



## BOOK REVIEW

By Vanessa Ziff

**TITLE:** The Legend of Holly Claus  
**WRITTEN BY:** Brittany Ryan

**GENRE:** Fantasy/Fairy Tale/Myth  
**HOOK/CONCEPT:** An instant holiday classic about the life of Nicholas Claus' daughter, Holly, in the Land of the Immortals and her struggle to free her frozen heart from the evil clutches of Herrikhan. A tale of love, faith, friendship, and the magic of dreams.

### **CHARACTERS:**

**Nicholas Claus** – The jolly round man we all know and love, minus the red suit get-up  
**Viviana Claus** – Nicholas' orderly, devoted wife; the epitome of selflessness and patience  
**Holly Claus** – born with a heart of pure compassion and love  
**Sofya** – Nicolas' most trusted advisor, a sorceress, and Holly's tutor  
**Herrickhan** – The evil warlock cursed for eternity unless he obtains a heart of pure love  
**Christopher Carroll** – the boy who wrote to Santa; proprietor of *Carroll's Curiosities and Wonders*; inventor and afflicted genius  
**Beyschlag** – Herrikhan's ghoulish, slimy servant  
**Tundra** – Nicholas' and, later, Holly's most faithful companion  
**Terra** – Once partner to Tundra before being killed by Herrikhan  
**Euphemia** – Holly's owl friend  
**Alexia** – Holly's fox friend  
**Empire** - Holly's penguin friend  
**Meteor** – The reindeer Holly and friends taught to fly; he led her sleigh to New York City  
**Jeremy** – The poor boy that befriends Holly in New York and joins in on her adventures  
**Mr. Kleiner** – Mr. Carroll's friendly and faithful assistant  
**Mrs. Kleiner** – Mr. Kleiner's generous wife; manages a bed & breakfast out of her home  
**Hunter Hartman** – Herrikhan's cover in New York; tries to woo Holly but fails

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**SETTING:** Forever, Land of the Immortals (off the map); New York City, 1878 -1896; Odyl, the dead underworld to which Herrikhan has been banished;

**SYNOPSIS:**

NYC, 1878 – 10-year old Christopher sits at his desk in his mother’s one-room slum apartment writing a letter to Santa Claus. He asks Santa what he wants for Christmas rather than giving him his own list of toys. Christopher’s father has died and he lives alone with his loving but exhausted mother. He takes the letter out to be sent and instantaneously, something magical happens, though he doesn’t understand what.

Forever, Land of the Immortals - Nicholas Claus is explaining to his wife, Viviana, his concern about whether and when children stop writing to and believing in him, though he understands that every child’s story must unfold for itself, no matter what the end result. Christopher’s letter enables both of them to make their own wish and change the Land of the Immortals forever.

Cut to Helvitiu Erst, the man who claimed he saw a map to the Land of the Immortals and went looking for it. Freezing to death in the Arctic, Helvetius is told by Claus that he can never be allowed to enter Forever. Immortality, he explains, is what happens when love conquers time, when a person’s ability to love stretches beyond death to live forever in the heart of the human race. Immortals have made the dreams and hopes of others come true. “We all have the ability to overcome sorrow, fear, and misery with charity, compassion, and wisdom. Love and keep hold of your dreams,” Nicholas tells him (p.28). Christmas Day is the one day of the year when new immortals can enter Forever. But because of so many curious explorers, Nicolas sets up a decoy toy manufactory at the top of the North Pole. He dresses up his elves and invites poets to view their work. Thus the myth of Santa, the elves, and his North Pole dwelling begins...

