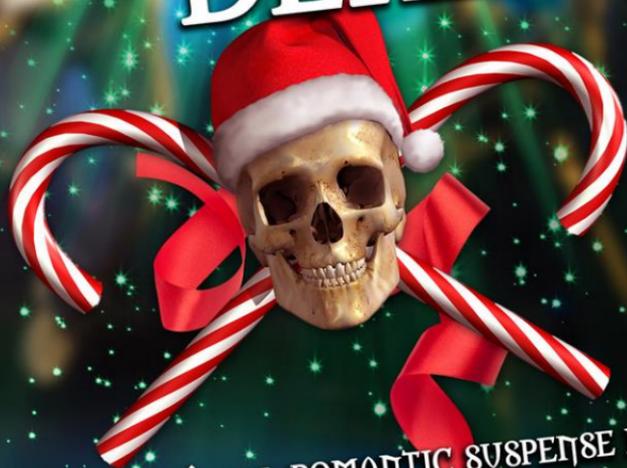


All I Want
for Christmas
is
Johnny Rocker...

DEAD



A ROCK 'N' ROLL ROMANTIC SUSPENSE BY

Lillian
DUNCAN

All I Want for
Christmas is
Johnny Rocker
Dead

Lillian Duncan

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales, is entirely coincidental.

All I Want for Christmas is Johnny Rocker Dead
COPYRIGHT 2018, 2019 by Lillian Duncan

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission of the author or Pelican Ventures, LLC except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews.

eBook editions are licensed for your personal enjoyment only. eBooks may not be re-sold, copied or given away to other people. If you would like to share an eBook edition, please purchase an additional copy for each person you share it with.

Contact Information: titleadmin@pelicanbookgroup.com

All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version^(R), NIV^(R). Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.TM Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

Cover Art by *Nicola Martinez*

Harbourlight Books, a division of Pelican Ventures, LLC
www.pelicanbookgroup.com PO Box 1738 *Aztec, NM * 87410

Harbourlight Books sail and mast logo is a trademark of Pelican Ventures, LLC

Publishing History

Independently as Rock and Roll Christmas, 2018

First Harbourlight Edition, 2019

Electronic Edition ISBN 978-1-5223-0264-3

Published in the United States of America

Dedication

This and all I do is for God's glory.

1

I AM

"Shut up."

I AM

"Shut up. Shut up. Shut up." Why wouldn't the voice listen to him? After all he was Johnny Rocker. Everybody listened to him. He was a rock god.

I AM

Zeb looked around. He was alone. Who was talking and why couldn't he see him? He stared at the drink in his hand. Maybe he'd had more than he realized, because he surely couldn't hear imaginary voices over the raging party going on downstairs.

I AM

"Just shut up. I'm not listening to you. I'm not losing it. Whoever you are, go away."

I AM

Zeb threw the drink against the wall. He couldn't hear the shattering glass over the blaring music, although he saw the shards on the floor. He stood in his home theater to get away from the crowd downstairs. He'd invited them, and now he wished they'd leave so he could be alone again. That's what he preferred these days.

Stan said Zeb had to have a Christmas party and, of course, when "Johnny Rocker" had a party, people came. A-list people. And now his house had been

invaded by people he didn't even particularly like. He sighed. He supposed that was the price of success.

He remembered his first days as an overnight success that took six long years. Parties were simpler then. Lots of people, and if there was illicit sex and illegal drugs, he turned a blind eye. Now it was all about the food. They still wanted the other things, but now he had to have a caterer and a mix master and...the list went on and on.

Not that he had to handle those details. That's what Stan, his manager, was for. But unlike other celebrities, Zeb had no intention of letting someone steal his hard-earned money. He kept a close eye on people and a closer eye on expenses. How many of the crowd downstairs would have come if Zeb Walker had invited then instead of Johnny Roker. How long had it been since somebody had even called him Zeb? Johnny Roker—the legend, the celebrity—Only, he wasn't Johnny Roker. He was Zeb Jonathon Walker. Or maybe he wasn't. He didn't even know who Zeb was these days. For years, he'd loved being Johnny Roker, but lately...not so much. Oh, well, no need to wonder. He was Johnny Roker, the rock and roll god, and that wasn't ending any time soon.

