SKRAMP JACK AND THE CHRISTMAS COMPASS

Original Title: “Skramp Jack e la bussola di Natale”

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Prologue

As trees and woods and gardens and houses spin and for a long moment, the world is upside down and then is upright again and then goes back to upside down, it occurs to me that yes, spinning is not so bad after all. Being born must be a bit like this, like spinning.
It’s nice to have the vertebrae stretched, the hairs caressed here and there by gravity, the astonished eyes looking at the world backwards as if they were seeing it for the first time.
I think Cully Curlytello noticed it, too. Whatever, he never takes anything seriously. Upside down, he takes advantage of this pleasant one-eighty to work out his arms, raising them and lowering them to the sides rhythmically.
I look at him puzzled.
«It helps to tone up the shoulders. Come on, Jack! Do it. It’s good for your health…»
All of a sudden, the world stops spinning but it doesn’t return to its upright position.
Beyond the windshield I recognize one of the brick buildings from the town center. We’re in the South Dakota State University’s parking lot, in Rapid City.
It takes me a moment to figure out how to unbuckle the seat belt.
Squirteyes takes much longer to find his eyes and Snotscarf to get back on his feet after the hits taken.
Luckily, the seat belts and the windows held up. We exit the Roachbus. We’re all a bit run down but safe and sound, there, in the university’s empty parking lot. The Roachbus has some dents and it’s more disgusting than usual as it waves its little black legs in the air.
For Skramps’ sake, Lugre! Where did he go? Ah, he’s here in the pocket, sleeping. How can he always be sleeping? «Lu, how could you stay there asleep despite all the tumbles? ». As usual, he replies with a big yawn.
For an instance, we all thought that things would have gone differently. Why do Elves hate us so much? I don’t know, but since the dawn of time that is simply how Christmas begins: with the Elves swooping down on us to greet us.
We Skramps call it *salutation* and it’s the worst moment of Christmas: when those Elves, drunk on chamolmilk and with sniffsniff-sweetpipes up their noses, riding Santa Clause’s sleigh, plunge down on us.

However, this year we were ready. The Roachbus had dug a deep trench where it could hole up. Snotscarf, the bravest of us, had unbuckled his seat belt and with a jump he had landed among the seats, with his arms raised and his very long scarfnose had shouted in the wind: «Listen up, woohoo! They will not move us, this year! My horoscope says today will be the day of the big revolution, woohoo!».
To make his woohoo-s more *woohoo*, Snotscarf always has to add a hand choreography. But it's also likely that he repeats his woohoo nonsense: just to give meaning to the uncontrollable impulses starting from the tip of his nose that shake his whole body.
«I believe in us, woohoo! Did you understand me? I believe in us! This time we'll push back! For all the Skramps! I'm really fed up with the Elves and I'll wait standing. Enough! I'm fed up with the salutation! Woohoo!»
Advices to not be an *idiotus* and seat back were useless.
«It'll be a revolution! Woohoo!» Snortscarf kept shouting until the very last moment, when a mighty lighting is followed by ten rows of incandescent hooves thunder on the windows.
Now Snotscarf is leaning against the Roachbus with his shoulders hunched, the scarfnose scraping the ground. I've never seen him so still. Only his eyes still dance around, as if looking for something on the asphalt. It's really *idiotus* to have false hopes… Maybe even that feeling of change that really doesn't want to leave me is just foolishness.
We all push in the same direction to straighten the Roachbus. We push fast and quietly, like we always do. Pitch Black, our Grand Master, is seated at the wheel like nothing happened. We also go back to our seats.
No Skramp has the guts to talk. Squirteyes nervously plays with one eye, making it roll like a marble from one hand to the other. Cully Curlytello twists and retwists a strand of hair around his clawed finger. Sbaldy flattens Cully's cascade of hair on his smooth head. Snotscarf huffs on his scarfnose tips and the tips bend.
As time passes, disappointment besets us and traps as leaving no way out. I need to think of something. «Well done, Snotsy!» I say, surprised by the sound of my own voice.
But no one heard me, so I say it louder: «Welll doooone Snotsyyyy!».
All the Skramps stop abruptly. Even Pitch Black releases the gas pedal and pulls the handbrake. They all turn to me. Now they're looking at me quizzically.
After a moment of silence and with some embarrassment, I improvise a speech. «I propose a big applause for Snotscarf, the first one to push back! Next time we'll win and they'll be the ones running away! Woohooo!».
I reiterate with all the breath I have: «WOOHOOOO»
Snotscarf is looking at me with sad eyes.

Cully Curlytello starts clapping a bit lazily, and soon the others follow, even Pitch Black. Even if he's not good at clapping his hands with his nails, he still tries to join in the applause.
Sbaldy doesn't know how to shout but at least he whistles, and he whistles very loudly.
And so it begins, we all start shouting and celebrating and rallying around Snotsy, patting him on the back and hugging him.
«Woohoo» he shouts.
«Woohoo» we say all together.
«Woohoo» he shouts.
«Woohoo» we all reply.
«Woohoo» he shouts.
«Woohoo» we say all together.
Cully Curlytello sings the Stramp anthem and everyone follows suit:

Skramps we are and always scare
Skramps we win wherever we go
We are Skraaaamps
Forever Skraaaamps
Beware my Skramp from Santa Clause's mean Elves
Trust your nose that will never be wrong
Because we are Skraaaamps
Forever Skraaaamps and always scaaaare

And so, the Roachbus sets off again, and mine isn't a feeling anymore. Now I'm sure that something revolutionary has already happened.