, and their light is the only illumination in that cavern. The bundle makes a high pitched whistling noise as the creature swings it with such velocity that the fire is nearly extinguished, becoming faint blue streaks that paint the air. It's followed by a horrible crack as the birch branches wheal my back. My scream echo off the cavern walls as the flames regain their intensity. I jump to my feet as the bundle whistles again, this time finding my bare buttocks.

The thing drives me towards a small alcove in the cavern's wall where the horrible noises are coming from, the sound of its hooves on the rocky cave floor are almost more terrifying than the flaming flail in its cocked arm. By its dim light I see the alcove is only about 10 or 15 feet deep, maybe half as wide, and just tall enough for an average sized man to enter without ducking. At its end, cowering as the creature advances, are more than half a dozen others, men and women, young and old, equally naked, their skin also marked. They cringe in unison as the birch bundle slashes across my ass

again, but they aren't the source of the horrible noises.

They're too close, and too few, to be generating the agonies that fill the space. And that's when I noticed something different about them. Their eyes register the same terror they must see in mine, but they're also hungry, expectant. They cringe around a rope hanging from the dark rock above, a rope covered with a black goo the consistency of crude oil, which seems to be flowing slowly down it. The rope descends into a shaft, from which heat and wisps of smoke rise- and that is the source of the echoing torments, and as I run headlong towards them to avoid another lash from the birch I can just make out an odd gurgling sounds coming from the hole that's even more frightening than the distorted screams and moans of despair.

Fear grips me and I stop. For an instant the creature behind doesn't seem as bad as this cowering mass of naked humanity ahead. Then the cavern shakes with hoof-steps as the creature bends and fills the narrow passage, advancing through it completely unencumbered by its own bulk. Before I can move a mighty snort reverberates through the space, the light dims and the air shrieks as the birch branches come down on my back again like half a dozen stripes of fire. I yelp and jump forward and they pounce, that group of people lunges towards me like one predator intent on a kill. I'm seized by a dozen hands, and tossed into the shaft like a pebble into a pond.

I grab the rope to keep from plummeting, but greased as it is it barely slows me and I slide rapidly into the shaft. I look up at my assailants, but they're already looking towards the creature, waiting for it to empty the next bag, and that's when

I recognize the horrible choice they made. Either help force others down the rope or go themselves. Tempting as it was to judge them, had I thought faster I would have joined them in a second, not hesitated to have thrown the weakest one of them down the rope so I could replace her, then happily shoved every being in every one of those sacks down the rope to keep from going myself, but it's too late for that.

I grip for my life as the echoing horror grows louder, more distinct. Intelligible individual screams occasionally rise above the background drone. I spread my legs and push them against the shaft's walls, but they're worn smooth, and covered in the same greasy ooze as the rope. It doesn't really matter because in a matter of moments the shaft has widened to a point where I can no longer reach the walls. I have no choice but to grip the rope with my thighs again to keep from accelerating down the rope. When I've slid about seventy-five feet I feel the rope jerk. Looking up I see an older woman begin her slide. She begs. She screams, but gravity pulls her like it pulls me.

Looking down I see dim flashes, feel occasional bursts of hot air rise past me. Then all at once the relatively narrow passage the rope is suspended in widens into a chasm of impossible size; a dozen football stadiums wouldn't fill it- a small mountain wouldn't fill it. It makes the cavern I've just come from with its slope of struggling sacks look insignificant. Like the cavern it's hard to fathom its exact dimensions, at least with one glance. The space is randomly illuminated by sheets of dim yellow flame that cling to its inky black walls, burning black pitch that seems to ooze from every

inch of them. The flames flash and dance across them, then die away before flaring up again, sometimes in the same place, sometimes hundreds of yards away. But the most impressive thing about that chasm isn't its size, or the fire. It's the odor. It's alive with the smell of sex, new sex, old sex, disgusting and intoxicating in its purity, in its lack of anything else, in its ability to arouse me instantly even in my terror- because I know I'm dead. I'm a thousand feet from the inky bottom if I'm ten. I can't tell where the rope ends, but I know it can't go all the way down, and know equally well that when it ends I'll inevitably plummet to whatever is down there waiting for me, and the best I can do is hope for a quick end because whatever it is will be worse than anything I can imagine.

