

# A Christmas Tale

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“Jake, time for bed!”

With a longing sigh the boy drew his eyes away from the window. Ice had formed on the glass in mesmerizing figures. A few flakes of snow were slowly drifting down from the sky and onto the already white ground.

But it wasn't those that had held the boys attention.

It was the lights across the street, at the neighbours house.

Mr. Lewis always had the best Christmas decorations. The amount of lights had to be in the thousands as they framed every corner of the house and all the trees in the yard. On top of that there were the lit up figures – from Snowman to Santa Claus and his reindeer – that made his yard like a playground for children.

Something scratching against the window made Jake turn around and look outside once more. He could have sworn seeing something green disappear past the window frame. He pushed his face against the cool glass to try and see.

“Jake? Did you hear me?” the voice of his mother now came from the door instead of down the hall.

“I saw something, mom,” said Jake and refused to take his eyes away from the winter scene.

She walked over to him and leaned down to see outside. Her hair had the fresh smell of shampoo on it and the red robe she wore was as fluffy and warm as it looked.

“There's nothing out there, honey.”

“But I saw it. It was green and it disappeared,” Jake insisted.

His mother gave him a smile. “Maybe it was one of Santa's elves checking up on you.”

“Really?” asked Jake, excited. He pressed against the glass just a little bit more, hoping to catch a glimpse of what ever it had been.

“But what do you think they'll tell Santa if you don't go to bed now?” asked his mother.

Jake pulled away from the window. “I'm going, I'm going.”

His mother smiled. “That's a good boy. You don't want to end up on the list of naughty kids.”

Jake looked up at his mother. “I've been good this year, haven't I?”

His mother put her hands on her hips and gave the boy an appraising look. "Did you brush your teeth?"

Jake looked down. "No."

A slight frown appeared on his mother's face. "Go do that. Now. And maybe you'll still be on the good kids list."

Jake rushed out of the room and into the bathroom in the middle of the hallway. He needed to use a stand to reach the sink and see himself in the mirror. He had just started brushing his teeth when his brother came in.

"Get out of here, little squirt. I need to use the toilet."

"I'm brushing my teeth," Jake protested with a foamy mouth.

Alex crossed his hands and stared at his little brother. He was the sort any fifteen-year old boy was. Getting long in the arms and legs, voice cracking, a hint of a stub around his chin. As a true metal fan he wore the black shirt of his favourite band, but that was as far as the parents had allowed him to go. No dying his hair black or growing it long.

They'd said it would make him look like a girl.

"Hurry up," said Alex and watched as Jake rushed to finish brushing his teeth and rinse his mouth with some water.

"I think I saw an elf outside my window," said Jake excitedly as he returned his plastic water cup in its place.

Alex rolled his eyes. "You still believe in that stuff? News flash, squirt. Santa ain't real."

"Is too!" protested Jake.

"Is not."

"Is too!"

Alex sighed and shoved the smaller boy out of the bathroom. He slammed the door shut and locked it, leaving Jake to stare at it defiantly.

"Is too!" he declared one more time at the door before turning around and heading back to his room. At the end of the hallway was Alex's room. His was right next to it. At the other end was his parents room and a guest bedroom. Right opposite to his room was the staircase leading downstairs.

His mother was still in the room. She'd pulled shut the curtains, blocking

out the street light and the even stronger glow of Mr. Lewis's Christmas lights. She held open the covers as Jake climbed into his bed and rested his head on the pillow. He put his hands over the blanket as his mother tucked him in.

“Is dad home yet?” asked Jake. “He promised to read me a bedtime story.”

“He had to stay late at work,” his mother replied. “He promised to make it up to you tomorrow.”

Jake's expression turned sullen. He wanted to protest and complain, but knew it would do not good. It wasn't the first time his father had bailed on a promise and it wouldn't be the last. Even though it always stung, it wasn't enough to make him ruin his mothers evening by throwing a tantrum.

Not any more.

“I'd best just get to sleep then,” Jake said.

