

The Christmas Proposal II – Rachel

by Keith West

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Rachel Lapino slid to a stop in Simon’s driveway. She’d never liked driving on snow and had barely avoided a collision after leaving Mrs. Thompson’s place.

Simon must have been watching and seen her drive up. He opened the door before she reached it.

Neither spoke until she was inside. After exchanging greetings, Simon took her coat, hat, gloves, and muffler and hung them in the coat closet.

“I’m sorry I’m late,” she said. “Mrs. Thompson spilled some medication and needed an emergency refill. She doesn’t drive at night, and certainly not in this weather. I had to go by Benton’s Pharmacy before they closed.”

“It’s all right,” Simon said. “I understand.”

“Thank you.” She gave him her best smile. He blushed, but he smiled back.

That was one thing Rachel couldn’t understand about Simon. He didn’t seem to understand how attractive he was. He could have any woman in town he wanted. Yet somehow he seemed content to spend time with her. She was thankful for that.

Rachel found the silence awkward, so she said, “It smells great in here. Is that lasagna?”

“Yes. My grandmother’s recipe.”

“Thank you. Your grandmother could make lasagna like nobody’s business. I’ve never tasted any that’s near as good as hers. It’s been a long day, and you seem to know what a girl needs.”

“Glad to hear it.” Simon’s smile broadened. “Let’s eat.”

Rachel was hungrier than she realized. She had two servings of lasagna, plus bread, salad, and a refill on her iced tea. Simon for his part seemed anxious and picked at his food. Was he afraid she wouldn’t like it? If so, he needn’t have worried. It was as good as his grandmother’s.

Finally she pushed her plate away.

“That was fantastic, Simon. Thank you again.”

“I’m glad you liked it.”

Simon looked away. If anything, his anxiety had increased.

“Is there something wrong? All night you’ve seemed...tense.”

“No. No, I’m fine.”

They sat there in silence for a minute. What was bothering him?

“Shall we trim the tree?”

Rachel knew that Simon had invited her over for dinner, but he hadn’t said anything to her about trimming the tree. She found the idea appealing. She’d assisted a number of clients with their trees over the last couple of weeks and until now had had no desire to decorate another one. But this was different. This was Simon.

“Yes,” she said with enthusiasm. “I’d love to.”

As they got up from the table, Simon reached out and took her hand. It was a sudden thing, and Rachel was a bit surprised. But she didn’t object.

The dining room and den were one large open space, the tree in front of the back window next to the fireplace. Simon led her to the coffee table where several boxes of ornaments were stacked.

“What shall we start with?” she asked.