I grip the rope as tightly as I can, but don't seem to slow at all. And even if I did, I'd never stop the woman above me, or whomever is coming after her. As I slide I find myself covered with more and more of the disgusting slime from the rope. It's as if the rope isn't covered with it, but is oozing it, with greater rapidity the further I go. Not only is it impossibly slippery, it's heavy. I feel like I'm accelerating. After sliding what must have been hundreds of feet I can see something beneath me. It's like the surface of a turbulent lake, but black, and moving in slow motion. It's the blackest thing I've ever seen, but it also shines, reflecting harsh flashes of light coming off its tumultuous waves.

Plunging into those black waves is the worst fate on earth, if indeed this is still the earth and not some region of hell too horrible for Dante to have described, and I only have one

choice left, whether or not to come before the plunge and my inevitable destruction in the waves below. I'm as erect as I've ever been, and squeezing that rope with my legs has placed my manhood against it, giving just enough slippery friction that it seems built as the world's most disgusting masturbation machine, and one last orgasm before I die doesn't seem like such a bad thing, even one as revolting as this. But I have to hurry. I'm nearly half way to the bottom. There can't be much rope left.

The cries are getting even louder, more distinct. Looking down I see people. The lake is filled with them. Then I see faces, covered with the slime their eyes look up in desperation. I can make out individual cries of despair, individual prayers unanswered. I will myself to come, to suffer the little death before joining them in the big one. I'm right on the edge, and as I'm about to let go the rope ends.

Falling and denied simultaneously.

I scream.

The plunge is dreamlike, fast and slow at the same time as the lake of despair rises to meet me, and in terror I realize it's no lake at all. It's not made of liquid, but a writhing mass of humanity, all covered in the horrible, slippery, black slime. I hit its surface at speed and plummet deep beneath the surface, sliding easily between the seams of greased flesh. When I come to a stop I can flail my arms and legs as arms and legs flail against me, but I can't move, can't breathe. Then I discover I can grab ankles. My hands slip on the smooth lubed flesh, but I can tighten my grip so that they can't pull their feet

free and get away, and as I pull others down I push myself up until, ready to pass out from lack of oxygen, I break the surface and gulp the air greedily.

Stay above the morass, I tell myself. Keep your lungs filled with air- breathe. It's a good idea, but the same one every other terrified soul in that seething pit has. We're all desperately trying to do the same- that or fuck the person nearest us, or to keep from getting fucked if we can hold out, because once the embrace is made the lovers sink, and don't rise again. I watch in horror as it happens half a dozen times in the space of three minutes. For the longest time I try to resist the urges, but it's all too clear that the goo is an aphrodisiac, and there's an ocean of naked flesh swimming against me. It's no good trying to abstain. Flesh rubs on flesh, and even in panic reacts.

We'll all submit to it in the end, but some are stronger than others. Near me a woman violently rejects the advances of several would-be suitors while struggling to stay on top of the writhing pile. Her breasts heave to the surface, their nipples like oil covered rocks. She clammers on top of me and tries to push me under to escape the hands reaching for her. Her open sex rubs against my shoulder, then arm as she slides slowly back down, and it's that last touch that does it. She tenses in orgasm. She throws her head back and freezes, letting out one last shriek of ecstasy which is stifled as the heavy ooze closes over her head, leaving just a few viscous bubbles behind where she sank until another struggler eagerly fills her place. I

feel her hands try to grab my leg and pull me down, but it slips free and she becomes less than unimportant as she vanishes forever.

