

# *Holly Daze and the Dead Line Steakout*

*by Holly Daze as told to Jezzi Belle Stewart*

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Well, Steakin, actually. You'll see.

It was Christmas 2005, and Marley was scheduled to come through Rogers Park on the Dead Line sometime between 10:01pm on The Eve and 3:37am Christmas day. My info was that he was gonna pick up the Skokie Swift DL branch at the Howard Street transfer. Why Marley wanted or had to visit Skokie I didn't know. Not my problem anyway. I needed to get to him before he left Chicago. The gilded North Shore communities are Rudy's problem, not mine, and he was unavailable - had to guide the damn sleigh, dontchaknow. probably the reason for Marley's timing.

"Marley was dead.... This must be distinctly understood or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am about to relate" (That's why he was riding the Dead line, Bubba. Duh! Blame Dickens; I do.)

Most people aren't aware of the Dead Line. In Chicago, it runs sorta between the Red Line and the Blue Line. In a way it's a lot like that track 9 1/2 good old J.K. writes about in those unaccountably popular Potter books.

Most people don't know the dead aren't dead either. Go figure. Ebbie found out, thanks to Marley. And now, while Marley's

still ridin' the Dead Lines draggin' that Godawful - literally God awful - chain, he and Tiny Tim are doing evangelical work in Cincinnati trying to convince some hick radio station news reporter that turkeys really can't fly, so he doesn't wind up a serial turkey killer with a long chain of giblets ... or, at least that's the last I heard where they were.

Dickens got some things right and some things wrong. He was right about an afterlife, and about the whole punishment/reward thing. The selfish dead seeing where they went wrong in life, wanting to correct their errors, being unable to do so ... all that, spot on. He's got the dead FLYING though for Christsake. Opps, gotta watch my language; the BOSS can be touchy where Junior's concerned at times. Anyway, they don't fly, least not the bad guys. They ride the Dead Lines. The only time flying is involved is when water needs to be crossed and then it's by boat - yeah, boats fly. Don't ask me how. Started by some damned - literally again - Dutchman back in the 1600's sometime. Again, not my territory. And, hey, if you want logic, don't mess with the afterlife. I just told you that in the 'burbs a frickin anthropomorphic mythical reindeer does my job, after all. And we're only talkin' about the Western culture and the Judeo/Christian afterlife. You don't even wanna think about the Islamic afterlife or that of the Asian religions. There's even an afterlife for atheists where they don't exist. Yeah, I know. Go take a coupla aspirin and don't call me in the morning. Long and short: The BOSS doesn't have to follow the rules; he makes 'em and then keeps 'em or not as he - or she, depending on whim - likes.

Me? I'm just the hired help, and pretty far down the food chain, at that. The BOSS isn't my immediate boss. Right now, it's Klaus - yeah, with a "K"; everybody gets it wrong these days. In October, it's Jack, July, Sam ... you get the idea. February is the worst; it's a little difficult taking orders given by an adult sized baby with a bow and arrows seriously.

I asked once why not Lincoln or Washington for February, and was told they were too restrictive, only viable in the USA. Oh, well. Klaus is OK to work for, and the Mrs. cranks out cookies to die for. December is THE busy season in my biz, and I like it; I was hired on Christmas eve.

I'm alive, by the way, but you'd never recognize me. Klaus sent some guy who calls himself The Professor to hire me; he sent me to a hick town called Ovid for my training. First thing, I got hauled in by the local cops and this Judge character says I broke some cockamamy local law and turns me from plain old middle aged, male Howard Day into this twenty-something VERY female blonde bombshell. Now, I had a life I liked, and I was reasonably handsome - or so Millie, the sixty something checkout "girl" at the Quickmart, used to tell me - and so I thought about throwing a hissy, but then I noticed - no aches and pains, unassisted apparently 20/20 vision, and no creeping pot belly. I bent over and I COULD TOUCH MY TOES !! I could adjust to lookin' like a blonde Xena, too (I'd kept my 6'2" height and athletic build). I decided to not look a gift horse in the mouth and keep quiet. I still don't know why I need to be female to do my job; the closest I ever got to a reason was the cop whispering to me on the way out, as if he knew what I was thinkin', "I think the old guy just gets off on changing guys to gals." Whatever floats your boat, I guess. Anyway, this judge character says I'm not his usual case and I don't have to stay in Ovid, so I can pick my own name and go do my job. Since it was Christmas eve and I was feeling a tad confused, I picked Holly Daze. Yeah, I know, I kill me.



