# ***The Christmas Angel***

By Patrick R. Aquilone

A chill filled the air outside as little five-year-old Simon lay asleep in his nice warm bed. It had been a very hard day for him having to attend and yet not understand his mother's funeral. Oh, he understand that she had been sick and in the hospital for months, and Simon was at her side three days ago when she smiled at him, squeezed his hand, closed her eyes for the last time. What Simon did not understand was that she was not coming back. So, he walked around the funeral parlor watching people's faces quickly turn sour as he past them. A few engaged him and asked how he was doing, a couple more patted him on the head and told him how brave he was being, but most after seeing him glanced the other way hoping that Simon didn't say anything to them. That was what he didn't understand the most. It was almost as if he had done something wrong or had gotten sick like his mother and the adults were afraid to touch him. And most important, at a time when he was confused and hurting, the actions of the adults insolated and hurt him more.

That was hours ago and now Simon lay quietly in his bed. His father, Aaron, had just finished checking on him and was returning to his bedroom when a sudden noise rocked Simon out of his slumber. It was a noise that was strangely familiar and yet distance and untouchable at the same time. It was a noise that he had not heard in the house for some time, and one that he had feared he might not hear again. However, the joy of hearing the sound touched his heart and Simon jumped from bed and raced out into the living room. His dad was just turning out the lights when Simon barged in.

"Did you hear her daddy?" Asked Simon who was grinning from ear to ear.

Aaron feared the worse as he crouched down to meet his son face to face. "Here who, Simon?"

"Mommy," blurted out Simon almost bursting at the seems. "She's come home. I heard her."

Aaron frowned with a sigh as he feared something like this might happen given Simons young and delicate age. "Simon," he began as he reached out and held his son, "Mommy's not coming home."

"But I heard her daddy. I heard her."

"I know you think you heard her," Aaron attempted to explain, "But she is not here."

"But daddy," Simon attempted to rebut, but was cut off.

"Simon," Aaron shouted raising his voice losing a bit of control after the long and painful week he had to face as well. He took a deep breath and then continued. "Listen, I loved mommy just as much as you did and believe me there is no one who wants to see her more then me, but she is not coming home and we both need to realize that."

"But daddy," said Simon with a tear in his eye.

"I know Simon," replied Aaron fighting back the tears himself. "I loved her too." As Aaron spoke several tears ran down Simons face and it was breaking Aaron's heart. However, this was a dark reality of life that many families have to face every year and many of those have to face it just like Aaron and Simon who attended the funeral of Simon's mother on Christmas Eve.

Aaron picked up Simon and carried him back to his bed. He laid him down and tucked the blanket

snuggly to keep him warm. When Aaron finished, he sat down and looked his son in the eye. He was proud of his boy who had faced so much and never complained. “You know that I love you very much,” added Aaron, “And I was very proud of you today.”

Simon smiled. “And I was proud of you too, daddy.”

Aaron couldn’t help but laugh as he leaned up and kissed his son. “Now, get some sleep. It will be a long day tomorrow at grandma and grandpas.”

“Ok, daddy,” replied Simon with a big smile who then closed his eyes really tight.

Aaron stood up and smiled at his little boy and exited the room closing the door behind him.

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The air was cold and crisp as Simon opened his eyes for again he heard another sound. This time it sounded like footsteps in the living room and Simon might have thought it was Santa except for the fact that Simon could see his breath flow out of him into a fog like mist that dissipated several feet from his face. While he did not know what was causing the change in temperature, he resolved to not leave his bed until he had too as his blankets provided more then adequate heat to keep him warm throughout the night.

Simon heard the person in the living room move from one of their trailer home to the other. And as it neared where he believed the couch to be, he heard the front screen door open. Obviously this was the reason for the cold spell that was cast around his room. Simon was just about to dismiss the entire event as his father potentially placing presents around the tree even though he claimed they would open presents at grandpas until he heard a very familiar sound.

“Simon,” came the slow sound of the angelic voice of his mother.

