

## Sayville Tales

By Lawrence Jay Switzer

### An excerpt

Next, the Devil shamelessly pursued a mouse from one end of the station to the other—to, fro, up, down, over, under, back, forth, west, east, south, north—until the creature was so traumatized, it made a desperate attempt to end the chase by jumping into the donut batter at a food concession. The mouse surfaced three times before it succumbed and slid beneath the yeasty muck. At first, he was curious, but, soon enough, the Devil tired of waiting for the drowned rodent to be dropped into the fryer by the mechanized donut-maker. He moved on, seeking opportunities for pranks that promised more immediate payoffs.

Freshly-delivered blooms at the florist concessions wilted as he pretended to be browsing paperbacks nearby (he was loosening the final pages of the mystery novels), at late-night cafés, cream curdled in canisters and dispensers, the homeless sleeping on the benches in the waiting rooms had horrific nightmares in which they saw themselves put to work with brooms, rakes, mops, scrub brushes and—worst of all—subjected to supervisors and schedules.

It was in the pre-dawn hours that the Devil's attention was arrested by a distant glint. Snapping to attention, always on the lookout for an unwelcome incursion of celestial light, he recognized something even worse: it was the twisted figure of Death, toting his scythe (the source of the glint) at the southern end of the waiting area. Quickly, the Devil concealed himself behind a brimming garbage can, hoping he hadn't been spotted. Death was a huge drain on his satanic battery, a lugubrious bore who was perpetually lonely, always on the lookout for company or someone to kill—either would do equally well on slow weekdays. The Devil wasn't eager to get dragged all over town by that eternal loser—merely for the sake of politeness—from one fatality to another, all of them lacking as much as a molecule of subtlety. An evening with Death was absolutely exhausting. The whispering was bad enough (you had to ask him to repeat himself over and over again), but surely the worst part of it was the mandatory tiptoeing. Wherever you went with Death he insisted that you walk on your toes, no matter whether there was someone around to creep up on or not. After a night with Death your feet were killing you.

For countless eons, Death had persisted in asking the Devil out, refusing to take *no* for answer. The Devil was running out of excuses to put him off—as is so often said, “*A date with Death is inevitable.*” On rare occasions—but not more than once or twice a century—he would throw Death a bone and agree to an outing, even though it meant being seen in public with a badly dressed hunchback with two left feet (one of them clubbed), and breath that stank of Zyklon-b.

Once he and Death had a play date on which they agreed to go clubbing. Death isn't much of a conversationalist but he does love to dance—that was one thing they had in common, and the only reason the Devil agreed to go along. *The Demon Dance* was lots of fun (you got to blow smoke out of your ears, and for a finale, out of your asshole), and it was hard to top the *Dance of Death*, a no-holds-barred version of the Tango which was justifiably famous for its violence, and which required the death of at least one bystander, usually engineered with the help of an artfully placed banana peel or a dollop of Crisco. They would have continued dancing all night, but the patrons packed around them had spent so much time snorting cocaine in the toilets, it wasn't long before the dance-floor began to reek of urinal cakes and sweat, and the D-Boys fled to the bar, where the air was more breathable, but not by much. So much for the entertainment. The rest of the night, Death chewed gum and swung his scythe and tiptoed around in his moth-eaten hoodie—it amounted to little more than engineering one fatal drug overdose after another, all of them exactly alike. The Devil was so bored he began to wish that Death would just go drop dead so he could get a cab and go home. That wasn't very likely, though. He wondered if Death would ever contemplate suicide. Would he leave a note? What would he write? How would he do it? Maybe one look in a mirror would be enough.