His mother smiled and leaned in to kiss his forehead. “That's a good boy.”

She stood up and went to the door. She shut the light and left the door slightly cracked.

Jake soon drifted to sleep.

Just as soon he snapped awake, woken by a bad dream and the feeling of falling. For a moment he still felt like there was nothing but thin air underneath him and it made him tremble.

But the familiar surroundings soon had him calming down.

It was still dark outside. He could tell from what little he saw through the crack in the curtains.

He tried to get back to sleep, but the dream haunted him. After tossing around for a bit he decided it was best to go to his parents. After a bad dream nothing had him sleeping again better than being between the two safest figures in his world.

Jake slithered out of bed and made his way to the door. His bare feet made a suction cup noise against the wooden floor and his pyjamas hung on him overly large as they were.

The hallway was dark, but he knew the way. He passed the stairs and the guest room door. The door to his parents bedroom was slightly open.

Without thinking about it, Jake pushed it open.

There was a figure hunched down at the foot of the big double bed. Enough light from the street lights and Christmas decorations of their own house came in through the windows to let Jake see the red colour of the shirt.

“Santa?” Jake asked, hopeful and curious.

The lurched figure started to rise up.

Antlers that scraped the ceiling became visible.

There was a loud snap followed by moist tearing and a pop.

The figure started to turn around, giving Jake a perfect view of its silhouette. Its snout extended out like a horse's. There was a bobble of hair on its chin. There was the shape of a hand in its mouth. Its jaws parted, revealing a row of sharp teeth.

The hand disappeared in its mouth with a loud crunch.

Red glowing eyes peered down at Jake. Claw like hands reached out towards him.

The boy screamed and turned to run away. He ran down the hallway and straight to his brother's room. He fumbled with the door handle for a moment before getting it to open. Quickly, Jake slipped inside and slammed the door shut. He remembered to lock it only a moment later.

A night lamp was lit, giving the room some light. A drowsy Alex peered at him from under the blankets. “What are you doing, Jake?”

Jake rushed to the bed. “A monster. There's a monster in mom and dad's bedroom!”

Alex groaned. “If you had a bad dream go to mom.”

“There's a monster there,” said Jake, nearly in tears.

“There are no monsters,” said Alex.

There was a heavy thump at the bedroom door. Something sharp scraped against it. The door handle was tried.

Both boys could hear the heavy sniffing.

The door shook as something heavy hit against it.

“Do you believe me now?” Jake cried out and climbed onto the bed, ripping the blanket from Alex's hands before burying himself underneath it.

“What is that?” asked Alex, his voice now tainted by fear.

"The monster," Jake whimpered from under the blanket.

There was one more thud and then a moment of silence. They could hear the breathing even through the door. Then there were steps away from the door. It sounded like a horse was walking.

"It's going away," whispered Alex. His heart raced.

Jake peeked out from under the blanket. Both boys remained silent and listened carefully. They stared at the door, hoping what ever had been testing its strength was now gone. Their own breathing was the loudest noise left.

A scrape from the window had both their heads turning.

They saw something shuffle into a dark corner.

"What was that?" demanded Jake in a panic laced voice.

"I don't know," said Alex and reached for the baseball bat resting next to his night stand. Its solid handle felt encouraging in his hands as he stood up from the bed and went to investigate.

"Be careful," pleaded Jake.

Alex raised the bat as he searched through the dark corners of the room.

"There's nothing here," said Alex and turned towards the bed.

A mischievous snicker rang out from under the bed.

Jake froze and stared at his older brother with a miserable expression on him. The noise had come right from underneath him.

Alex inched towards the bed and motioned for Jake to remain in place. With the bat at the ready, he started to kneel down.

"What are you doing?" Jake demanded.

"I'm going to have a look," replied Alex as he knelt down and started to lean down to peek under the bed.

"No. Don't do that! It'll get you," said Jake.

"Nothing is going to get me," said Alex and leaned down. Even though there was not much light he could tell there was nothing under the bed.

"Alex," Jake pleaded from above, his voice choked up.

