

BILLY MCLAUGHLIN



# KRAMPUS

Δ SHORT STORY

The wind whipped through the beast's fur as he came crashing to the ground. He hitched a hoof into the snow to stop himself from sliding. For one hundred years he had sworn never to come back. Marina Kringle had left him with no choice.

A crack from behind a nearby iceberg brought Krampus into the present. There was someone there. 'Show yourself,' he bellowed, irked that someone would intrude in his humiliation.

'It's just me, Mr Kringle,' a tiny voice replied. 'I've come to take you to your brother.'

'I can find my way,' he lied. It had been a century since his abdication, and he doubted he could even find his way around the family home, much less the surrounding land.

An elf appeared from behind the rock. 'My name is Tristan. Mrs Kringle sent me. She said it is imperative I bring you home.'

Krampus lurched forward. 'You're new. I don't recall you being here when I left.'

'I've been here for eighty years. A mere minute in human time,' he paused and took a step closer to the towering beast. 'Your brother must mean an awful lot for you to come all this way after so long. He really needs your help.'

'For Kris, I would go anywhere. What could he possibly need from me though?'

Tristan beckoned Krampus to his sledge and smiled sadly. 'Even Santa loses his way sometimes.'

#

Marina Kringle leaned forward and caressed the groove on Krampus' face. 'You're really here. I cannot tell you how wonderful this is.'

In a century Krampus had not felt the touch of kindness from another being. He had only endured fear and judgement. Long ago his brother had begged him not to leave the North. Krampus had never felt that he belonged. He didn't feel good and kind. He felt ugly and inferior. How could he have carried on his father's work when children looked at him through eyes of terror?

'What could possibly be so important?' He spoke softly as he eyed the frightened faces of a tiny army who cowered on the perimeter. He didn't recognise any of them.

'Your horns have grown to be very big,' Marina said, as if she were paying him the biggest compliment.

'They are very heavy, a curse really.'

Marina brushed his arm gently. 'You look wonderful.'

Krampus felt a blush on his bronze skin. His tale wagged slightly and he recalled the first time Marina had entered the kingdom. She was all the things Kris deserved; kind, generous and beautiful. She was the only person from the human world not to look in disgust when she met him.

'May I see Kris?'

Marina's smile faded. 'I must warn you. He's has become very disillusioned.'

A gasp spread around the room as if the army of little beings had only heard this for the first time.

'I fear you're the only person who can help now.' Marina held her hands up in frustration. 'He's so angry with the universe. It's almost Christmas Eve in the human world. I don't think we're going to be ready. Please help him.'

Krampus shook his head. 'Take me to my brother.'

#

Kris' face glowed by the embers of a dying flame.

'Kris, someone has come to see you.'

'I told you not to let anyone in,' he whispered sadly.

'Not even me,' Krampus said hoarsely.

Kris turned to reveal a single tear as it fell down his cheek. 'Kramp?'

'What can I do to help you?'

Krampus watched Kris rise from his seat. He was smaller than he used to be, and his belly jiggled as he moved. It was an amusing sight.

'Is it really you?'

A slight nod and then Krampus trotted forward so the two brothers could embrace. When they finally parted, Krampus tugged at his brother's arm. 'You have important work to do.'

'I cannot do it in a world that has become so greedy and uncompassionate.'

Krampus eyed Marina, choosing his words carefully. 'You must. You're a symbol of hope in a world where miracles are no more. I cannot do it for I am too feared.'

'How can I carry on in a world where people hurt someone I love?'

Silence befell for what seemed an eternity. 'I can live with it. I have endured it all my life. In every way, we are opposites. Without the need for fear, hope dies. When that happens, the universe will fall into darkness forever.'

Kris turned away. 'You place too much importance on me,' a deep sigh as he lowered himself into the chair again.

'You place too little importance on yourself. I see the world as belief lessens. You're the one last beacon of hope. Someone they still believe in.'

After much persuasion, Kris reached for Krampus' clawed hand. 'I can only do it if you're by my side.'

Marina, who had been quietly watching the exchange without interruption, stepped forward. 'Just as it always should have been.'

'I don't know. You can never change the way human's think.'

'Poppycock. If you two can be a united force, what they will see is that light and darkness can come together and be a formidable force.'

Krampus hesitated. He looked down towards Kris whose almond shaped eyes were now pleading.

'This is where you belong,' interjected Kris, pushing the last seed of doubt from Krampus' mind.

'I'll stay for one Christmas,' he finally said, a grin spreading across his face.

Marina lurched forward and pulled the two of them together. The three hugged until the bells of the workshop began to chime.

It would be the happiest Christmas the universe had seen in one hundred years.