
THE BUZZ

“From its tense opening page to the electric climax, *The Santa Claus Killer* is a thriller that will hold you captive in its frightening clutch as a killer stalks the dark, twisted, unexplored alleys of New York City.”

Ray Helmers

“EXCELLENT STORY!!! Scared the crap out of me and had to stop reading a few times! That's the kind of thriller I like! Last book I read that I had to take a break due to fear was *THE EXORCIST*.”

Laura Morella

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THE SANTA CLAUS KILLER

By
RJ Smith



A Storyteller Novel

(MMXIII – 02)

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FOREWORD

WHERE I COME from, Santa Claus would've killed to be in my book... those auditioning would have lined their fat asses up around the block of Woolworths to audition for the part.

Now, they carry their bones down to Walmart and shake barbered heads in feigned disgust.

People have asked:

“What’s gotten into you, RJ? Why did you write this horror involving the King of Christmas?”

I say, screw it... if Mr. Chris Kringle has time to keep a naughty list, then my name is número uno to receive coal! Let fatso track me down between deliveries and drag my lazy carcass to the graveyard; good for him.

Everybody has to die sooner or later.

Why not now?

For everyone else, those of you who think the guy behind the beard might have something to hide, this tale is for you.

Growing into my teens on the streets of Manhattan, I wasn't invested in Christmas. The shiny new toys didn't call to me from Macy's glittering windows. The season's opening of Rockefeller Center ushered in the Upper West Side

kids... and yes, Christmas was fun for them... it was special...

They bought the scam and drank the Kool Aid.

I guess, as a young boy, I recalled sitting on HIS lap one winter and tugging on the beard. Then, I knew the hoodwinking I'd received. I understood the con job and how it all played out. So, when I got older, I filed my complaint with the jolly old fat man! He laughed and smiled and didn't give a crap.

And, that's when I knew something wasn't right.

There was a secret.

Thus, the gang and I kept a close eye out for his appearance along the sidewalks and in every store right after the parade on Seventh Avenue. There, he rode into town atop his official red and green glittered sleigh on Thanksgiving Day.

The city would dance, and cheer, and sell their Christmas toys.

But, deep down, I knew a monster lurked under that façade, and, that one day... he would show his real face.

That day is today.

That's what carried you, dear bookworm, to this nightmarish tale of murder, horror, and fright.

Nobody, after all, gazes into the blackness of a shadowy graveyard expecting to find a love story.

You know why we're here!

You stared at the book cover of Santa dragging his bloody sack through Times Square, accepted

the premise, and then bought the book recognizing damp, sticky blood would soon fill your stockings!

However, let's not get ahead of ourselves here...

The particulars of how we get through Christmas rests in the pages that follow.

For there, amongst the sleigh bells sounding in the dead of night, a snowstorm is brewing, and just around the corner, a murderer rings his bell.

This Is

NOT

Sugar & Spice!

WELCOME TO THE SHOW

JUST ANOTHER SNOT-NOSED KID, a lousy orphan, an abandoned morsel, left here to die at my feet.

You better watch out, you better not cry,
You better not pout, I'm telling you why,
Santa Claus Is Coming To Kill...

That was his anthem, the tune which got his rocks off better than a five-and-dime hooker. It was also the lone miniature melody he couldn't shake from his throbbing skull. The twelve days of Christmas were heading down the pike like a freight train—Tick; Tock, Tick; Tock—Father Time was stomping through the dead of winter, waiting to turn the calendar of another rotten year.

“Please,” a streetwise white boy begged. “Just let me go and I promise to live my life right!”

He was flat on his back staring up at the face of a monster; the kind that Mommy warned would stalk him one day.

“Too bad, so sad,” the slaughterer scoffed. “Take your five-finger discounts to the pits of hell.”

The boy trembled, fear gripped his spine and urine pooled beneath his hips.

“Just give me a chance!” he bawled, sensing the Fat Lady was about to sing.

“Time’s up!” the killer cackled. “There’s no more time to lie, cheat, or steal!”

“I wasn’t meant to die this way,” the boy cried, his arms and legs flailing for freedom. “I could have been somebody!”

Yet, escape was useless; the assassin had him pinned to the sidewalk in the middle of Times Square. To either side, hundreds of people milled about... watching the strangulation, waiting for the moment when they’d witness a murder.

New York was every man for himself.

“But you ended up a fucking nobody!” the murderer growled. “Shit happens and then you die!”

Death, the boy reflected, will end the pain. It will pinch away all hopes and dreams... and then, my life-force will blink out... like the lights on a Broadway marquee... popping off, one at a time, goodbye, so-long, and farewell.

