

the
judge who stole
CHRISTMAS



RANDY SINGER



Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
Carol Stream, Illinois

Visit Tyndale's exciting Web site at www.tyndale.com.

Visit Randy Singer's Web site at www.randysinger.net.

TYNDALE and Tyndale's quill logo are registered trademarks of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

The Judge Who Stole Christmas

Copyright © 2005 by Randy Singer. All rights reserved.

First printing by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., in 2010.

Previously published as *The Judge Who Stole Christmas* by WaterBrook Press under ISBN: 1-4000-7057-0.

Cover photograph by Dan Farrell copyright © Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. All rights reserved.

Back cover and title page photographs by Jason Miller copyright © Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. All rights reserved.

Designed by Jessie McGrath

Published in association with the literary agency of Alive Communications, Inc., 7680 Goddard Street, Suite 200, Colorado Springs, CO 80920, www.alivecommunications.com.

Scripture taken from the New King James Version.® Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

This novel is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, organizations, or persons living or dead is entirely coincidental and beyond the intent of either the author or the publisher.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Singer, Randy (Randy D.)

The judge who stole Christmas / Randy Singer.

p. cm.

Originally published: Colorado Springs, Colo. : WaterBrook Press, 2005.

ISBN 978-1-4143-3566-7 (sc)

1. Judges—Fiction. 2. Church and state—Fiction. 3. Christmas stories. I. Title.

PS3619.I5725J83 2010

813'.6—dc22

2010018848

Printed in the United States of America

16 15 14 13 12 11 10

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

This book is dedicated to the Christ child.



*It's not as majestic as gold or frankincense or
myrrh, but it's the best that I could do.*



THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 30

“Doggone it,” Thomas grunted, glancing toward the Holstein as the big fella lifted its tail. “What’re they feedin’ that thing anyway?”

Theresa smiled to herself and watched the cow pie form on the wood chips blanketing the ground of their makeshift manger. Thomas shook his head, then hustled behind the partition that formed the back of their little stall, strategically located on one side of the Possum town square. He returned with a shovel and black plastic bag, scooping up the mess before a family of four climbed out of the Ford Explorer at the edge of the square. Visitors had been sparse tonight, kept away by a cold and steady drizzle. Plus, people didn’t usually

have time to visit the live manger scene this early in the season. There was simply too much shopping to do.

“I’d help you out, but I just got baby Jesus to sleep.” Theresa cuddled the plastic doll wrapped in swaddling Walmart blankets. “You know what a momma’s boy He is.”

“Don’t be disrespectful,” Thomas muttered, his voice low so he couldn’t be heard by the approaching family. They had learned that it somehow broke the reverence of the occasion if Mary and Joseph were bickering.

“Didn’t mean no disrespect,” Theresa whispered. She looked lovingly at the baby in her arms, its chubby little face glistening as the spotlight bounced off its plastic cheeks. It was only a doll, but it was special in so many ways. For two years this doll had played the part of the Christ child in the otherwise-live Nativity scene. And Theresa, who had been honored to take her shift as a thirty-five-year-old replica of the teenage Virgin Mary, had seen some pretty amazing things happen when people came to visit.

But the baby doll was special for other reasons as well. It was, after all, the favorite doll of Theresa’s eight-year-old daughter, Hannah, a constant companion that Hannah had named “Bebo” when Hannah was only three. Bebo’s plastic face, hands, and feet—once a clean and fleshy pink—now took on the hue of a Middle Eastern baby, colored by thousands of hugs, kisses, and strokes from Hannah’s grubby little hands and lips. Bebo’s cloth body had been patched twice in an effort to keep the stuffing from falling out. Other dolls and stuffed animals had come and gone in the Hammond household, but Bebo stayed around, sleeping under Hannah’s arm every night.

Because she was nearly human anyway, Bebo was a

natural choice to play the Christ child. Nobody outside the Hammond family needed to know that Bebo was really a girl.

“What smells?” the approaching teenage girl asked as she turned up her nose and huddled under an umbrella with her mother.

“Maybe one of the shepherds let one rip,” her younger brother said.

Theresa noticed Thomas stiffen, but she knew he would hold his tongue. As soon as the family left, however, Thomas would complain about the lack of discipline in families these days.

“Justin!” the boy’s father snapped. He stood to the boy’s side, hunched down in his own trench coat, seeking protection from the wind and drizzle.

“That’s not even funny,” the girl said.

“That’s not even funny,” Justin mocked. “You’re such a suck-up.”

Theresa watched as the dad glared at Justin, but the boy avoided his father’s eyes. She gauged Justin to be junior high age—thirteen, maybe fourteen. He was listening to his iPod, swaying slightly to its beat, his face shielded by a large hooded sweatshirt. Theresa thought about her own son, a little six-year-old pistol they had nicknamed Tiger. She wondered if she would survive Tiger as a teen.

“Amazing, isn’t it?” the mother said as she stepped closer to Theresa and looked down at the Christ child. “That God loved us enough to send His Son to be born in a place like this.”

Theresa nodded, flashing back to the delivery of her surprise baby—Elizabeth Leigh—ten months ago. The labor



was brutal. But Mary—she delivered Jesus in a barn with Joseph as a midwife and with no epidurals.

“Amazing,” Theresa muttered in agreement.

“It’s not like He was born in Possum,” Justin said.

But the mother ignored him and inched a little closer. After locking eyes with Theresa, she touched her fingers to her lips, kissed them, then placed them on the cheek of baby Jesus. Her daughter, without saying a word, did the same.

“Thanks for being out here, even in the rain,” the mom said.

Theresa smiled and nodded. “God bless you,” she said. She watched as the mom and her daughter locked arms under their umbrella, then turned and headed back to the car. As Justin trailed behind them, the dad began to follow but hesitated and turned back toward Theresa. He took a few tentative steps, looked deep into her eyes, and did something that always gave Theresa goose bumps.

He went down on one knee in front of her and bowed his head. She wanted to tell him to get up. The grass was wet and the Lord knew that nobody should be bowing to her. But the Lord also knew that this man didn’t take a knee out of respect for some thirty-five-year-old mom who lived in a double-wide trailer in Possum. He was bowing before the Christ child, and Theresa had no right to interfere with that. She realized that Mary, the mother of Jesus, must have felt the same sense of unworthiness and awe when the shepherds came to honor her child.

She glanced at Thomas and saw the look of appreciation in his dark brown eyes. His face was shining, wet from the drizzle, and she could see fatigue in every muscle, but the look reflected her own thoughts—*This is why we’re out here.*



After a few seconds, the man crossed himself and rose. He reached out and touched Theresa's hand even as she held tight to the make-believe baby. He squeezed softly. "Thanks," he said. Then he turned and walked away.

Author's Note

FICTION AUTHORS LOVE this section the way lawyers love disclaimers. We get to remind readers that we've made up most of this and that's why the book is *fiction*. There is no Possum, Virginia. There is no Judge Cynthia Baker-Kline or Jazz Woodfaulk or Tiger Hammond. As for Santa Claus . . . well, you make the call on that one.

One thing I don't make up is the law. I try to be accurate on the substantive issues and legal proceedings. There is enough conflict and drama and majesty in our legal system that you don't have to go beyond what's there to write a good story. One particularly thorny issue we confront is the right of citizens to acknowledge God and religious traditions in the public square. I've got an opinion or two on this, but I also know there are good people on both sides of the debate. I've tried to reflect that in this book.

I've also tried my best to do justice to the spirit of my favorite holiday. In all of history, no event is more worthy of our meditation and best storytelling efforts than this: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." You'll be the judge of whether I succeeded.