

The Visitor

By

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Bing Crosby crooned, "I'm dreaming of a white Christmas," as the televisions white glare painted over the unshaven, muscular man sitting on the sofa before it. He stared blankly at the serene merriment dancing across the screen. On the coffee table, in front of him, sat a half-finished bottle of Jack Daniels, a coffee cup and a Colt .38 Special loaded with one bullet. As the credits began to roll, the man picked up the coffee cup and drank the last of the numbing nectar. Then he picked up the revolver, flipped it from side to side, inspecting the design, admiring its simplicity, its purpose. He spun the cylinder to align the bullet with the hammer and cocked it back.

Bing-Bong-Bing-Bong - the doorbell chimed, shaking the man from his fixation. "Who the hell's ringing the door-bell on a night like this?" He grumbled, as he laid the gun down on the coffee table and staggered to the front door. Peering through the peephole, he saw a snow-covered man being buffeted by the gale like winds and opened the door.

"What the hell are you doing walking around in a storm like this?"

"My car ran off the road back toward the highway. I saw your yard light, hoping somebody was home. Can I come in? I'm freezing my ass off out here."

"Yeah, yeah, of course. Let me knock the snow off you. This is my mom's house and she'll kill me if I mess it up."

"Your mom's house... ? She here?"

"No. She went to my sister's place in Tampa for the holidays."

"So you're all alone on Christmas? Man, that's a bummer. Don't you have any other family?" The young man stomped his feet, shaking the snow to the entrance mat.

"I used to have a wife and kid. But, when I got home from Iraq last week she told me she couldn't handle being married to a Marine anymore and has found someone else. She hasn't even let me see my daughter yet. She was born while I was gone."

"Man, that's cold. What a bitch. Where is she now? Can't you go over there and see the kid?"

"Nah. She moved back to San Diego. I met her when I was at Camp Pendleton. Her parents live there." He said with a yawn. She came here to live with my mom while I was gone. But,

when winter set in, she went back home to stay with her parents. She mailed me this letter.” The Marine bent down and picked up the simple one page note from the coffee table. “I’ve tried to call her, but her parents won’t let me talk to her.”

“Man, that whole family sound like a buncha assholes.”

“I guess.”

“What’s your name?” The young man queried, as he pulled his hood back and looked around the living room.

“Kyle... Kyle Stedman. What’s yours?”

“Hilary Slump. Helluva a name, eh?”

“Different for sure. How old are you?”

“Let me see, I was 18.”

“Was 18?” Kyle looked over the young man with ear piercings, and tattoos around his neck and across both hands.

“I guess that makes me nineteen now. The few friends I had called me Hil. My dad was a mean bastard and I think gave me this name so all the jocks would beat me up and give me wedgies.” Hilary continued surveying the house then said. “He thought I was the reason my mom died when I was born.”

“Wow! That’s pretty heavy stuff to have to deal with. What’s with all the hardware?” Kyle said then turned and walked toward the kitchen. “You want some coffee or tea, something warm to drink?”

“No thanks I’ll be fine.” Hil said. “For most of my youth, I tried to please my father, but nothing seemed to work. So, when I was about fifteen I started getting tats and stainless just to piss him off.” Hil paced about, inspecting the room. “Nice homey place your mom has here. Where’s your father?”

“He left my mom a few years ago and lives in Websterville a few counties over. I don’t see him much.” Kyle stood in the doorway, silhouetted by the kitchen light. “He’s still on my shit list, for what he did to my mom.”

Hil stopped at the television admiring the only Christmas decoration in the room - a green porcelain Christmas tree with colored lights sticking out of little holes. “My dad had a tree like this. It was the only Christmas tree we ever had. I hated that tree. Never got any Christmas gifts. He’d give me a few bucks to go buy video games. How about you? You have a real Christmas tree when you were a kid? Gifts?” Hil said as he ran a finger up one side of the tree and down the other.

“Sorry, man. Yeah, my mom was big on Christmas. She always had the house all decorated and plenty of gifts for my sister and me.” Kyle walked in and sat down on the couch.

“Why not this year, with you coming home and all?” Hil turned and faced Kyle.

“Mom didn’t know I was coming home. I wanted to surprise her and my wife. Guess that didn’t work out, did it?”

“Looks like you got the surprise. What’s with the pistol?”

“Ah, well I was just... it’s my dad’s old gun and I was just checking it out.”

“Is it loaded?”

“Yeah.”

“Let me see the bullet. I ain’t seen one in a while. Man, I was always fascinated by bullets.”

Kyle flipped open the cylinder and dropped the bullet into his hand, tossing it to Hil. Hil held it up between his thumb and index finger. “Do a lot of damage these little rascals can. That prick of a dad of mine had a pistol like this. I should have shot him with it.” Kyle watched Hil slip the bullet into his jeans pocket.

“So, what are you doing out on a night like this?” Kyle yawned again, the effects of a half a bottle of JD and a long day wearing on his body.

“After I quit school and bummed around some, I started helping people and found it made me feel good about myself, for once. Besides, maybe I’ll get a break doing good deeds. So, anyway, I came out this way to help a guy out of a bad situation.”

Kyle lay back on the couch, weariness overwhelming him. “Well, maybe we can pull you out of the ditch in the morning and you can get to him. Why don’t you make yourself comfortable and catch some shut-eye. I’m beat.” Kyle closed his eyes and drifted off to sleep.

Standing with his thumbs hooked into his pants pockets, Hil smiled, looking down at Kyle. “Go ahead man, I’m fine.”

Sunshine poured in the east bay window, blanketing Kyle. The brilliance of the day summoned him awake. Rubbing his eyes, stretching, Kyle looked around the room for Hil, and called his name, “Hil... Hil, hmm?” He pushed off the couch, walked around the coffee table. Stepping on something sharp, he yelped and hopped around the living room holding his foot. Kyle turned and saw the bullet lying on the carpet. He bent down and picked it up. *Must have had a hole in his pocket*, he mused placing it on the coffee table.

Kyle searched the house for a slumbering Hil and wondered if he'd already left to try to get his car out of the ditch. He threw on a sweatshirt and boots, grabbed his coat and stocking cap, and trudged knee deep to his Chevy, four-wheel drive, truck. After cleaning off the windows and letting the engine warm, Kyle backed down the driveway. He noticed there were no tracks in the snow indicating which direction Hil had left to. *Maybe, the wind drifted them back in already,* He thought.

Driving to the highway, he saw no sign of a car running off the road. Kyle decided to drive into town for breakfast at Sherri's Diner. There was no sign of Hil or a car in the ditch anywhere along his drive into town.

"Hi, Kyle. When did you get home?" Lily an old school mate asked from behind the diner counter. "Like some coffee?"

"Got in four days ago." Kyle slipped onto a stool at the counter. "Coffee'd be great."

"Happy to see you made it home safe and sound. Did you have a nice Christmas?" Wisps of steam rolled off the lip of the cup as Lily poured fresh coffee. "Got any plans for New Year Eve?"

Holding his cup in both hands, ready to take a sip, he was unwilling to discuss his homecoming with anyone just yet. Kyle said. "Mom's in Florida with Sandy and her family. I think I'll drive down and see them." He took a careful sip of coffee then added, "Had a strange fellow come to the house in the storm last night. Said he got stuck in the ditch down from my house. His name was Hilary Slump. He was gone when I woke up this morning, left without saying a word. Strange."

Lily furrowed her brow and turned to the cook. "Hey Hermie, what was the name of that kid who shot himself last year?"

"That was Hank Slump's kid, Hilary. Shot himself dead with a thirty-eight special."