Holly & Howard

As Howard, I always tried to live my life on the Bill and Ted Principal, "Be excellent to each other and party on dudes.", and somehow, that put me on Klaus's Nice List. Maybe he's a Keanue Reeves fan.

Anyway, I was on the skids a couple of Christmases ago. You don't wanna know; let's just say I was singin' the Blues in the Night. I was headin' from the local brew factory to the Quickmart on Touhy on The Eve, half soused, and I saw Millie standin' outside and she was cryin'. She looked like shit. Millie shovels on the makeup by the truckload - I think she keeps revlon, etc. in business all by herself - and it was all running down her face. Seems she'd been evicted from her apartment that morning and fired by the scrooge who managed the Quickmart that night. (BTW, not everything is perfect for the redeemed; Ebbie just hates his last name used as a derogatory common noun.) Geeze, who evicts and fires on Christmas eve?

I have a soft spot for Millie - maybe because she's the only broad who ever really called me handsome - so I tossed her the keys to my apartment and told her to go get a good nights sleep and to fix herself something to eat from the leavings in the fridge. I wouldn't be home that night or tomorrow and to just leave the key under the mat when she left. I figured I'd just hit the next bar down the street and drink all night; it was owned by Miles Togo, our town's resident atheist, who I know didn't give a rat's ass about Christmas and never closed his place. My folks and all my other relatives were dead, My wife was gone, run off with the whitewall boy, formerly of the Qwikie Kar Wash on Malcolm Street, and I had no friends in this city, having recently arrived - well, no friends except for Millie. I was approaching the Chicago River bridge and wondering whether if I jumped I would drown or freeze first, when "What to my wondering eyes did appear but a miniature sleigh and eight tiny reindeer". Well, nine, actually; Rudy was leading and instead of a sleigh it looked more like a '59 Caddy

Eldorado with the top down.

Klaus was in the drivers seat, but he looked more like Hugh Hefner in his prime, smoking jacket and all. And he had some elves with him partying in the back seat. I bet Mrs. didn't know about them! About the only thing that fit the common image was the reindeer - and the fact that the Caddy was red and the elves wore green, though not much of it.

The Rudy and the girls - yeah, except for Rudy, the reindeer are girls; the stories I could tell you about Vixen ... but I digress. Rudy and the girls put the Caddysleigh down beside me light as a feather. Having decided to off myself, I didn't let a little thing like this freak me out, so when Klaus checked his list - twice - and asked me for some photo ID, I pulled out my wallet and showed him what a lousy job the photographers at the DMV do. He looked at me, then at the pic, then at the list, then did it all again, and then stuck his hand out. We shook and he offered me the job. It sounded better than an ice water bath in the river, so I accepted on condition he take care of Millie. The next thing I knew I was walking toward the courthouse in Ovid and you know the rest.

Oh, you don't? The job? I'm a redeemer. Not THE Redeemer, of course; that's Junior's job ... and he redeems the living. I redeem the dead. Like Dickens, Joseph Smith had it partially right. The unredeemed dead can be redeemed. It just doesn't happen because a particular religious group of regular, ordinary humans conducts a ceremony involving a giant bathtub. And it's not the choice of the dead; it's a decision made by the boss because some aspect of the life of a dead person, while not enough to provide him or her with the BIG TICKET convinces The Boss to give that person, while dead, a second chance, None of us knows the Boss's criteria, but it must be pretty strict, because those potentially redeemed dead are few and far between. In the three years since I became Holly, I've

only redeemed one of the dead.