That darkness of finality would bring the end to his nightmarish life.

Good Golly! Jolly Molly! A disembodied voice cackled in the recesses of the slayer’s mind. *I do believe that boy is about to cry like a bitch!*

Stefan might’ve sobbed, had his childhood memories not flooded the blurring vision of the killer’s face.

I’m on my way to heaven!

But death took time. It never happened like actors portrayed in the movies.

Committing homicide required some doing.

It took muscle, and every once in a while, this murderer knew he had to drag their naughty souls kicking and screaming into their graves.

Chapter 1

The Master Poser

MANHATTAN NEVER SLEEPS.

It gives birth to dreams and stamps them out like cheap, harsh cigarettes.

Frank Sinatra once sang that if you could make it here, you'd make it anywhere. What he failed to mention was the boogeymen who stalked the streets in search of blood.

That's where Richard Blake slouched; ringing his bell at the entrance to Macy's on 34th Street where miracles were replaced by the gore and mayhem that plunged through his mind.

"Bastards," he grumbled. "Good for nothing squares." Every year, he'd shrug on a Santa outfit and watch the fools scurry into the store for their spoiled little brats nestled safe and sound at home. It angered him that while he, the main attraction, stood out here in the freezing cold, panhandling for pennies, those fat little piggies were nestled in the warmth of their beds.

"Nasty little disease carriers, that's what they are!" Grumbling, he reached into his coat and retrieved a pint of Mad Dog 20/20. He adored the red grape flavor—better known as Bum Juice—an inexpensive, low-end, fortified wine that had an alcohol content of 18-percent. It packed one hell of

a wallop and washed away his pain and misery. It excited him to drink the Mumble Juice right there in front of the silly fat cows as they dropped their meager coins into his bucket. He called it Mumble Juice because if he drank too much of it, he wandered the streets mumbling to people who weren't really there.

And that was just crazy.

Besides, if he really wanted to be one of the bums he hunted, he had to play the part and drink their Kool-Aid.

First impressions meant everything.

Tossing back a gulp, he scowled at the shoppers. "Ho! Ho! Ho! Have a merry, fucking, Christmas!"

The bargain hunters gasped, covered the ears of their youngsters, and rushed into the night.

"Hey, pal," a fatherly type muttered, shoving his finger into bad Santa's chest. "What's your problem, huh?"

Santa sniggered, and took another swig. "This whole damn city's my problem! You're all stinking gatherers, nothing but spenders!"

The man shoved Santa to the ground, shook his fists, and stormed down the street. "You drunken, stupid idiot, ya need a New York ass-whipping, that's what you need!"

"Asshole wannabe," a passing woman sneered. "You're not Santa Claus at all; you should be ashamed of yourself!"

I should be ashamed of myself. What am I doing wearing this itchy costume again this year? Damn

naughty or nice, how many more will piss on my lap and step on my toes?

He staggered to his feet, spat on the ground and stared at a passing Camaro and a teenager who hurled insults from its open window.

“Yo! Dickhead! Where’s your lousy reindeer?”

“Rotten thug,” Santa answered. “It’s because of pricks like you that I’m in this situation to begin with!” Stepping from the curb, he reached to the ground and gathered a snowball. “I’ll show you bastards, I’ll teach you a lesson or two!”

To those interested enough to stare at the drunken Santa Claus stumbling from the sidewalk and flinging his snowball at the passing car, they might’ve wondered what had become of the King of Christmas.

But Richard knew exactly what had become of himself... what his mission was, and why he stood out here in the snow to draw in the bums who begged for money and harassed the herds.

So, as his anger tracked straight and true, exploding in the face of a Puerto Rican boy, he smiled triumphantly.

“It’s a present from Rudolph, with my compliments from the North Pole!”

Suddenly, the Camaro spun on an icy patch of road and slid towards the place where he stood. What headed his way was four wheels of death and destruction; a horn desperately warning the innocent of its destructive approach. However, for those who knew better, horns and whistles were

merely comfort warnings that cautioned the shit wagon was headed their way.

Nothing stopped the candy man when he jingled up your number, calling.

The car crashed into the windows of Macy's just moments after the shoppers leapt to safety.

They screamed in horror as three teenaged boys sprung from the car, attacked Santa, and taught him about street justice.

"You stinking deadbeat fraud!" a white boy shouted, swinging his fist with all his might, striking Santa on the chin.