Nearby a set of panicked eyes catch mine. I don't know how I recognize them. They're just a pair of eyes peering from a face so covered in ooze none of its features stand out- but they're Miranda's. I know that, and instantly know how she got there, why she seemed so enthralled by that personal trainer. And he's there to, clinging to her, arms wrapped around her waist. He's impaled on her and she's trying to get free as he fucks her like a five dollar whore. He rocks her back on top of another man, pushing him down until they slide off and begin to sink. I see Miranda's hands and feet reaching as she's pushed beneath the black goo; then they vanish. I struggle over several squirming bodies and reach down for her. I find her hand, but it's too slippery to grip. My other hand grabs her hair, at least I hope it's her hair. I pull, getting purchase by standing on the man's shoulder's, separating them, pushing him down as I pull Miranda up.

She pops to the surface with a gasp, coughing up some the goo as she does. As she draws a breath I mount her- balls deep in one unexpected thrust with the aid or the slippery ooze. She screams in shock. She tries to climb on top of me, but I hold her to me, fucking her the best I can while keeping her from slipping away. "Miranda," I say, and she recognizes me. Her legs and arms wrap tightly around me as I begin to pump for all I'm worth. It's all I can do. There is no escape. We both know that. We sink beneath the ooze. Soon the space above us

vanishes. We're being kicked down by feet above us, pulled down by hands below, the space becomes more densely packed as we sink. Movement becomes harder. The grabbing hands lose their strength as their owners dissolve, slowly becoming the goo they fought, the lubricant that lured them to sink.

I can't breathe, can't see; my lungs and eyes burn. I no longer know which way is up as we sink deeper, as the pressure increases, but I don't stop thrusting my hips as hard as I can, afraid I'll suffocate or dissolve before I reach the one worthwhile goal I've ever had. And as I'm about to give up it happens. I freeze in orgasm. It's as unbearable as not being able to breathe, as perfect as all the sunrises I chose to sleep through. I can't fight the blackness, can't stop the blackness, can't escape the slippery blackness claiming me, but the last thing I do is inject something white and sticky deep into Miranda, and feel her body shake as she accepts the gift. Then it all fades away.

We awaken in each others' arms. It's Christmas day. I can tell from the terror in Miranda's wide eyes that she wants to dismiss it as a dream, or drunken hallucination, but we're nearly stuck together with something black, viscous, and slippery, yet growing tacky. It covers the bed as well as our naked bodies. I know for sure the sheets, the pillowcases, the comforter, the pillows, and likely the mattress will have to be replaced. More disturbing still, there are no footprints leading to the bed. We don't know whether we're wallowing in the

remains of Finley and the personal trainer, whether they've somehow managed to escape as well, or whether they're still struggling in that lake, and I know we'll never seek them out for fear they'll turn up missing.

We look into each other eyes and breathe deeply. The terrors of the night have been replaced by the terror of the day-and its hope.

“Merry Christmas,” I say.

“Is it?” she replies in a whisper. Then our lips touch, black on black, in the most disgusting and magnificent kiss ever recorded, and we have our answer.

The end

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About the author

J. Manque is a writer based near San Francisco, California. He's currently working on a million word magnum opus about life and politics in the 1990s. It will likely be released as three or four novels. The first, tentatively entitled ***Love on Concrete***, is scheduled for release in print and eBook form shortly. Here's a brief synopsis-

In the late summer of 1994 an act of civil disobedience triggers a chance meeting between an amateur dominatrix and an IT specialist, resulting in an intense psychological wrestling match that mirrors the politics of change of the mid 1990s. It ends with a torrid confrontation in a rundown motel in Reno's dirty heat hours before the 'Republican Revolution' changes America in ways that are still echoing through the world today. In between the two explore the dark shadows of the human psyche reflected in aspects of sexuality never discussed among friends, but always lurking just out of sight in a dark world of sodium vapor lights and diesel choked streets- in short, our world.

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