"There's nothing under the bed," said Alex and started to get up. As he did so he came face to face with the thing on the edge of the bed.

It was covered in green fur. Big eyes stared back at Alex with malice. A

mouth filled with sharp teeth grinned at him. It wasn't big. Even Jake was twice its size. Still, it had sharp claws and it didn't hesitate to use them as it went for Alex and managed to cut a bleeding wound on his cheek.

“Alex!” Jake cried out.

The older boy fumbled back, but raised the bat and tried to whack the creature. It snickered and easily dodged the hasty hit. It jumped off the bed and made cartwheels across the floor.

“Naughty, naughty,” it cried in a mocking voice while continuing its maniacal snickering.

Alex swung the bat, frantically trying to hit the little gremlin. His hands were starting to hurt from the bat meeting nothing but solid floor all the time. He sent stacks of papers falling from his desk and knocked over a chair trying to kill the thing.

“Hit it Alex,” Jake yelled from the bed.

It drew the gremlin's attention and it started jumping and cartwheeling towards him.

“No you don't,” muttered Alex and swung the bat, this time hitting home with it. The creature flew through the air and crashed against the wall. Alex wasted no time hurrying over there and beating the lifeless body until green ooze was flying around the room and covering him with each hit.

Jake watched from the bed as his older brother kept pounding at what was nothing more than an unrecognisable lump of green. Even though it had been a scary creature, the way Alex was acting was almost more unsettling.

“Alex, stop. It's dead,” Jake pleaded, but the bat kept going up and down. After repeated pleas, the beating finally stopped.

Alex breathed heavily and stared down at his handiwork. What had it been? Some kind of monster. Were there really such things? Was it just a bad dream?

“Alex..”

The tear muffled voice of Jake drew his attention. He was such a pain to deal with sometimes, but right now he was family and they were both in trouble.

“It'll be all right, Jake. We're going to get out of this,” said Alex and went to the bed. He was far from certain his assertion would come true, but there was no

reason to further grief and scare the younger boy.

They wouldn't escape anything if Jake was sobbing all the way.

"How?" asked Jake and gave his older brother a teary eyed look.

That was the question. Going out the window was out of the question. The snow covered roof was slippery even in summer. Now, it would have been a certain fall for anyone venturing on it.

That left only the stairway downstairs and the front door and the kitchen door, but who knew what was waiting outside in the hallway? Then again, they'd not heard anything more from there. Maybe the thing banging against the door had left.

"Out the front door," replied Alex. "Or the kitchen."

"We can't go in the hallway. That thing is there," Jake moaned and wrapped the blanket tight around himself as if it would shield him from everything evil.

Alex grabbed Jake by the shoulder and looked him dead in the eyes. "I'm not going to let anything happen to you. We're going out that door, down the stairs and across the street to the Lewis's."

Jake's eyes were still moist and the tears had left visible streaks down his cheeks, but he bravely nodded, encouraged by his brothers words. Despite the occasional fight, the two were close and Alex rarely treated him badly.

"Come on. Let's go," said Alex and took a hold of his hand. In the other he carried the baseball bat. The two headed for the door and both held their breath as they listened for any noises in the hallway.

All they heard was silence.

"See? What ever was there is gone," said Alex and undid the lock. Jake looked doubtful, but didn't say anything as the door was pushed open. The dark hallway looked empty and the pair ventured onward, careful not to make much sound.

Alex held the bat ready to strike at anything jumping at them. He'd let go of Jake's hand to get a firm two hand grip on it. The short distance to the stair was quickly covered.

Jake flipped the light switch, lighting three lamps mounted on the wall.

"What are you doing?" Alex hissed quietly.



"I don't want to trip," said Jake and went down the first step.

Alex shook his head and followed. The light was certain to attract anything still in the house.

"Hurry up," he muttered and Jake started to go down faster.

They made it down without incident. The front door was only a few quick steps away and Alex quickly unlocked the door.

As he pushed it open they were met with a depressing sight.

Dozen of the small green gremlins stood in front of the door, looking at the two with their glowing eyes.