"Get off me, you little prick!" Santa sniveled a moment before the boy smashed a bottle against the side of his skull. Stumbling to a knee, he reached to the boy's neck, grabbed a crucifix hanging from a chain, and collapsed to the street.

"Kill his sorry ass, Mighty Whitey!" the Puerto Rican boy begged. "Send his phony ass back to Mrs. Claus in a body bag!"

And that's what might've happened if a black kid hadn't pulled Stefan away at the cacophony of approaching sirens.

"Come on, Stefan! Let's get out of here before you kill him!"

"I got to find my chain, Darius," Stefan yelled. "The lousy deadbeat ripped it off my neck!"

"There's no time," Darius urged pointing to an NYPD cruiser turning the corner. "We have to haul ass!" And so, they abandoned the poser in a

puddle of his own blood and hightailed down the dark street and out of sight.

As for the Grinch who stole Christmas, the last thing he remembered were the voices in his head.

Chapter 2

Ushering in the Season

THE NEXT DAY, wind battered the cheeks of three million spectators lining Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade.

The tradition began in 1924.

Back then, they released the balloons at the end of the parade until one brought down an airplane.

Now, they fold them up for next year.

Crashing planes are a touchy subject.

The smart viewers lounged at home watching televisions, their feet digging into plush shag carpets, their mouths watering from the turkey roasting in the oven. Nobody wanted to venture into the blustery wind just to welcome a jolly ole fat man from the North Pole.

But, staying at home was for chumps.

Any kid worth his weight in Bubble Yum would tell you, in order to one up their friends, bragging rights came by freezing their balls off while hot chocolate warmed the hand. Boasting that they came, saw, and conquered, meant watching from a heated living room wasn't going to cut it.

Stefan whistled as the Spiderman balloon soared overhead. "Look! It's Spidey!"

 Spiderman, Spiderman,

Does whatever a spider can. 🎵🎵🎵

The boys went crazy as the masked marauder soared past Macy's followed by the Late Night Float.

"Look," Stefan pointed to the rock and rolling band on wheels. "It has a giant Les Paul guitar on it."

"Imagine that!" Darius grunted, nudging Stefan.

"You think it's a sign?"

"Maybe, why not?"

Marco couldn't refuse. "Maybe the universe is warning us not to steal one." It was a reference to an upcoming heist they'd planned.

"Maybe it's a sign?" Stefan again asked.

"Take it easy, Mighty Whitey," Darius giggled. It was a nickname they'd given Stefan.

Then, they cheered louder as the Air Force Marching Band appeared.

"Damn!" Stefan exclaimed. "Those are some ass kicking brothers!" Cheering, he didn't know what war was, but liked the drums just the same.

After a long procession of bands and television stars, pandemonium broke loose and an emerald and gold sleigh appeared. From high upon the float, Santa and Mrs. Claus waved as tickertape fluttered over the scene like a blizzard.

Christmas had officially arrived.

"Can you imagine," Marco joked, "that fat slob screwing the hookers on 42nd Street? He'd be pawning his toys to buy those girls their crack."

“Yeah,” Stefan chuckled. “Liberty Pawn and Jewelry would put his sleigh in the window with a big fat Santa mannequin sitting on it.”

“Red-light special,” Darius threw in. “Pawn it or sell it!”

After a moment of hysterical banter, the boys picked up bottles and hurled them at Santa. It was a display of anger that presents weren’t delivered to street kids like them.

“Put these in your stockings,” Stefan shouted and threw his bottle.

“Hey!” a city cop yelled hurrying through the crowd. “You guys throwing the bottles! Hold it right there!”

But, holding it there wasn’t part of the plan.

Before anyone knew what happened, the friends ran through the horde with police hot on their trail.

It was just another day in the city of dreams.

Chapter 3

The Belly of the Beast

STEFAN WAS PISSED at how he'd been treated by New York's finest jerks.

When criminals were arrested in the County of New York, they were searched, degraded, and sometimes beaten before being locked into holding cells pending transport to Rikers Island Jail.

That's where Mighty Whitey now sat with petty thieves, drunks, and most likely, murderers.

He was losing his patience.

The corrections officers had already changed shifts once... and none of the detainees had been shuffled upstairs to the housing units. As far as the prisoners were concerned, the only difference between them and the guards was that the guards hadn't been caught.

Stefan stared through a Plexiglas barrier and cursed knowing that none of the morons were actually working. He didn't remember much of the parade, save for throwing the bottle and running for his life. Everything else was beaten from him by the flatfoots who chased him down and taught him the consequences of getting on Santa's naughty list.

