

The Christmas Proposal IV – The Visitor

by Keith West

© 2020 Keith West

Simon tried not to run when he heard the doorbell. That would be Rachel.

He flung the door open, and his smile faded. The man standing there wasn't Rachel.

"May I come in?" he asked.

The man was tall and thin, almost gaunt. He wore a long, grey trench coat and a matching hat. His face was long and cleanshaven, with an almost lipless mouth and eyes that matched his coat. His voice had a note of infinite sadness to it. Simon assumed he was a cop.

"Is there something wrong?" A thought struck him. "Has something happened to Rachel?"

"No, but this matter would be better discussed indoors. May I come in?"

Simon wasn't sure why, but he allowed the man to enter.

"Time is short, so I'll come to the point, Simon Cleary. Rachel Lupino is scheduled to die in an automobile accident in a few minutes."

"What? How do you know that? And just who are you?"

The man looked at Simon. Simon realized his eyes had no irises, just dark spots where they should be. It felt like he was seeing into eternity.

"I am the Angel of Death. It is my duty to know such things."

Simon started to protest, but the stranger held up a hand.

"Allow me to demonstrate."

He closed his fist. Simon *felt* his heart stop beating. There was no pain, but he knew he had no pulse. He tried to say something. His lungs wouldn't work.

The man unclenched his fist.

“That should suffice to demonstrate I am telling the truth,” the Angel of Death said.

“Rachel Lupino is scheduled to die minutes from now.”

Simon was overcome with horror.

“Can you stop it?”

“Yes,” the man said, “I do have some limited discretion in these matters, especially during this season. But such aid comes with a steep price.”

“What do you mean?” asked Simon.

“I can grant Rachel an additional three years of life, but they come at the cost of yours.”

“I don’t understand.”

There was an urgency in the Angel’s voice. “Rachel will die unless you choose to give up years of your life. She will live an additional three years, as will you. You will marry and have a happy life for three years, at the end of which you will both die.”

“And if I say no?” Simon asked, already knowing what his answer would be.

“You will live for decades, never marrying, growing more embittered and lonely as the years pass.

“I ask you, Simon Cleary, do you love Rachel Lupino enough to sacrifice most of your life to give her a few more years of happiness?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Very well, then. So be it.”

The Angel of Death turned and walked out. The door opened and closed without his touching it.

Simon rushed to the door and threw it open.

The steps and yard were empty.