

A Specialty Service

My Life Behind the Gun

Defending the Bell Ringer

Here I am standing on a corner ringing a bell wearing a Santa Clause suit. The job sounded easy. Find the people beating up the Salvation Army workers. In the past couple of days, seven bell ringers have been assaulted with one of them losing an eye in the attack. The temp service that supplies the local Salvation Army here wanted to protect their workers. After the cookie incident, I had said never again, but here we are working for an icon of Americana in red and white suits. As it turned out the initial part was easy. About a day into our stake out a rival charity showed up to go after my second-in-command a woman we all call TC. That was a very big mistake. TC is a tall, strong, beautiful black woman who likes to kick ass.

The three men followed her into an alley. The first dressed as an elf swung a tire iron at her head. She easily dodged the swing and brought up her knee connecting with his junk. The force of the kick doubled him over. As he fell the other elf and Santa struck. The elf pulled a knife and came at her with a downward slashing motion. Like he was a movie psycho. TC shifted to her side and used his downward force to propel the knife toward him. He stabbed himself in the thigh. Santa struck with a led pipe. He used a sideways motion trying to prevent what just happened to his elf. The result was a weak hit to the forearm. She easily disarmed Saint Nick and used the pipe on his, well let's just say he won't be walking right for a while.

TC is a valuable employee of a specialized security service I run. Some call us mercenaries, the ones dressed like elves just cry uncle. We handle cases most are unwilling or unable to take. If you are a drug kingpin, crime lord, or tyrannical ruler of an oppressed people then just don't call we won't help you. We may be mercenaries, but we do have standards.

TC found a card on old saint nick for a charity called *New Hope*. The plot thickens. New Hope is a charity devoted to helping the poor and homeless. They put their people on every corner. Their business is high tech using specialized collection boxes that include debit and credit card readers and a money counter that could provide a receipt. They collect all year long using different themes for every occasion. Some are known for being aggressive with the bell ringing and asking for money.

The next day I went to the New Hope offices to find out what was what. The charity was being operated out of an office space in a strip mall. TC stayed out on the street hoping someone else tries that again. No windows, just a handmade sign. I knocked on the door. Nothing. I knocked again. A voice came over an intercom to the left of the door, *“sorry we don’t take walk-ins or allow nonemployees inside our offices. If you want to make an appointment, then please call.”* The disembodied voice gave me a phone number. I said to the voice, *“a couple of your employees tried to go after an employee of the Salvation Army and had their asses handed to them. It would be nice to hear if New Hope had an explanation.”* Dead silence. So, I left a card in the door and went back to the office.

About an hour later five men came to the office with baseball bats. I had an idea that someone would be coming. So, I was waiting in our reception area. The five men walked in. I said, *“this isn’t the batting cages fellas.”* The first guy in the door said, *“shut your hole and.”* He stopped talking as I stood up holding an AR-15. I am wearing gray and black camo with a full-size Beretta Storm on my hip and a compact Beretta Storm on a tactical vest. I said, *“it seems that you all brought bats to a gun fight.”* The first one went to make a move. I took a step back and aimed the AR at the lead. He turned white then red. He almost looked like he was going to faint. Then the smell. Yes, he crapped himself. They dropped their bats and left. I went looking for an industrial strength air freshener.

The upfront way wasn’t working so we needed a new plan. This may shock you, but we planned to steal from a charity. We needed to get a better look at their fancy collection boxes. I doubt any of them would let us. Ted and I went looking for a mark. He or she would have to be in a remote location with an easy escape route. After combing the city, we found our mark. A man dressed as Santa with a top hat instead of the traditional one. Unlike many, his box wasn’t chained down to anything. We were in a panel truck with a sign saying we were plumbers. Can anyone say shades of Watergate?

We made our move first speeding up then coming to a stop in front of the top hat Santa. Out of nowhere, a shot rang out. The headlights of three cars came on. One car was parked just across from us with a guy and his AK 47. This was a trap. Top hat Santa dropped to the ground as gunfire erupted. After the first shot, Ted had stepped away from the wheel which was a good thing as all the fire was directed at the driver's side of the truck. Using our ARs Ted and I returned fire. The other two cars opened fire. The panel truck was armored but not completely. Within a few minutes, the engine was dead, and if we didn't do anything fast so were we. I shot out the street lights plunging the street into darkness. They didn't pack any night vision for this little hunt. I try and never leave home without it. Ted and I using suppressors and night vision picked off two of every person in the cars. They eventually drove off. I sent Ted to a car we had stashed for an emergency with all the guns while I waited to explain to the police what this was. Ted also took top hat Santa who as it turned out was a junkie the others paid to act as bait.