Rudy and I have discussed this over the traditional bowl of smoking bishop<sup>1</sup>, and he told me he's been at it - along with his sleigh guiding duties - since 1939 and hasn't redeemed anyone yet. Rudy's my best friend, and we hang together a lot. Even after three years, I'm still not completely acclimated to this whole girl thing, and Rudy looks me in the eyes not the boobs; When he says, "Nice rack!" he means it literally and isn't referring to a human<sup>2</sup>. His reasoning is that the people on the North Shore who die unredeemed are all REALLY unredeemed - no room for Waffling on the Boss's part. I suppose that could be true - the whole harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom of Heaven thing I guess - but I told him that I didn't think it was a matter of geography since my one redeemed wasn't from Chicago, my territory. Anyway, he seems to think I must be special because I had let it slip that right after The Judge changed me, he did tell me I was to be a heroine. I didn't tell Rudy that when I asked The Judge what he meant and what I had to look forward to, he smiled and quoted Jane Austen to me: "When a young lady is to be a heroine, something must and will happen to throw a hero in her way"<sup>3</sup> That has been the stuff of nightmares, as, while my sex changed, my sexual orientation hasn't - at least not yet. I wouldn't mind another heroine, though; after all Xena had her Gabriel.

While there might not be a lot of the redeemed while dead, there have to be a lot of us. That's because the redeemed dead don't know they are redeemed. We literally have to catch them and forcibly make them aware, and that's hard to do ... catch them, that is, because they are constantly on the move, looking for those that need their help and suffering because they think they can't give it. If they sense they are being hunted, they take evasive action.

Once caught, we stake 'em. Like Dickens and the Mormons, Bram Stoker got it partially right; when we catch one we drive a wooden stake through his or her heart. That's why I call what I do a stakein rather than a stakeout. And, no, I can't tell you why that's the particular method; maybe the Boys Upstairs are too busy to do a tech upgrade and figure if it works, don't fix it. Who knows? Once staked, they change to or go on to whatever or wherever The Boss has in mind for them.

My "Deemie" before Marley had been a hooker in Wilmette - yeah, they DO have hookers in Wilmette, but you probably couldn't afford them. No one can know The Boss's reasoning for sure, but my guess is that "Titsie" was a workin' gal who really did fit the hooker with a heart of gold stereotype. Whatever, it took me a month or two of watching her old hangout, the diner by the movie theater in downtown Wilmette, to finally catch her. Titsie must have been a swimmer; she liked to dive, and her way of leaving the diner was to do a shallow dive through the front window in spirit form, materialize once immediately outside, go into a tuck and role, and end up on her feet. The next time she exited, I was laying on my back on the sidewalk under the window and as she came through, I stabbed up through her heart. There was a flash of light, and she and the stake were gone. I don't know for sure, but I think she became a cat, because when I looked around, a big - and the only word that comes to mind is beautiful - tabby was crossing the street. She turned around and, I swear, smiled at me. She looked happy.



Titsie Tabby

Marley was different. He was old, wise, and famous ... and fictional. He was one of those, like Rudy, who took life, even in death, from the minds of men, and who would, without intervention, cease to exist when men no longer remembered. Due to Marley's intervention, Ebbie went from fictional reality

directly to real, immortal spirituality upon Dicken's death,<sup>4</sup> and that's why Marley was slotted to be redeemed. It had taken well over a hundred years for Redeemer Central to track him down and develop a plan. The best times for redeeming were Christmas eve and Christmas and Good Friday through Easter Sunday. Somehow RC had figured out Marley would be going through my territory this Christmas and so I was plan "A"; if I didn't get him, plan "B" would go to whoever had the territory or territories he'd be in in the spring. If Rudy hadn't been out sleighing around with Vixen & Co., he and I could have coordinated and there would have been a wider window of opportunity to do the deed. Oh well.

So that's why I was freezing my butt off on the platform of the Jarvis Red Line station, a super sized Buffy clone in black leather, wearin' my 6" heeled Dutch made knee high boots, carrying a frickin' fire hardened Oak stake. I know you're wondering about the boots; I don't know why I wore them; something just sort of made me put them on back at the apartment. I usually only wore them for show because at that heel height they were damn hard to walk in. But not this night; it was as if I was wearin' my sneaks.