I AM

He ignored the voice. This was one of his favorite rooms in his mansion. Johnny Roker's gold and platinum records and posters—of him, of course—as well as old movie posters, decorated the walls. Because after all, it was the theater room. Music blared from every speaker in his mansion, including this room. His music, of course, because he was a rock and roll god.

I AM

Probably a trick of the acoustics. That had to be it.

I'm not losing it. Everything's fine. He poured another drink and sat. His fingers ran across the buttery-soft, brown leather of the recliner. Fourth in a row with five rows. Each row a few steps higher than the previous row—just as in a real movie theater. Nothing but the best for Johnny Rocker. Who'd have ever thought that poor little Zeb Walker would be sitting in his debt-free mansion? He could afford anything he wanted these days. The good life. He had it all. People loved their rock and roll gods.

I AM

Zeb stared at the clock. Almost midnight. How much longer would this party go on? Why had he let Stan talk him into it? Stan insisted everyone who was anyone had a Christmas party. Not that Zeb cared about Christmas. It was just another day. Zeb didn't believe in any of it. Not the commercialism or the spiritual hype. There may have been a man named Jesus, but he was not the Son of God—because there was no God.

I AM

The door opened before Johnny could yell at the unseen voice. "Well if it ain't Stan the Man."

His manager of eight years glared. "What are you doing up here, Johnny? The party's downstairs. That's where you need to be. Everyone keeps asking, 'where's Johnny?' What am I supposed to tell them?"

"I know where they are, and that's why I'm up here."

"Very funny. Now get downstairs. The reason we're having the party is so you can prove you've still got it."

"I don't have to prove anything to anyone. I'm Johnny Rocker."

"Of course you are, but maybe you should tell that to all the people who aren't buying your music these days."

"Yeah. Yeah. I hear you."

"Let's go, Johnny. Now."

"That's not my name."

Stan rolled his eyes. "You're in one of those moods again. Fine. I'll call you Zeb if that makes you happy. So, Zeb. Downstairs. Now."

"I don't know when you became my boss."

Stan grinned. "When I made you your first million. Let's get down there and make the record executives happy."

"Right behind you," Zeb said, but Stan was already gone. Apparently even a rock and roll go—

I AM

He looked at the glass in his hand. No more of this if it made him hear voices. He set down the glass, not caring if it left a ring on the black lacquered cabinet. If the furniture got ruined, he could always buy another one. He walked toward the door.

BOOM!

And then another explosive sound—even louder.

What was going on? Zeb headed toward the door.

Another explosion.

The floor below him disappeared.

I AM, the voice said again as Zeb hurtled through the floor.

2

I AM

Zeb opened his eyes. Hospital room. "What did you say?"

"I didn't say anything, but I'm glad to see our Christmas miracle is awake. Welcome back to the land of the living, Johnny." A woman stared down at him. She was wearing a nurse's uniform and a name tag. Sierra Livingston, RN.

"Christmas miracle?"

"You're blessed to be alive. Very blessed. And since it's Christmas, that makes you a Christmas miracle. Right?" She grinned. "Of course the real miracle is that I'm standing here talking to Johnny Rocker. I mean, really? I'm Johnny Rocker's nurse. How awesome is that?"

He tried to focus on what she was saying, but all he could think about was the voice. No. It wasn't happening. He refused to be hearing voices. This woman had to have said the words he'd heard in his home theater. Such an odd thing to say. "Why did you say, 'I am'?" he asked.

"I said you're blessed to be alive. And I'm so blessed to be your nurse."

"I heard you say 'I am' before I opened my eyes."

"I didn't say that. I said you're a Christmas

miracle. And you are. How you survived that explosion is beyond me."

