

## Kristday

The dark caramel wings of the creature shimmered, catching the mid-morning sunlight as it flew briefly into the air, disturbed from the business of foraging. It landed on the girl's shoulder, and the tickle of antennae on bare skin grabbed her attention. She flicked it away nonchalantly, as she so often did.

'Come on Jak, sure you've foun' somethin' by now.' The girl was tired of waiting for her younger brother, engaged in his own foraging amongst the discarded containers behind the abandoned derelict Storing Place.

'Just a mina Amb, there's lottsa good stuff 'ere.' Jak continued to rifle through the contents of things that had no names, not for one too young to have known the time when the stuff was made. He picked up a rectangle.

'Amb, whattsa this one?'

Amba went to her brother with the authority of an elder child, and snatched the rectangle from his hand.

'It's a pictya, Jak, of somethin' that hap'ned. Before you an' me.' She crouched down to match Jak's size. 'These are people from before – a mama, a papy, and kids like us.' She paused, wondering why they had so many coverings, and about the nothingness around them. The colourless space.

'Seems to me someone didn' finish the colorin',' she shrugged.

Jak snatched back the rectangle and clutched it to his chest. 'Itsa good Kringle though, in't Amb?'

Amba was eager to leave, but was also curious. She agreed it was a fine Kringle, but suggested they take it to the Gray One to be sure.

'Does he know everythin' Amb?'

'Everythin'. Some say he almos' 120 year.'

Despite the dry heat, the children ran to the place of the Gray One.

'Children, why you out so far on the Kristday?'

'We were out Kringlin', an' we foun' this.' Amba took the rectangle from Jak and passed it triumphantly to the Gray One. The old man sucked in his breath. 'My, this be a mighty fine foto! Good preservin'.'

'Where be the color?'

'The color?' the Gray One laughed heartily. 'That'd be sno now.'

'Sno?'

'Water that be hard 'n' cold 'n' falls out the Big Sky,' said the old man. 'Me papy told me here used to have sno every Kristday. Aint been no sno here for nearly 100 year, since the great Weather Shift.'

'Weather Shif' old man?'

‘Me papy tell me in the ol’ days, people used to be in big places high above ground, go all aroun’ in movin’ contraptions, had more stuff than they coulda used. Some of it still lying around. But the movin’ things needed enagee, like we need the hydro food. The old’n people spent so much time a-arguin’ that the enagee ran out. Then they had the Wartime, lasted o’er 40 year. Burnt a hole in the Big Sky. Now we hafta be careful with stuff, conserve and all that.’ Conserve human enagee, food, things. Seemed to him even words used to be longer.

‘But old man, how’d the sno go away?’

‘With all the fighten and the enagee a-going, The Nature got angry and shifted everythin’ round. Gave the sno to some other people.’

Amba wasn’t sure she believed the Gray One, even if he was 120 year. But Jak sat silently entranced by the magical gone world the old man had conjured.

‘Now off be with you little ones. It’s near the Fire Time and you best be home.’

Amba ran fast, dragging the tiring Jak behind her. Mama was waiting at the opening.

‘Where you two been? It’s near the Fire Time and we havna yet had the Kringle Circle!’

‘Sorry mama.’

‘Ne’er be mind, you be here now.’

The family sat all around the Stone Tree, bits of rock and pebble piled into a cone-shape.

‘OK all, put in the Kringles.’ They placed them in the centre. Amba had made an Evening Star from mud after the last Rain Day, dried and colored with rock shavings mixed with spit. But Jak still clutched his rectangle. ‘Come on Jak,’ Amba glared, and so he relented. Everyone took another’s Kringle – mama took papy’s, papy took the Evening Star, Amba took mama’s. Jak grinned, and reclaimed the rectangle.

‘Quick children, the heat’s upon us. Let’s rest durin’ the Fire Time.’ They followed mama down the stairs to the Underground, the dark cooling place. Jak lay down and placed his rectangle under the head resting, hoping to dream of the Pudding they’d have come The Twilite. And of sno.