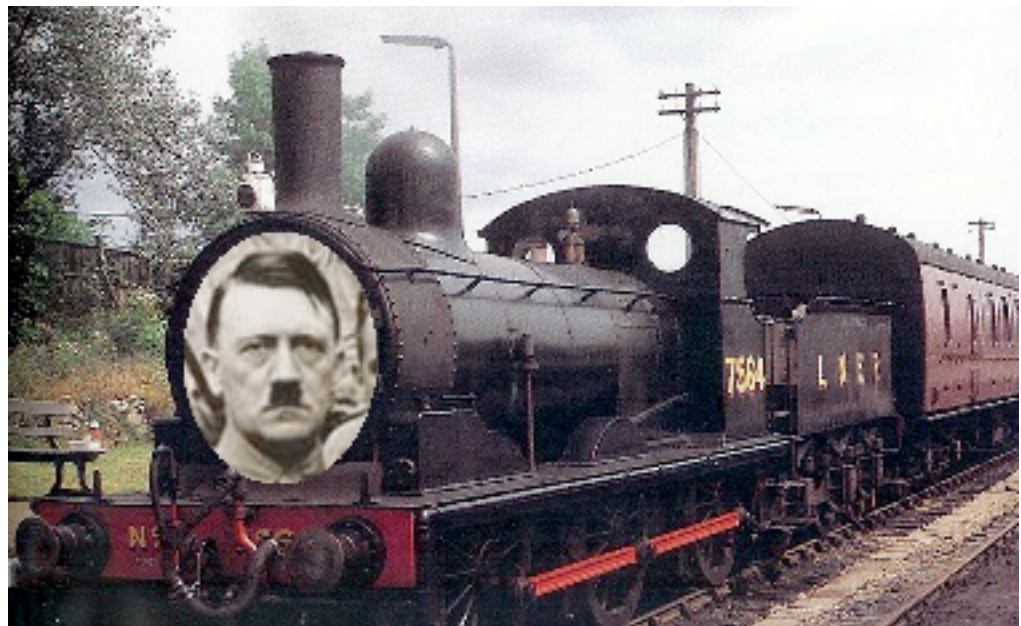
I'd know which train Marley was on because the stake would vibrate - sort of doing for those special dead what a dousing rod does for water. It was 12:32am Christmas day, I'd been there over two hours, the freezing was way past just my butt, there'd been only two Dead Line trains - Mussolini and Stalin - and Marley hadn't been on either one. The trains are named after the real baddies, the damned damned or DD's as we call them; their spirits inhabit the steam locomotives that pull the trains, and they feel everything as if the engines were their bodies. HotterthanHell isn't just an expression for them. You can tell which is which because, like Marley's face on the door knocker, their human faces are where the front boiler plate



would be; Thomas the Tank Engine<sup>5</sup> gone horribly bad.

At 12:33, I heard sound of a steam loco and looked south down the tracks toward The Loop. The noise was twice as loud as the two previous baddies, and the sparks that were shooting from the smokestack looked like a 4th of July display. This engine was running hottest of all! Kindly old Uncle Adolf was coming! His mouth was wide open in a horrifying silent scream. The face had the look of a soul being consumed by the fires of Hell, which,

of course, it was. I suppose one of these days the Boys Upstairs will update their DD list, but for now, Hitler was the damnedest of the damned on the Dead Line.



Adolf, just before Hellfiring up for the first time, April 30, 1945. He wouldn't keep that stoic look for much longer.

And Marley was on him. My stake was vibrating like crazy. As Adolf slowed down upon reaching the platform, he was still glowing, but I felt no heat; it was all reserved for him. I gazed into the car windows as they slid by, and in the 4th car, I spotted him. He was completely gray, still dressed in 1840's garb, still with the scarf tied around his head holding his jaws in place. The only difference from before he warned Ebbie was no chain. Damn! He'd be faster without the chain.

I estimated the train would stop with the 4th car about 50 feet beyond me. I turned and ran, again briefly wondering how I could do that in my FM heeled boots. For this to work, I had to get to the car just as the doors opened, and I did.