"Are you sure you didn't say something about I am?"

"I'm very sure." She shrugged. "Did you hear someone say that? Are you hearing voices?"

Apparently, he was, but even in his groggy state, he knew that wasn't a good thing. Time to change the subject. "What happened? Why am I here? And where exactly am I?"

"Don't you remember the explosion?"

The words brought back the memory. "Did anyone else get hurt?"

"A few, but mostly scratches and bruises. You're the only one who got seriously hurt. You were upstairs when the floor collapsed and fell all the way through to the first floor."

"Do I know you?"

"No, but I know you, of course. Who doesn't know Johnny Rocker? I love your music. It's such a thrill for me to be taking care of you. You are the only Christmas present I need. And I plan to take good care of you."

"You seem familiar to me."

"Well, I've been taking care of you for the past two days, so you might recognize me from that."

"Two days? I've been here for two days?" He tried to sit up but instead doubled over in pain. He groaned. "What's wrong with me?"

"I'll get the doctor. He'll be able to explain everything to you. And then the police are out there. And your manager's been waiting. The press, too. It's all been crazy." She patted his hand. "I'm sorry I can't tell you more." She went through the door.

“No problem,” he mumbled, not sure she heard. Gotta keep the fans happy. The hospital room was filled with flowers. He was surprised that the hospital allowed so many. But then again, he *was* Johnny Rocker.

A few minutes later, a man in scrubs walked in. He picked up the tablet notebook at the bottom of the bed, and tapped the screen. “I’m Doctor Singer,” he said. It’s good to see you awake, Mr. Walker.”

Somebody who actually used his real name?

“Doctor Singer and Johnny Rocker. We should form a band.”

He looked up from the tablet. No smile. “I guess maybe we should. Do you know why you’re here?”

“Some sort of explosion at my house. What caused it?”

“I have no idea. I’ll let the police talk about that with you. My concern is your health.” He hung the tablet and then approached the side of the bed and pulled a stylus from his jacket. “Please follow the stylus with your eyes but don’t move your head.”

He moved the stylus from side to side then up and down. Zeb followed with his eyes as best he could. “I can’t believe I’ve been unconscious for two days.”

“Not exactly. You’ve been in and out of consciousness, but you probably don’t remember much of it.”

“What kind of injuries do I have?”

“You have a concussion along with three broken ribs and a broken clavicle. Nothing too serious.”

“It feels pretty serious.”

“I’m sure you’re in some pain, but it could be worse. You should thank God you’re still breathing.”

As a rock and roll god, he was happy about that

breathing part, too.

I AM

Zeb sure didn't want the doctor to know he was hearing voices. Dr. Singer might decide to put him in a different sort of hospital. "I didn't know doctors believed in God. I thought they were all about science."

"This one definitely believes in God. I've seen too many miracles to not believe."

Zeb had no inclination to get into a philosophical discussion about religion. "When can I get out of here?"

"We'll talk about it tomorrow." Dr. Singer held up a finger. "After I see how you're doing."

"Yes, Doctor."

"In the meantime, get some rest. I'll check on you later."

"Thanks for..." For saving his life? "For everything."

"It's my job, but you're certainly welcome." Dr. Singer smiled. "Now, who would you like to talk to first? Your manager, or the police? They both seem very anxious to talk to you."

"I don't care. How about both at the same time? Then maybe I can rest."

A concerned look crossed the doctor's face. "I can tell them they have to wait until tomorrow if you're too tired to deal with them. That's not a problem."

Zeb didn't feel like talking to anyone, but he needed to find out what happened. "I'm fine. Send them both in at the same time."

A few minutes later, Stan walked in with another man. Stan Render didn't look the part of a manager for a rock and roll...star. He was straight-laced, short brown hair—without even a single highlight in it. He

always wore a suit. Stan grinned. "Good to see you awake, man. You had us worried. But I gotta tell you, sales shot up after news of your accident got out. You're in the top one hundred on the online music stores."

"Always good to hear, Stan. Thanks for your concern."