Odyl - Herrikhan learns of Holly Claus’ christening and decides to invite himself over to the celebration. Herrikhan used to be a mortal, but he became a tyrant and unyielding destroyer. The elders of the universe punished him for this. Now he wears an immovable iron band around the crown of his head and has been banished to the underground world Odyl for all of eternity unless he obtains a heart of pure love and compassion. (As part of his curse, every time Herrikhan leaves Odyl, his energy wanes and he must return within 24 hours time.) Tundra and Terra try to stop him at the gates to Forever but Herrikhan kills Terra. Everyone showers Holly with gifts. Sofya gives her Alexia the fox. At the christening, Herrikhan casts a spell on Holly that encases her heart in ice until she is ready to marry him and give to him her preserved purity and compassion. As a result, Holly can only survive in a world of cold and ice or else her heart will melt. Fearing for her safety, the gates to Forever are closed indefinitely. Tundra does not return.

Holly is forbidden to leave the castle and so her nursery is turned into an ice forest. Years pass and Tundra returns to become Holly’s most trusted companion. A telescope is planted (by Herrikhan) in Holly’s closet. It only shows Holly the mortal world in all its happiest moments, driving Holly to dream of visiting worlds beyond Forever. One time she ventures outdoors only to hear the upsetting rumors of her curse and the effects it has on

the rest of the immortals.

Upon hearing her distress, Nicholas allows Holly to venture outside the castle for a game of pelote, played by the centaurs. Herrikhan masks himself as a centaur and tries to destroy Holly by lighting fire to the field. He succeeds in getting the immortals to fear Holly's presence, forcing her into loneliness.

In an attempt to cure Holly of her nightmares, Tundra brings Euphemia the owl to the castle, though she ends up disappointing them with her ineffective incantations. Holly opens *The Book of Forever* and finds out that her page has no information, yet she has been given immortal status. The one thing Holly desires most is the chance to deserve the immortality she was born with. She feels she's an outsider until she journeys to the mortal world to find her way.

Holly turns 17 and starts helping out with making Christmas dolls, though all the time searching for a secret way out of Forever. While working in the toyshop, she discovers her magical ability to create lifelike dolls. One night, while peering through her telescope, she figures out how to escape to New York City on the Boreal Rainbow, occurring on December 21<sup>st</sup>. She plots her escape and leaves with Tundra during the night, promising to return on Christmas Eve with her father.

Touchdown in NYC's Central Park – Holly meets Jeremy, a wily street boy who introduces her to his friends that live in the park. Everyone she meets is enamored with her charm, grace, and compassion. Holly discovers that she needs to make money in order to help these homeless children so Jeremy introduces her to Mr. Carroll at Carroll's Curiosities and Wonders toyshop.

Carroll is a humbug hermit proprietor and dutiful Mr. Kleiner runs his store. When Holly begins working in the shop, it comes alive with customers. Upon meeting Mr. Carroll, she is aware of a chilling feeling that she has known him forever. The reader suspects that Mr. Carroll is actually Herrikhan. At one point, Holly seeks Carroll out and they lock hands unexpectedly. Holly whispers a cryptic message not even she can decipher: "Why do you keep coming back?"

Meanwhile, Holly molds magical lifelike dream dolls for the customers who marvel at her uncanny abilities. She makes a doctor doll for Jeremy. Mr. Kleiner offers his house for the week. Her "cold" curse is kept a secret, though no one is able to explain the flurry of snowflakes that falls magically around the toyshop. Holly meets the affable and wealthy Hunter Hartman who is insistent on taking her out on her last night in town.

At the bed and breakfast home, Mr. and Mrs. Kleiner light their minora with Jeremy and Holly. Up in her room, Holly finds her friends Alexia, Euphemia, and Empire tucked into her travel satchel. They fill her wardrobe and fall asleep. Holly fashions a doll for sick Lissy in the park. Meanwhile, Herrikhan rents an entire floor in a house across the street. The question becomes: is he Mr. Carroll or Mr. Hartman?

Dec. 23<sup>rd</sup> – Hunter takes Holly to the opera. –Holly finds that Carroll is sitting in the box

adjacent to theirs. Hunter tries to give Holly a necklace in order to get her to take off her locket willingly (as the spell requires) but she realizes his true identity, escapes, and flees to the toyshop.