“What are you, some kind of tough guy?” they’d barked, daring him to argue. “We have a place for idiots like you.”

And they did, too, he found out—a meat locker of freezing human flesh.

Bodies in the morgue are warmer than this, he thought. My friends are nice and warm back at the apartment, probably resting on the flea-infested couch having a laugh or two.

“Shit,” he moaned, pinching his nose against the putrid stench of urine. It was so rancid he could taste it on his tongue.

One of these lowlifes is going to vomit on my two-hundred-dollar kicks at any moment.

It was in the middle of those thoughts, that the cell door clanged open and Johnnie Law appeared. In his hands were wristbands, the type found on hospital patients.

“If I call your name, exit the cell, place out your right hand and keep your lying mouths shut.”

“It’s cold in here,” an elderly man protested, his bones rattling from the chill, obviously drunk from one too many.

“This,” Johnnie Law sneered, showing the man his wristband, “was your ticket outta here. But now, old man, you wait.” He smiled vindictively, pushed the wristband deep into his pocket and glanced around the room.

“Does anyone else have a hearing problem?”

There were no takers; everyone understood there were no magic numbers in a hat, no prizes squirreled away behind door-number-two.

They knew who the king cobra was in this pit, so they gave nothing—except their rapt attention.

When a snake threatened to strike, you had to avoid the bite.

Stefan was led to a blue payphone hanging on a dingy wall.

“One phone call,” Johnnie Law mumbled.

Considering his options, and balancing the odds, he wondered who to call.

“Can I call two people?”

“What’re you deaf, kid? You get one phone call and you better make it count.”

Putting the receiver to his ear, Stefan dialed the one person who could pull him from the dungeon, his criminal defense lawyer, Terry R. Woodward.

Chapter 4

The Defender of Justice

TERRY STOOD SMOKING a Partagas cigar on the wind chilled terrace of his posh 5th Avenue penthouse overlooking Central Park.

The terrace was his getaway.

Creeping out here late at night, the crisp air cleansed the muck from his lungs. Having danced with demons, he'd whiffed their unpleasant odor and was glad to simply be an observer.

Then, there was Mirabel, his lovely wife.

Yes, indeed, he considered, glancing across the snow blown scene below. *Life is good.*

He walked amongst the nightmares of society and rubbed shoulders with the worst people in Manhattan. A criminal defense lawyer, he was in tune with the pulse of the real world; he recognized the heartbeat of the street, knowing sometimes, it was a cold blooded monster.

Years of defending the guilty had born down on him. Yearning to believe in justice again, he wanted to gain that fervor of hope he once held as a young defender of justice. Yet, the lawyer understood those hopes of innocence were lost.

Terry knew justice and truth had nothing to do with actual verdicts. Jury trials were a game. Innocence and guilt depended on which side

weaved the best story for a jury. If a lawyer got the jurors to trust them, it didn't matter what the facts were; it was all in the storytelling.

Most defendants were chips to be traded for a later date. The object of the game was to hold other people's chips for that one case which came along every once in a while; the defendant he wanted to save.

But those cases are few and far between, Terry supposed turning to Mirabel who stepped through a sliding glass door carrying Henri IV Dudognon Heritage Cognac.

"Hey, rock star," she said, pouring them a glass, "its celebration time for winning your biggest case yet."

It was true; this was his biggest case.

His client, Pablo Rivera, was arguably the city's most fabled drug dealer, independently ruling the city's crack cocaine and heroin trafficking trade. That meant two things: Rivera was bigger than John Gotti and controlled more cash than Donald Trump.

Terry grabbed the glass and stared into its liquid. "This is two-million-bucks a bottle, a hell of a bonus from the city's most dangerous man."

"Don't beat yourself up, my love, you kept your oath and paid your dues."

"Nah, the jury did the dirty work. I merely told them a fantasy of innocence."

Mirabel sighed, pushed against her husband for warmth and raised her glass, "To our little white

bunny rabbit, then?” It was a reference to a long-ago witticism they shared that one day he would acquire a cottontail to hop about the office as a reminder of their fairy tale.

“To all things magical,” he agreed, placing his arm around her waist and staring into her eyes. “You know I love you, for better or worse.”

“I prefer the better over the worse.” She lived for moments like this, alone with her man, just sharing the same space. It was magical. This was where she wanted to be—forever. Shivering in his warm embrace and staring into the night skyline, she recalled their humble beginning.

Her husband had climbed the Legal Aid ladder, clawing his way from the depths of nothingness, slaving through eighteen-hour days in the swamps of the criminal courts, defending the poor who couldn’t afford an attorney. He had a desire to make a difference, to save them from themselves. But, she knew it was the horse and water tale: Sometimes he just couldn’t make them drink.