After a night of saying wrong place wrong time, the police released me, and I went back to the office. In our main conference room, I found TC with one of New Hope's boxes on a table. She said, "*I found one in a bad location and offered the Elf three thousand for it. He said yes as long as I knocked him out and tied him up.*" She looked me over then she looked at Ted who wasn't in yet. She said, "*how did your night go?*" I said, "*you can read about it in the paper.*" TC went over and grabbed a crowbar. I waved her off and said, "*no this thing may be booby-trapped. Let's wait until Ted gets in.*"

An hour later Ted came in with a newspaper. The cover was **War in the Streets**. The second story was about an Elf for New Hope being tied up and shot on a street corner. TC Said, "*I didn't shoot him.*" I tapped on the box and said, "*no, my guess is there is a secret in this box worth killing for.*" Ted said, "*yeah no kidding.*" Ted went on to say he would need time to examine the box. I told him he had twenty-four hours. I was going home to shower and sleep. At home, I found two officers waiting for me. They needed me to come back to the station and answer some more questions. Ten hours later they brought me back home where I showered and slept. In the morning, I went for a run. I noticed a bigger police presence in my neighborhood.

After running, I showered again, and I had a bowl of corn flakes. Then using the back door went to the office.

At the office, Ted said we would have to meet in the secure room. In it, he had dismantled the box. He had found a tracking device inside. Our secure room acted as a Faraday cage preventing signals from coming in or getting out. Ted said, *“outside of the GPS marker this thing had no security.”* I replied, *“the security was the guys with the guns.”* He went on to say how the box was a large hard drive storing peoples stolen credit card numbers as they donated. He said, *“it’s the perfect scam. Most people today don’t carry cash so if they can donate using a card, then they will.”* The scam was worse. People with credit limits above fifty thousand or bank accounts above two hundred thousand had a special marker placed on the file. Using a program to retrieve erased files Ted rebuilt the past scans. He connected the marks with home invasions over the last couple of months with at least twelve deaths. But wait there’s more.

Ted said, *“this is where top hat Santa comes in. I found a receipt on him with a barcode. When I tried to take the receipt, he flipped out. So, using the street cameras, I followed him to a dealer.”* Ted turned on a screen in the room. A video from a street camera showed top hat Santa walking up to a known drug dealer. The dealer stood on the opposite side of a fence from the buyer. The dealer pulled out what looked like a pricing gun and scanned the receipt. He left then came back with a small packet with white powder, but I don’t think it was sugar. Ted said, *“I also searched every known charity for homeless and poor and couldn’t find where they gave any money away.”* Identity theft, credit card theft, home invasion, murder, drug dealing and embezzlement of charity funds. I said, *“what no puppy kicking?”* Ted turned around and played a video of one of the elves kicking a puppy into the street and under the tire of a passing truck. TC who had come in without a sound said, *“we need to stop these people now.”*

As if to answer the question the police were at the door. The police had a search and seizure warrant for all firearms on the premises. They took everything from my personal Beretta Storm subcompact to every AR 15 in the arms locker. They even took a plugged barrel replica of

a WW II M1 Garand hung on the wall. None of the guns used that night were there. I have a secondary location for heavier duty weapons. If Ted did his job, those guns were long gone. The location isn't in my name or the companies. Luckily the donation box was unrecognizable in its separate parts. Then they took me in for 24 hours so they could test the guns so, I wouldn't make a break for it.

24 hours later I was on the street. Back at the office, I found everyone that works for me. TC called everyone who wasn't on an assignment to work on this job. I pulled TC aside and told her we need to do this by the book and within the law. With the police watching us anything stupid or illegal could end the company. She asked, "*then what will we do?*" I answered, "*I have no idea.*" It would seem Ted had an idea. He sent all the information we gathered illegally to a police detective he knows. This detective is the one working on a rash of home invasions taking place in the city.

We needed to make it able for the detective to investigate the charity. TC said, "let's raid their offices. Using baseball bats and our fists we would go into the New Hope's offices and break stuff. This will give the police an excuse to go in and find the evidence they need to take them down. This also could end our company. Our preferred clientele does not hire criminals and the kind that do we don't work for. Before we left I addressed the company, "*this could be our last action within this country. If anyone doesn't want in, I will understand.*" Near the door with the annoyed intercom was two loading doors. If we were to give the police, the best way of seeing all the illegality happening we would need to take these doors down. It's a good thing we had the Hummer. I attached a tow line to the doors and pulled them off. Inside was the entire elf army. Twenty men all dressed like either elves or Santa Clause. Also, there was one in an Elvis Santa costume. They were surrounded by guns, money and what turned out to be stolen items from the home invasions. In other words, evidence.

TC yelled, "*let's take it to them.*" We charged in with bats. The doors coming off and our invasion took them by surprise. We struck. Luckily, they didn't go for their guns. They grabbed

whatever was handy. One of them threw a bell. The bell clanged off the Hummer. Santa Elvis pulled a knife and came at me, but before he got to me, TC put her foot in front of him, and he tripped over it, and the knife went sliding by. He got up and threw a punch, but I countered and caught him in the beard with a good old fashion roundhouse. That is when the police arrived.

In the end, the charity was closed. All their operators were jailed, some with multiple counts of murder. Inside the offices, the police found a detailed account of all the drug dealers they worked with as well as all the stolen money and houses invaded. The elf that kicked the puppy may have had a little accident involving a baseball bat and his nuts. After some negotiations, my team was charged with several misdemeanors from simple assault to property damage. I now find myself alongside the road picking up trash for the next one hundred hours. Also, our client refused to pay us.