

SANTA'S HELPER

By Michael Rychlewski

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TIME

Well after midnight, Christmas Eve, 1995

PLACE

Grand Rapids, Michigan

SCENE

The roof of an older office building, 16 floors up. It is turned at a 20-degree angle so stage-right is further down-stage. There is a white roof shed up-stage left of center that can be used as a projection screen when TOM shows his photos to JEAN-PIERRE. The lip of the roof should be 18 inches high and 12-inches wide.

CHARACTERS

TOM: around 50, a retired paramedic from Chicago, now a night guard at an older office building in Grand Rapids. He has seen a lot of death.

JEAN-PIERRE: 35-50, a man who appears to be of Middle Eastern descent.

AT RISE: JEAN PIERRE stands center-stage about ten feet from the front ledge. He wears black pants, an orange Marmot windbreaker and black running shoes. He faces out with his hands at his side and does not move or show emotion. There is a white roof-shed up-left with an envelope taped to the black door. TOM enters from there wearing a security guard uniform with winter jacket and a flash-light and gun attached to his belt. He carries a thin hard-cover book. He slowly pushes the door one-third open, peaks out from behind the door, sees JEAN-PIERRE. His shoulders sag. JEAN-PIERRE does not notice. TOM pushes the door open half-way. After a few seconds he takes a very small step out on to the roof. JEAN-PIERRE still does not hear him or sense him. TOM regards JEAN-PIERRE for several seconds.

TOM

(under his breath) Fuck.

(JEAN-PIERRE turns to the sound, sees TOM, tenses, moves down-right a bit, watching TOM'S every move.)

Hey. Whoa! Whoa! ...It's okay. ...I'm not.

(TOM puts his hands up in a defenseless gesture. JEAN PIERRE stops.)

I'm not gonna. ...Don't worry.

(Beat)

Okay. ...Let's...

(Beat)

Jesus.

(Beat, TOM gets his bearings.)

Okay.

(TOM sees the envelope.)

Oh! Good. ...Good!

(TOM gestures to it)

This. This is yours, Right? ...Am I right? ...Taped to the door here?

(TOM walks mock-carefully over to the shed and mock-carefully pulls the envelope off the door.)

Don't worry. I'm very good at this.

(TOM considers opening it, doesn't.)

Right.

(Beat.)

So. ...Do you?

(TOM squints to see JEAN-PIERRE better.)

Do you understand me? ...Speak English? ...No? ...Yes?

(Beat)

You want me to read this, right? ...Is that it? ...Or I could...

(TOM puts the envelope to his forehead and concentrates like a clairvoyant, grins.)

Carnac. Remember him? The Tonight Show. *(imitating Carnac.)* "Your grandmother's bippy."

(Beat)

You ever seen that? The Tonight Show? ...Johnny Carson? We used to watch that show every night. Like clockwork. Or habit. You know. Something you start doing and after a while you can't stop. Like those people who have gone to every Cub game since World War II. Or Barbie. There's some guy in California. He's got like a billion Barbies.

(Beat)

I'm sorry. This is supposed to be about you, isn't it? ...Let me imagine.

(TOM puts the envelope to his forehead and concentrates.)

Your boss at the post office. ...No? No, that wouldn't be it, would it? You would have gone in there with an AK-47 and taken him out yourself. ...So. *(sly grin)* ...I guess we can safely eliminate postal worker. *(perks up.)* Say! ...Is that a Marmot jacket? It looks like my old hunting jacket.

(TOM starts to put a hand to his back to

gesture where the zipper was on his jacket.)

Is there a zipper across?

(JEAN-PIERRE tenses, backs away)

Hey! Whoa! Whoa! Whoa! Relax! ...Relax. I was just pointing. I was...I'm not. *(voice softens)*
Hey, I'm not.

*(TOM gestures "I'm-not-here-to-bother
you.")*

Believe me. *(under his breath)* Fuck.

*(Beat. JEAN-PIERRE looks away from TOM and
begins to breathe heavily. TOM regards him awhile,
takes a step down-stage, leans out just a little.)*

So. ...You waved down at the guy? Is that it?

*(Beat. TOM takes another step, leans out a
little further. He is maybe five feet from the
ledge.)*

It must have been hard for him to see you up here. The way the roof juts out down there. ...I
guess he must have been across the street, huh?

(Beat)

So what did you do? Did you shout down at him? ...Did you throw something? ...Well, who
cares, right? He was a good citizen. He came over. He knocked. So few people want to take
responsibility nowadays. It's a lost art, you know. Good citizenship. A lost. *(searching for the
word)* Vocation? ...Anyway. "Knock-knock." I look up from my book. Some goof with
 earmuffs.

*(TOM imitates a goofy guy pointing up and
mouthing the words "There. Is. A. Man. Up.
There." JEAN-PIERRE does not move or look at
TOM but he senses TOM'S movement.)*

Just as I'm getting into my book. I'm reading this very good book.

(TOM takes a step towards JEAN-PIERRE,

stops, holds out the book.)

Rat.

(Beat)

It's about a rat. His life. Scrounging around for food. Tearing off the heads of mice Got it in the remainders. Published in eight languages. What the hell, right? Get a different point of view. Everybody needs that. Anyway, he was just about to satisfy himself on the back of some female when "knock-knock." I look up.

(Beat)

No! ...It was an earmuff hat. ...An earmuff hat! ...Stevie had one of those. He loved it. Wore it when we played hockey. Every winter we'd flood the back yard. Neighborhood kids would come over. Tammi'd bring out some hot chocolate.

(TOM looks out over the landscape with a pained smile. JEAN-PIERRE sneaks a peak at him. Beat.)

Listen. I'm not an authority on this by any stretch. But I'm thinking...so as to...you know.

(TOM makes a small "flying-through-the-air" gesture with both hands.)

Really get air-borne.

(Beat)

You might go a little farther back here. You got a fair amount of space. I mean why waste it, right? You gotta speed it up on the ground before you take off anyway. ...Right?

(Beat)

But hey. That's your call.

(TOM'S voice becomes interior.)

We make our calls.

(Beat. TOM gestures to the envelope.)

So. Should I open this? Or would you rather jump first? And then we can... You know. Like it was a will.

(Beat)

No?

(Beat)

I'll tell you what. I've got a better idea. Tell you what I'm gonna do. I've got a good idea.

(JEAN-PIERRE looks down-right with a faraway and anguished look on his face. TOM cannot see this.)

I'm gonna go get Ted. I know. You're thinking, "Ted? Who the fuck is Ted?" Ted's my partner. We split the graveyard. He does Sunday-Wednesday. I take Thursday-Saturday. He needs those week-ends off. Young guy. You know how that is. Anyway on special nights, big nights, like tonight *(ironic)* When all hell is breaking loose!

(JEAN-PIERRE'S lowers his head. TOM notices this change in comportment.)

I'm not boring you am I?

(TOM'S voice darkens a little.)

Small talk, my friend. Without it the world doesn't run. Walking up the fairway. Or cruising some shit-hole neighborhood. "How's the wife? How's the kids?" "How's his pink eye?" "We're giving him drops. It's almost gone." "Great!" "I read your proposal." "You like it?" "Very dynamic." All the big talk? Evil? Destiny? God? Doesn't mean shit.

(Beat)

Do you think that's what I should be talking about? I can if you want. We could do it like in the movies. You know. Get philosophical.

(TOM regards the stars with a mock-far-away look in his eyes. JEAN-PIERRE sees this, looks up.)