Today was her husband’s day.

It culminated this afternoon in the Federal Courts and Terry was the center of attention. He had beaten back the United States Attorney’s Office, the snakes with the longest fangs. A jury of five men and seven women had acquitted his client despite overwhelming evidence of guilt.

And yet, Mirabel knew, the acquittal weighed heavily on the love of her life.

“Why do I feel so guilty? I’ve let Pablo out to prey on the suckers who buy his dope.”

She kissed him. “Your client is free tonight because of your oratory skills and dedication to the law. Right or wrong, innocent or guilty, the United States Constitution guarantees people like Pablo their day in court... to appear before a jury of their peers when accused of a crime. That’s the nature of the beast. It’s how the system works.”

“It doesn’t mean I have to feel good about it,” he said sipping the cognac.”

“No, you don’t.”

He stared into her bright green eyes and rubbed a palm against her cheek. “On this cold day, the system worked just fine for Pablo Rivera, accused, but acquitted, and most assuredly, New York’s most renowned gangster.”

She giggled and hugged him.

Then, just as the world seemed bearable again and things were perfect once more, his cell phone rang.

“God damn it!” he growled staring at the display. “It’s the payphone from county jail.”

Chapter 5

Nightmares & Dreamscapes

AFTER HIS PHONE CALL, Stefan was locked into an eight-foot cinderblock cell.

There, in the frigid loneliness, he stretched out upon a wretched, threadbare mattress and pulled an itchy blanket over his head. It was similar to those utilized by stables to warm horses in the dead of winter.

He fell into a recurring nightmare.

They'd intensified recently, pushing him from slumber into a clammy, panicked sweat.

Nobody escaped the lunacy of dreams.

This particular frightscape extracted a memory of years before when his twelve-year-old eyes watched helplessly as his father beat him to a pulp.

And, his mother got revenge.

"You good for nothing little brat," Daddy Dearest screamed in a violent rage. He was delirious with drunkenness and had slammed Stefan's head against the wall.

"Please, Daddy, stop!" But, he understood father's motives. Once monsters like him got their hooks into you, they stomped and stroked and sometimes...

Off came the belt, "I'll show you who the man of this house is!"

That belt seemed twenty feet long and Stefan knew it was going to hurt... he'd felt its leather slicing into his flesh many times before.

His dad was a butcher and parked his refrigerated truck down the street.

Inside, treats waited for later pleasures.

In the dream, he covered his eyes with trembling hands, helpless to avoid peeking through his fingers at the preview of things to come.

“No, Dad. Please, don't hurt me.”

Then, suddenly, his mother appeared through the bedroom door with a knife in her hands.

She's going to shove that knife into his heart, he thought; cowering in the corner, he watched as daddy moved closer, raising the thick leather belt over his head.

Crack! Whip! Crack! Snap!

“Mommy!” he screamed, the leather biting into his pale white skin. “Mommy, help me!”

The strikes stung, the belt leaving a raised red welt across the cheek. And then, his right eyelid began to swell and his vision blurred.

Mother lunged. Her face twisted in fury the moment the monster had grabbed her boy's legs towards the bed. She was quick... swinging the knife with all she had... allowing it to find its mark deep inside his chest.

Cruuuuuuuunch!

A splash of bright red blood drenched her face and jogged along her neck as it spurted from the wound.

“I told you,” she shrieked. “I warned you!”

Yet, that isn't true, Stefan thought. She had never cautioned father that a knife would slam into his ribs. This was something new.

One thing was for sure, Daddy wouldn't drive his meat wagon another night. He'd run out of tokens and the turnstile of life would no longer rotate for the psycho.

His mom was making sure of that right now.

“Get away from us!” she screamed, yanking the blade from dad's chest and watching as consciousness faded from his eyes.

Stefan imagined she'd rip the heart from the chest and take a big old bite, like chomping on a New York apple.

Then a voice woke him from dreamland.

“Wake up, come on, get out of bed!”

Emerging from the dream, he tried to grasp where the words originated, yet there was only darkness.

“Stefan Berks,” the voice barked. “Wake up!”

His eyes flashed open and he realized... there was no killing zone; gone was his demonic father who attempted to take his life. And then... it all came crashing back. The barking voice in dreamland was a guard standing in the jail cell.

“Court time, get yourself together.”

Stefan swung his trembling legs off the steel bunk, glad that nightmares had an ending. Little did he know; the frightscape had just begun.