"Don't be that way, Zeb. You know I care. I haven't left this hospital for two days. And I wasn't leaving until they let me talk to you, so I could see with my own eyes that you were alive."

"Did you get hurt?"

"Not—"

"Boys, you can have your reunion later." The stranger flashed a badge. "I'm Detective Roger Munger."

"A detective?"

"I'm investigating your case."

"Case? Wasn't it an accident?"

"Do you know anyone who wants you dead, Mr. Walker?"

3

"Wants me dead? What are you saying?" Zeb stared at the detective, not quite believing he'd heard properly. Something really was wrong with his hearing—first the voice, and now this police officer. "I figured it was some kind of an accident. Are you saying it wasn't?"

The man met Zeb's gaze. "Definitely not an accident. We found several bombs in the house. Four, to be exact. Three went off, and one didn't."

"Bombs?"

Stan just stared at the man before looking at Zeb.

"Are you kidding me?" Zeb had a difficult time articulating.

"I don't usually joke about bombs, Mr. Walker. They were homemade—a little rough—but bombs, nevertheless. And Someone was watching out for you upstairs." He pointed toward the heavens. "The fourth didn't go off. Not only was it in the room with you, but it was the most powerful of the four. It would have killed you."

"I can't believe this." He looked at Stan. "What's my house look like?"

Stan eyes were wide, and he seemed too flabbergasted to respond.

"So, who wants you dead?" The detective had a single-track mind.

“Nobody that I know of.”

“I can’t believe anybody wants him dead.” Stan spoke up. “Everybody loves Johnny Rocker. Can’t you take fingerprints or DNA or something off the bombs? That’s what they do on TV.”

“This isn’t a TV show, Mr. Render, where everything gets wrapped up in a nice little bow in an hour. Real investigations take time.”

“Well, you need to find out who did this. That’s your job. Not Johnny’s. It’s been two days; you should already know who did this and have them arrested.”

“Investigations take time.” The detective turned back to Zeb. “From what Mr. Render said, you had people in and out of the house the day before and the day of the party. So, did you see anyone where they didn’t belong?”

“People were everywhere—all over the place. Cleaners. Party Decorators. Caterers. It was a zoo.”

“Did you see anyone upstairs where they didn’t belong? Those workers should have been downstairs, right?”

“Most of them, but the cleaning people were supposed to be up there. I don’t know why they needed to clean up there, but Stan said they should clean the whole place. Top to bottom. It had been a while since the whole place had been deep-cleaned; that’s what my housekeeper calls it. She just keeps the downstairs clean and a simple, dusting upstairs now and then.”

“I’ve got the list of names for everyone who was in the house. They’re being checked out. I was hoping you’d have an idea who might want to do this. Anybody mad at you for anything? An ex-girlfriend? Or someone who thinks you cheated them out of

money? Anything like that at all?"

"Not that I know of."

"He has a few stalker types, but that goes with the territory of being a celebrity these days."

Zeb stared at Stan. "What stalkers? I don't know anything about that."

"Nothing serious for you to worry about."

"Then why did you bring it up?" Detective Munger asked.

"I don't know. Just making conversation. Trying to be helpful."

"Any specific threats from a stalker?"

"No. Mostly just love letters. The usual fan mail. Enthusiastic fans. You know."

Zeb turned his attention back to the detective. "What do I need to do? After I get out of here?"

"Maybe take a long vacation where nobody can find you until we get to the bottom of this."

"No can do." Stan intervened. "He's scheduled to be in the studio for the next month right after the New Year. And the record company won't reschedule. Again." He looked at Zeb. "You don't show up this time, and they'll sue you for breach of contract."

"And I have that charity concert next week so..." Zeb looked at Detective Munger. "You heard the man. No long vacation for me."

"Don't you have bodyguards? Most celebrities do."

Zeb shook his head. "Nah. We hire them for public gigs but not on a regular basis. I just hide my hair under a baseball cap, put on sunglasses and usually nobody even recognizes me."

