

Terror in December

I'm asleep on the bottom bunk in the room I share with two older sisters. Exhausted as usual, Mommy sleeps soundly on the other side of the wall in her bedroom. Daddy is in Mexico on a fishing trip with his buddies. Earlier, my shoulders ached from the day's tree climbing. Now, I can't tell where my muscles end and the sheets begin because I've slept one-with-the-bed for hours. Not fully aware of my actions, I start to turn over.

As I roll to face the center of the room and settle into a comfortable slumber, I bump against Flea, my sock-monkey companion. My eyes slip open. Even though I don't intend to look at anything, I glimpse a large shadow that doesn't quite make sense. I'm groggy as I blink, expecting the mirage to waste away before my eyelids separate again, but the odd form is still there. I blink again and again, each time more intently, wider, as consciousness invades my inner sanctum. I see the image more clearly each time, an alien figure in the room. And it's big.

I force myself awake but keep my head on the pillow. Only my eyes move. The partial moon outside veils objects in the room with just enough gray. My eyes adjust as dim swimming shapes coalesce in their proper positions. All is in place except this strange looming mass across the room. I dare not sit up as I stare at what appears to be a man standing on our dressing counter.

Wha...? Can it be?? It looks like a man. Why is he there? Why isn't he moving? WHO IS HE??

As imperceptibly as possible, a millimeter at a time, I slide the covers up over my nose. I leave my eyes exposed so I can see. Outside the blankets, the man endures the stinging December chill of the room. Shielded from it within my shroud, warmth comforts me and helps me feel protected. Somewhat.

I must see who this is. I need to know who this is. Why is he just standing there? Why doesn't he move? Should I ask him his name? I'm fully awake now.

I decide against speaking. I don't want him to know I'm here. *Does Melody see him also? She must 'cause she's just above me. But I haven't heard her moving so maybe she's sleeping through this. Am I the only one awake? I think I'm the only one who sees him. Elaine probably can't see him from where she is. I don't hear her moving either. Oh dear Lord, what do I do?*

I want him to go away. I'm terrified. I blink and blink but he's still there, standing, facing the center of the room. He doesn't leave. He doesn't speak.

I watch for ten minutes but there is not a twitch from him. I feel sleepy again and I'm done seeing. I close my eyes, clinging to hope he'll be gone when I open them again. I hide beneath my blankets. I sleep. A half hour later, I wake up to discover he's still there. The nightmare continues. *Is this what it is, a nightmare? Am I really asleep?* Again, I blink and blink and look and look, harder and harder. *No, I am awake and this isn't a bad dream. There is a man standing on our dressing counter! And he's paunchy.*

I want the world to end. I want the madness to stop. But it doesn't. I throw myself to fate and decide to move. I crush against the wall and dive into my bedding, shuddering. Nothing happens. The man doesn't speak to me and he doesn't walk over to me. I dig my head into the pillow, wishing I would sink into oblivion. Sleep rescues me.

I wake again. *It must be several hours later. Dare I peep?* I do. Out of the cocoon of my blankets I want to scream because the man is STILL there! *Oh, horror of all horrors. Don't scream! You've made it this far. Surely morning is coming soon. Then I won't be the only one awake and everyone will see the man and we can all fight him together and find out why he broke into our room.*

I keep one eye on him as I drift in and out of sleep. Each time I wake, he is anchored, resolute. I battle believing this is happening. The ebony of night slinks away, dispelled by twilight all too slowly etching outlines into the landscape of the room. Silver shapes emerge where various gray blotches had been. I start to see more clearly vague, familiar features of my belongings and those of my sisters, profiles now apparent that before were lost in blackness. The dark silhouette of the man pales along with them. I'm desperate for it to be morning so I can see him clearly, but I'm tired. I fall in and out of sleep while waiting. I dream of a consoling ride on our pony.

I wake. At last enough time has passed. My sisters are not stirring but dawn is finally washing the room with light. Objects now boast a palette of cloudy pastels. I'm braver now that I can see more clearly. I jump up and turn to see the man. *There he is, still. Standing atop our dressing counter, staring into the center of the room.* While I rub my eyes, it takes me a minute to make out who he is. He is stiff. He sports a white beard and wears a black belt, black boots, and a vermilion suit with white trim and matching stocking cap, but he's covered in confetti. My fears evaporate. I rocket from terror to joy. *IT'S A SANTA PIÑATA. Daddy's home!*