

The Celestial Guardian

By Rebecca H.

A man sits in the freshly fallen snow looking at the cabin in the distance. Although he's been there for hours, he feels nothing. He is surrounded by trees, and there are deer tracks nearby, indicating that the animal passed, but was not disturbed by the man. He is wearing no jacket, only a dark blue button up shirt and black trousers. Middle-aged, his face shows signs of underlying pain even though his eyes are warm and his smile is soft. To an outsider, the man doesn't fit in here. But to him, looking at a reality he is no longer a part of, it makes sense.

In the cabin, a middle-aged woman, a boy in his teens and girl no older than five are preparing for the holidays. There are few decorations and the cabin is sparsely decorated. It's clear that the family doesn't have a lot of money. From a distance, the woman appears content with a kind smile and doting on her children. But if one was to look closer, they would see a deep sadness in her blue eyes.

"Danny, have you gone and got that tree from Mr. Ellis' farm yet?" the woman asks as she puts a stew pot on the fire.

"No Mama! Let me get my boots on and I'll go down there and get it!" Danny replies as he goes to the closet and gets out a pair of worn brown boots that are barely big enough for his feet.

"Very well, just make sure you try and get back before supper is done."

"Yes Momma" was all that could be heard before the door to the cabin opened to the harsh winds and closed.

It wasn't very long after the boy left that the little girl starts to talk.

"Momma, when is Papa coming back?" the girl asks with pure curiosity in her voice.

Almost dropping her spoon in shock, the mother pauses, but quickly gains her composure.

“Kerry, Papa isn’t coming back.” She says as she turns towards her daughter. “He went to live with the angels, remember?”

“Yes Momma, but they will let him visit won’t they? It’s Christmas!” Her small voice whines with innocence.

“No honey, they have no way to let him visit, but he is in our hearts so he is here with us,” explains the mother as best she could. Hoping there would be no more questions, she turns again to the fire.

“I still think they could let him visit.” Kerry grumbles before leaving the table where she had been sitting, to go play with her favorite doll that the wife of the store clerk had made her following her father’s funeral.

Just as the woman is ready to put the rolls she made in the oven, the cabin door opens again to reveal her son, Mr. Ellis, and his eldest boy with a tall, full evergreen. Pausing to dust the snow from their feet, Mr. Ellis meets Elizabeth’s eyes and asks, “Where do you want this thing?”

“There in the corner beside the stairs please, Matt. Thank You.”

Mr. Ellis helped the boys stand the tree where Elizabeth had told them and picks up some fallen twigs before walking towards the kitchen. Once there, he throws the twigs in a bin and watches Elizabeth. It is clear from her demeanor that something

happened while he was away. He isn’t sure what to make of it yet, but he aims to find out.

As the kids were running up the stairs to collect the decorations, Elizabeth and

Matt were once again alone. Confident the kids were out of earshot, he turns to Elizabeth and tenderly brushes her shoulder. “How are you holding up?”

For the first time in a long time, Elizabeth feels she can be totally honest. Having lost his wife years earlier, Matthew Ellis knows what it means to lose someone you love.

“It is day by day, but worse lately knowing this will be the first Christmas without him. I can’t seem to make Kerry understand that her father won’t be back...not even for a visit. And Danny? Well I just can’t tell with him.”

“Everything will be alright. Kerry will understand when she gets older and Danny is a lad who doesn’t know which way is up right now. Just be there for them.” His heart swells, but he knows Elizabeth is vulnerable right now. He takes a step closer to her but doesn’t reach out to her.

“I know what you’re feeling. It was equally hard when I lost Sue. But I am here to tell you that the pain will lessen as time goes by. Let your friends be there for you. It will make it easier on both you and the children.”

“I know, but it still hurts!” Elizabeth’s voice broke, but she kept the volume low so the kids wouldn’t hear her. “They say time heals all wounds,” sighed Elizabeth, “but it sure doesn’t feel like it.”

“That’s what they say but you have to move on for that to happen.”

“I know I have to.” Shocked at her vulnerability, she turns back to the fireplace.

“Thank you for talking about this with me.”

Elizabeth moves the stew pot from the fire and then turns back to the oven to check on the rolls. Out of the corner of her eye, she catches Mr. Ellis grabbing a spoon and smiling, sneaks a taste of stew.

Turning quickly, she feigned anger. “MATTHEW ELLIS! YOU BETTER PUT

THAT SPOON DOWN!”

“You can’t blame a guy for trying.” joked Mr. Ellis and Elizabeth’s mood lightened.

“Matt, you and your family are more than welcome to have supper with us,” Elizabeth offers as she removes the brown rolls from the oven.

“Thank you. We’d love to stay.” Mr. Ellis’ eyes met hers once more before calling to his son.

“Go get your siblings; we’ve been invited to supper.”

“Yes, sir.” said the boy in respectful tone as he opened and walked out the door. They had a wonderful supper and the Ellis’ went home.

Christmas Day was soon approaching and Elizabeth had come to rely on Matt for comfort and stability. Unbeknownst to all inside the cabin, the man on the hill continued to watch, never left, never moved.

As the sun went down, Mr. Ellis and his children came over just like he told Elizabeth he would. As soon as everyone was situated they would open the presents, but Kerry wasn’t with them. After several attempts to call Kerry into the family room without response, Elizabeth went to search for her daughter. Motionless, Elizabeth finds her daughter standing by the window, looking out into the distance. This wasn’t unusual. For some reason this had become her favorite perch. Nobody knew what she was looking at because nobody could see what she could.

The man watched his family and their guests in the cabin below and smiled as tears poured from his eyes. A soft glowing hand reached out and laid itself on the man’s shoulders and a gentle voice softly spoke, “They are safe and happy. Their pain will ease, so let us leave.”

“Yes they are and that is all that I could ask for.” spoke the man as he slowly stood up and reluctantly faced the glowing figure. The figure saw the man’s tears and gave a soft, sad smile before they both walked into the woods and out of sight.

In the cabin, all the presents had been opened and the supper was almost ready when Kerry asked her mother if she could go outside for a minute. She just had to see her father, one more time. Her mother was lost and didn’t know what to say, but when she looked at her daughter’s determined yet sad face, all she could say was, “grab your coat and make it quick.” Rushing to get her coat, she runs outside and looks towards the hill where the man had once been and searching frantically, looks for her father.

But he is gone.

Crying softly, she collapses in the snow. “Where are you? Why can’t I see you again?”

A firm hand reaches for her tiny shoulders. Turning, she expects to see her father, but no one is there.

“You are looking with your eyes and not your heart. Do that and you will see me.”

She wipes her tears and smiles softly before she takes a deep breathe and looks slowly toward the hill once again. For a second Kerry sees two dimly glowing figures and then nothing. She then realizes whether she can see him or not her father was always watching them from heaven, a celestial guardian.