Without so much as a thought, Simon leapt from his bed paying no mind to the cold of the floor beneath his feet as he darted for the living room. At almost a full sprint, Simon passed through his open door around the corner and straight out into the room. As he suspected, the front door was open and the screen was just closing. Simon rushed to the door and looked around. It was snowing outside and there was about an inch of fresh snow upon the ground. Looking around, Simon saw a set of footprints leading away from his home and into the forest behind house. He did not see anyone, but the new falling snow couple with the floodlight that illuminated their driveway made it difficult to see anything past the tree line.

“Simon,” came the voice again as there was a glimmer of light that flashed directly ahead of the footprints in the snow. Simon was certain that he had heard his mother and that she was calling to him. He did not know why she just didn’t come into his room, but that didn’t really matter to him. What mattered was that his mother was calling for him and he had to go and catch up with her.

Simon raced back into his room grabbing his boots, coat, gloves and his toy hippopotamus flashlight. He quickly donned his boots and his coat. He did close his coat, because his zipper always stuck. For a quick moment, he thought about waking his dad and asking him to help, but then he remembered how his father didn’t believe him earlier and decided to just go without. After all, as soon as he caught up with his mom, she could close his coat for him. He raced out the door putting on his gloves as he darted across the snow-covered driveway and into the forest.

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Abruptly Aaron sat up covered in sweat waking from his nightmare. He had the most awful of dreams where he and Simon were at a park together. As he watched his wife walked over and took Simon by the hand to take him for a walk around the nearby pond. Aaron was smiling as he watched them begin the trek, but his joy quickly turned to fear as the thing that looked like his wife turned and looked him in the eye and changed into a demon. Aaron's feet betrayed his commands and failed to move leaving Aaron the agonizing torture of watching his son be stolen by a demon. The nightmare was so real that Aaron had to take a good minute to ground himself to the fact that he was sitting up in his bed in his own home.

A chill crawled down his spine alerting Aaron to the fact that it was not only cold, but down right frigid. Quickly, he got out of bed and went to the thermostat that was placed on the closest wall in the living room. As he arrived, he immediately noticed that the front door was open. Without even thinking he raced with his heart pounding to Simon's room, darted to the bed, and yanked off the covers to find it empty.

A strange feeling of horrific déjà vu came over Aaron as he felt like he was still in his nightmare. He quickly returned to the front door and looked for Simon. Outside it was still snowing and there was maybe two inches on the ground. Most obviously missing was any trace that anyone came in or went out of the door as there were no tracks of any kind to be seen.

Aaron opened the door and shouted at the top of his lungs, "Siiiiiimmmooooonnnnnnn!" Aaron strained with all his might to hear any last sound that might lead to finding and rescuing his son. Inside, his stomach dropped and a feeling of dread overtook him as he feared the worst.

Aaron called out again, but again there was no answer.

Aaron went back into the house and called 911. He was connected to Katie who not only moonlighted at the telephone company, but was Simon's daycare provider. She immediately got Sheriff Thomson on the phone and within moments there was a bustle of activity at Aaron's home all focused on finding out exactly what had happened to little Simon.

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Simon began at a sprint following the footprints into the forest and then as he progressed he slowed to a quick walk and finally down to a stroll. The footprints were zigzagging all over the place. They did not stay straight for more then a handful of paces before they would change direction again and again and again. In the whole time, Simon never saw his mother at all. The tracks were fresh and he could tell that he must be close, but he did not catch her.

By this time, Simon was getting very cold. He did not expect that he would be wander for so long and the fact that his coat was not closed was allowing a deep chill to settle in his chest. Already Simon found himself with a bit of a wheeze as he breathed in and out; however, he thought that it would all be all right as soon as he just caught up with his mother. Even though he was very tired and cold and beginning to get fairly hungry. Food was another item that Simon had not worried about darting out of the house expecting to only

be gone a short time before catching his mother.

As Simon was walking, the tracks unexpectedly ended. Simon shined the light back and forth, but there were no more tracks. Whomever he was following seemed to have just disappeared into the snow and the night. For the first time, Simon felt the cold in the air and in his chest. He looked around and found that he was standing in a small clearing, but not one he recognized. He used to go hiking with his mom and dad before mom got sick and at least had some knowledge of the trails and the forest, but after taking a second look he had no idea where he was.