"Don't worry, Zeb." Stan held up his phone. "I'll take care of it. Right now. How many do you want?"

Four? Five?"

"I think one will be enough." He looked back at the detective. "Is there anything else I should be doing?"

"You can't go back to your house for a few more days. It's still a crime scene. But after that, do what you want."

"Is it livable?"

Stan and Detective Munger exchanged glances.

Stan looked at Zeb. "Ah...not really. But I can hire someone to get busy on the renovations if you want."

"I want. I guess when I get out of here, I'll book a hotel somewhere."

The nurse walked in. "That's it, gentleman. The patient needs his rest. If you need to talk to him some more, you can come back in four hours. For now, you're done. Doctor's orders."

"One more thing before I go." Stan held up a finger. "What do you want me to tell the press? There's a boatload of them down there. I need to tell them something."

"Do they know it wasn't an accident?" Zeb asked the detective.

"We haven't told anyone anything. It's our policy to not discuss open cases with the public. Ever. No matter who's involved. My advice is to let them believe it was an accident at this point. Otherwise, it could interfere with our investigation."

"You heard the man, Stan. Tell them I'm awake and getting better in spite of this unfortunate accident."

"Out. Out. Please. Johnny needs to rest."

Stan and the detective left.

"Is it OK for me to call you, Johnny?" the nurse

asked. "Or do you prefer Zeb?"

"Zeb's my name."

"OK, but it feels odd. To me, you're Johnny Rocker. And I have to admit; I'm a fan. A big fan."

"Thanks."

"If there's anything I can do for you, let me know. Are you hungry? I can get you some real food. I'm sure you're used to a much higher quality."

"How about some booze?"

"Oh, I don't think so. That's against the rules. Especially with the pain medication. That would be very dangerous."

"Yeah, I figured as much."

Nurse Sierra fussed with his blanket then put a hand on his forehead as if she were his mother checking for a fever. Her hand lingered as she smiled at him. "I'm sorry I couldn't help but overhear. This wasn't an accident? What happened?"

"Some sort of bomb. Can you believe that?"

"I can't. That's just horrible."

"Please don't mention that to anyone. The police feel it's better to keep that information quiet right now."

"Of course. Of course. I won't tell a soul. You can trust me, Johnny. I mean, Zeb. You poor man. I'm so sorry you have to go through something like this." She patted his arm.

"It comes with the territory of being famous."

"Still, it's just horrible. How could anyone do something so horrible to you?"

He wondered the same thing. He still couldn't believe that someone had put bombs in his house. Who hated him that much? "There is one thing you can do for me."

“Anything. Anything at all.”

“I need a phone to call my mom.”

“That is so sweet. I can do that.” She pulled a phone out of her pocket. “Here you go. Talk as long as you want. I have unlimited minutes.”

“Perfect. Thanks.”

“I’ll give you privacy. When you’re finished just set it on your tray and then you rest. Doctor’s orders.” She adjusted the IV bags. “You have a few minutes before your meds take effect.”

“Yes, ma’am.” He saluted her.

She turned and left the room.

He punched in the number and waited. “Hi, Mom.”

“Zeb. Are you OK? It’s all over the news that you had some kind of explosion at your house. I’ve been worried to death. Why didn’t you call sooner? I’ve been sitting here waiting for you to call.”

“Sorry about that. I would have called before, but I’ve been sort of out of it. I’m in the hospital.”

“At the hospital? My goodness. Are you sure you’re OK?”

“Fine, Mom. The doctor says I can probably leave tomorrow.” A slight exaggeration. “A few bruised ribs. Nothing serious.”

“Maybe I should come out to take care of you.” The words were right, but the tone wasn’t.

“What about Dad?”

“No, you know he can’t travel, but I can get someone to take care of him. If you need me to come.”

“And leave him at Christmas. That wouldn’t be right, Mom. It would make both of you miserable.” His mom and dad were still in love, even though they’d been married for so long. He’d marveled at their