"Naughty, naughty." They started to mutter and snicker just like the one in Alex's room.

He quickly slammed shut and locked the door before any could make it inside.

"Ho ho ho."

Both of the boys froze as the deep laughter drifted down the stairs.

"Ho ho hoo.."

It had started jolly, but began to slow down like a toy running out of battery, turning into a creepy and unsettling mock. A floorboard at the top of the stairs creaked as something heavy stepped on it.

Afraid to turn around, but too frightened not to, both boys turned to look up.

There it stood.

The antlers scraped the ceiling, red glowing eyes stared down at the two. Broad shoulders were draped in a red overcoat, not dissimilar to what Santa would have worn. White and grey fur peeked from underneath it. It was no wonder Jake had mistaken it for the real thing. Muscular arms were spread out, clawed hands gripping something that was difficult to distinguish in the dim light.

It continued its increasingly creepy laugh and tossed down what ever it had had in its hands.

Frozen, the two boys dreaded what came rolling down the stairs.

Thump, thump, thump.

The two round shapes came to a halt at their feet.

The dead eyes of their parents looked up at them. Their severed heads frozen in a mask of death.

“Run to the kitchen,” said Alex as he turned away from the horrible sight. He swallowed the tears and cries that wanted to burst out. It wasn't the time for it.

“Mommy! Dad!” Jake cried and broke down into an uncontrollable sob. It was heart wrenching to listen to and made it that much more difficult for Alex to do what he did.

“Jake, snap out of it,” he shouted and shook the boy. “Run to the kitchen and out the door. Go to the Lewis's. Go!”

For a moment it looked like the words were not going to reach him, but finally Jake nodded and started to the right, through a doorway that led to the dining room and through it the kitchen.

“Naughty, naughty,” came the rumbling voice from up the stairs and a creak told the boys the monstrosity was headed down.

“Go, Jake. Go! I'll hold it off,” Alex shouted and raised the bat as he stood between his younger brother and the monster coming down the stairs.

“Come with me,” Jake demanded from the dining room.

“I'm right behind you,” Alex assured as he slowly backed down. The monster had made it to the foot of the stairs. On the same level it looked much bigger and the bat in Alex's hand felt inadequate to even annoy it. But it was all the boy had.

Jake gave his brother a pleading look from the dining room. The monster coming closer had him wishing there was something he could do, but the best he could do was run away as told. He pushed open the swinging door to the kitchen and turned on the lights. He went past the counter that split a small dining area from the cooking area.

The door leading outside had a glass window in it so he peered through it before opening the lock. The lamp on the porch lit the outside, allowing him to see.

There were green gremlins there, grinning up at him with their sharp teeth exposed.

“No,” Jake muttered in a panic. There was no other way out of the kitchen. There was a laundry room you could get to, but it didn't have a door leading out

anywhere but the kitchen.

A scream came from the dining room.

Jake looked around for a hiding place. It was the only thing he could do. He went to the cooking area and opened every cupboard, hoping to find one that would fit him. He found one under the sink and crawled in. The doors were like shades so he could see what was going on in the room.

He had to cover his mouth as Alex came crashing through the door. He landed on the floor with a heavy thud and a groan of pain. There was no sign of the bat he had been wielding.

The door slammed open and the monster started to wrangle itself through. It had to come in head tilted to one side so its antlers could fit through, followed by the rest of its wide body.

Jake hoped Alex would get up and run away, but there was no sign of that happening.

Having made it to the room, the monster reached down and grabbed the older brother, lifting him up from the floor. It slammed him on the counter, back first, soliciting another groan from the boy.

Jake put another hand in front of his mouth and bit down in the soft flesh of it. He wanted to whimper and scream, but he knew if he made a sound he'd be right there next to his brother. There would have been no point in him remaining behind.

"What are you?" Alex managed to ask, sounding out of breath as he stared up at the monster.

It leaned down, its snout close to his face. "Has it been so long that I have been forgotten?" Its voice was deep with an edge to it.