I slid in and twisted bringing up the stake. Marley was facing me about four feet away, and I launched myself at him stake extended held in both hands, using all my power of motion to try and drive it through his heart. But he was fast and while he didn't have a chain, he did have a cane in his left hand. He brought the cane up and sent my stake flying, grabbed the bottom of the cane in his right hand and caught me in the chest, just under my boobs, with the cane horizontal. I double damned that Ovid judge at that point, not so much for making me female, but for making me female with D cups. The cane caught under those boobs and he was able to flip me over onto my back. Like Titsie, he was a diver and started to dive over me. A tuck and roll would bring him even with the car's doors; he'd be out onto the platform, and I'd be still in and riding the Dead Line. I could get off at the Howard stop, but he'd be long gone before I got back to Jarvis. Failure began to sweep over me, but then it hit me, the answer to why I'd worn the boots. They were DUTCH boots - wooden soles and heels! I gave a silent nod of thanks to Junior, who probably was behind the nudge to wear them and my ease of motion in them, curled up on my back, flexed my legs, and lashed upwards with my feet. The heels caught Marley in the chest just as he was diving over me. It must have worked, because There was a flash of light and the next thing I knew, I was standing on the Jarvis platform, in my sneaks, with the most beautiful little girl I'd ever seen holding my hand ... and Marley nowhere to be seen. Screamin' Adolf rolled on into the night.

I looked at the little girl, maybe six years old, and felt instant love. "Jacob?" I asked.

She smiled and giggled. "Silly Mommie. Not anymore. I remember, but I'm Marlie now, like I always knew I was supposed to be. Let's go home." Marlie; I could almost see the pink signature with the little heart over the i.

I'm Holly Daze. I still don't know what I'm going to do about sex, but I'm Mommie and I've found my little heroine. And I'm going to take her home, and we and Millie will have hot chocolate with Marshmallows, and then we'll go to bed so Klaus and Rudy and the girls will bring us presents<sup>6</sup>. If they don't, well, I know Millie will love just being a grandma, I already have mine, and I know Jacob finally has hers.

And to rip off Tiny Tim, "God bless us everyone!"

*Footnotes next page*

1 -It's that damn Dickens again (although he isn't) *"...and we will discuss your affairs this very afternoon, over a Christmas bowl of smoking bishop, Bob!"*

... but the stuff IS good. I close my eyes when I drink it with Rudy, though; he does drink it from a bowl, being a reindeer and all, and it's not an aesthetically pleasing sight. Here's a recipe:



5 unpeeled, sweet oranges  
1 unpeeled grapefruit  
36 cloves  
1/4 pound of sugar  
2 bottles of red wine (strong)  
1 bottle of port

Wash the fruit and bake them in the oven until they are brownish. Turn once.

Put them into a warmed earthenware bowl with six cloves pricked into each.

Add the sugar and pour in the wine - not the port.

Cover and leave in a warm place for a day.

Squeeze the fruit into the wine and strain.

Add the port and heat.

DO NOT BOIL!

Serve "smoking hot" in small wine glasses.

Yield: 15 to 20 servings

2 - Both male and female reindeer grow antlers. In older male

reindeer - Rudy's 67 - they fall off in December while in females they fall off in the summer. Since the eight ladies have been hauling sleigh since 1823 (when it WAS a sleigh), making them each around 200, Rudy really doesn't socialize much with them outside the month of December, but at that time, rackless himself, he lets them know he can still appreciate "a nice rack". They may be old, he says, but they work out.

3 - From Northanger Abbey. I've actually met Jane Austen. She's normal redeemed dead - by Junior, that is. Howard was a fan, and so am I. She's pretty cool, and I gotta say this girlie stuff is getting to me because I just love her clothes!

4 - I've also met Chuck. Nice guy, but don't share a bowl of smoking bishop with him if you're in a hurry. The guy talks like he writes, and with just a bit of the alky in him, he doesn't stop for hours.

5 - I've heard through the RC grapevine that Thomas is slated to become a Redeemer by the 22nd century. It's said he'll take some of the load off Rudy - give him some Christmases off from Sleigh duty. Bob the Builder's high on the list, too, I hear.

6 - Actually, they did bring presents. Vixen picked out mine, but it'll just have to stay in the box till that hero shows up.