Up in his dark loft, Holly tries to unlock Carroll's clock doors curiously inscribed, "Love Conquers Time," but Carroll catches her. Instead, he opens the doors to reveal a magnificent room of futuristic toys and his sole reason for self-imprisonment – a device (planted by Herrikhan years earlier) that shows him how bleak the future will be, much like Holly's enchanted telescope. All these years, Carroll has been lead to believe that the world will come to a horrific end and so the meantime has become pointless for him, as have all his futuristic inventions. After attempting to dissuade him of his misperceptions, Carroll then shows Holly the carved toys he made when he was ten. They are replicas of Tundra, Empire, Euphemia, and Alexia. Holly figures out that he is the little boy who wrote the letter and he shows it to her. She has not yet revealed her identity. Sparks fly! He does not want her to leave. They fall asleep in the room - in separate chairs ☺

Christmas Eve Day (D Day)- Hunter Hartman, aka Herrikhan, confronts Holly back at Mr. Kleiner's in the morning. He scrapes off his skin to reveal his true self. Tundra tries to kill him but Herrikhan is quicker and Tundra falls to his death. Holly manages to escape to the toy store in order to appeal to Carroll for help. She explains everything to Christopher, even showing him the music box Sofya gave to her as a sign of true love (if the recipient can hear the music), but he won't hear any of it. Desperate, she flees with Jeremy to Central Park, giving her locket willingly to Christopher. Herrikhan lays a sweltering curse on the city and Holly nearly dies on the way to the park.

Meanwhile, Holly's animal friends persuade Christopher by showing their likeness to his carvings. He finally hears the music box notes and his carefully created misery is squashed in a heartbeat. He flees to her side with Holly's friends in tote. At the same time, all of the dream dolls that were carved by Holly chant in unison for their owners to save Holly in Central Park. All the parents and children are compelled to help.

Up at the park, Christopher is hindered by Herrikhan's death curses. Upon seeing all her friends gathering in the park, Holly summons her last bout of energy in an attempt to save Christopher. She hears the truth ring clear. "I will go with you," she tells the warlock. "I will love you. I forgive you," These are not the words that he expects. By contrast, these are the words that break her curse and conquer his evil. Herrikhan disintegrates into dust and the curse is lifted from Holly's heart. She starts to shiver from the cold.

Christmas returns to New York and Santa has arrived early (after growing impatient, watching helplessly as the events unfolded through the telescope). She is about to enter Santa's sleigh when she requests to ride alone with Christopher in their own sleigh (ooh, la, la!) Santa feels a bit sheepish about this matter but agrees. As she says her goodbyes to everyone and prepares to help her father deliver dream dolls to the world on Christmas Eve, she tells Jeremy to "Remember your dreams. Don't give up on them. You will become what you choose to dream. Believe in yourself..." (p. 514). This is truly the crux of Ryan's message to her audience. Tundra returns unscathed and all is as it was. Sofya has immortalized Christopher and the gates to –Forever have been reopened.

The story closes with an inscription in the Book of Forever written on Holly's page speaking of how her bravery, faith, love, and compassion saved Forever and proved that Love Conquers Time. As she rides away with Christopher into the sky, the reader has a strong feeling that she will be back for more adventures.

**STORY STRENGTHS:** A richly told, magical journey with a universal message: Love Conquers Time. The settings invoke images that are both an audio and visual delight. On screen, this story would be a feast for the senses. Each character is unique, multi-dimensional, and believable. Ryan does a nice job of building tension and passion between Holly and Christopher. The reader is definitely left wanting to see more from these two. This mythic fairy tale is the first in a trilogy that audiences will warmly receive.

**STORY WEAKNESSES:** Holly has too many friends that follow her along the way. Three would suffice or else we have a hard time remembering their purpose. Herrikhan dies quickly and without much struggle. It is a bit unclear why Holly's last words to him are such a deadly blow. This scene could have been drawn out more.