In his surprise, Alex could not do anything more than shake his head in disbelief.

"It has been a long time," the monster admitted and straightened up. "Very well, boy. I shall tell you."

Alex tried to roll off the counter, but the claws of the monster kept him firmly in place. There was no escape.

"I am Rudolph," the monster declared, staring off into the distance. "And I

have been sealed away by Saint Nicholas for a very long time, forced to a limited form, tied to slavery, pulling that sleigh of his.”

The hatred dripping from its voice could have filled a swimming pool.

Rudolph turned its gaze down on Alex. “But now, I have escaped. I am free to once more do what I have been meant to. What Nicholas does not want me to do.”

“And what's that?” demanded Alex defiantly.

“To cull the list of naughty people,” replied Rudolph, grinning to reveal a row of sharp teeth.

“But we're good people,” said Alex, sounding desperate.

A terrifying sound escaped from Rudolph. For a moment Jake feared in his hideout that it was the end of his brothers life, but he soon realized it was the actual laugh of the creature.

“Good people?” asked Rudolph, his voice mocking the assertion. “A good man does not embezzle from his clients. That's what your father did. He stole from his clients.”

“You lie!” Alex struggled to get free from its grip.

Rudolph ignored the protest. “A good woman does not cheat on her husband. That's what your mother did. She slept with Mr. Lewis. She slept with Mrs. Lewis. She was a dirty whore.”

“She was not!” Alex struggled even harder, but the strong grip held him in place as surely as if he'd been tied down and locked in chains.

Jake could barely contain himself in his hiding place. The claims Rudolph was making had tears rolling down his cheeks. Mother and father could not have done what it claimed, could they? They had been good to him. They had been strict when needed, but never had he felt like they didn't love him.

They had told him he had been good.

A stifled sob escaped his lips.

“And then there is you,” Rudolph continued and leaned in to stare at Alex, face to face. “A good boy does not drink while under-age. But that's what you did. That sleepover at your friends place during summer break. The bottle of vodka from his fathers liquor cabinet. Naughty boy.”

Alex struggled even harder. His hands looked for anything that could be

used as a weapon, but everything had been sent flying to the floor already.

“Now you pay for it,” said Rudolph. A clawed hand came down, smashing Alex on the head before travelling down his body, tearing through clothes, peeling away skin and flesh. Blood stained the remaining clothes and dripped down to the floor as the boy's body convulsed and shook before finally coming to a still.

Rudolph let out a satisfied sigh.

A leg was grabbed.

Flesh tore, bones snapped.

Jake moved his hands to his ears and balled up inside the small space he had. He wished he could not hear the sounds. He closed his eyes and tried to go some place else.

Some place happier.

Even though he spent a good deal of time trying it, the world did not suddenly turn back to the place it had been. His emotions did calm down and finally he was able to open his eyes and dare a peek through the door.

His eyes were met with a bent down Rudolph staring right back at him.

Jake screamed.

The door to his hideout was ripped off, a clawed hand reached in and grabbed him. He struggled and screamed, but to no avail. He was pulled out and slammed down on the bloody counter, amongst the remaining pieces of Alex.

“Little Jake,” said Rudolph with a grin. “I've been looking for you, you naughty boy.”

“No! I've been a good boy! Mom said so!”

Again came the creepy laugh.

“A good boy does not steal. But that's what you've done, haven't you Jake?” Rudolph stared down at the boy. The patch of hair on his chin had blood dripping from it, making it look almost like the tip of a paintbrush.

“All that candy. Weight it once to get the price sticker, add some more, then go pay for it.”

Jake started to sob. There was no escape from the tight grip. There was no escaping the truth of the accusation.

“I'm sorry,” Jake sobbed. “I promise I won't do it any more.”

“I know you won't,” said Rudolph and raised his other hand. The claws came down. Blood spilled.

The front door to the house opened as Rudolph made his exit. The little gremlins swarmed around him, snickering and babbling.

The list of naughty people was long.

Plenty more places to visit.

One right across the street.