"Mommy," cried out Simon as loud as he could although he soon found that the cold in his chest was also affecting his ability to speak loudly. He could still talk, but not without strain and not very loud.

Simon called out again and his cry was returned with nothing but silence.

Simon was scared. He was cold, tired, sick and very afraid. He didn't understand what had happened. As far as he could tell, he was following his mother, but his mother would not have brought him out here and left him. He knew his mother was not a mean person, and that meant that he must not have been following his mom, but then what did he follow. And more important, how was he to get back when he had no idea where he was.

Simon began to cry.

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Aaron stood anxiously in the middle of his living room. Sheriff Thomson had arrived and thankfully did not proceed with a list of questions, but immediately began to organize a search party. Aaron's neighbors having seen the police car and the several other cars arriving to help search for Simon had come over to offer their help. Within a half hour of the Sheriff arriving, there were over twenty people receiving final instructions to head out and find Simon.

Aaron had tore apart the house while the Sheriff was calling people to help in a desperate hope that Simon was just hiding somewhere in the trailer. However, when he discovered that Simon's boot, gloves and jacket was missing, he knew that Simon walked out into the night. And as much as Aaron didn't want to admit it, he had a feeling in the pit of his stomach that what had taken his son out of his home was nothing less then the demon from his nightmare. He couldn't explain it, but deep down he knew and it terrified him. He also knew that Simon could not zipper the jacket by himself leaving his chest exposed to the elements.

The Sheriff had just finished his instructions about searching in teams of no less then two. Watching for footprints and branches that the snow has fallen off of as each could be markers to where Simon had passed and may be close to. He also instructed them to call out Simon's name and then wait for a moment to hear if there are any responses. Finally, he told them that Simon was cold, tired and probably terrified and that they needed to find him fast. The Sheriff did not mince words, but cut right to the heart of the matter. Then to Aaron's surprise, the Sheriff called everyone to hold hands and said a prayer that God himself would direct the search party to find Simon and find him quickly.

The Sheriff left one of the neighbor's teenage sons at the Aaron's trailer to wait in case Simon returned with explicit instructions to immediately call 911 and tell Katie to call dispatch as the Sheriff took his radio with him.

With everything said and planned that was needed, the teams went out in search of Simon. Aaron had been assigned to the Sheriff and they wasted no time charging into the forest to go and find Simon somewhere out in the vast land of trees and snow.

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Simon had sat down. He was so cold and tired that he didn't notice that he was scared anymore. In fact, he didn't notice very much at all except for being tired and cold. He wanted to go to sleep, but something told him to stay awake. Every now and then, he called out for his mother, but the cold had taken his ability to speak some time ago. That did not stop Simon's determination to try.

As Simon's head slowly got closer and closer to the ground, he thought he heard some sound near him. He tried to turn to see what it could be, but found that his body no longer wanted to move at all. In fact, he found that it was increasingly difficult to do anything other then let his head fall to the ground and go to sleep.

In the midst of all that was going on, Simon remembered something that Sheriff Thomson had told him about God. He had said that God always had an ear positioned in our direction to hear anything we might ask of him. As Simon thought about this, it gave him a little bit of peace to think of God leaning down from heaven just waiting to hear what Simon might say. Up until now, Simon had never tried to speak to God. He believe in God because his mother told him about God. His father was another story. Simon's mom told him once that his dad was mad at God and someday he will make his own peace with the Almighty and to not let that get in the way of Simon learning about and speaking to God. However, Simon didn't know what he would say to God until now. Finally after all the months of wondering and trying to think of what he might say, he had not only the chance, but the words.

"God," began Simon just barely above a whisper, "I know you are listening. I shouldn't have gone out of my home, but all I wanted was to see my mom again." Simon paused for a moment as it was a struggle to talk even at a whisper. "I'm sorry I did that. I feel so tired and I feel I will see you soon. Please help me dad to make peace with you."

As Simon finished his prayer, there was a blinding white light the flooded the area with warmth and love. Simon no longer felt cold. He no longer felt tired. He no longer worried about anything as he could feel the love of God all around him and in him and finally he knew it that God had heard him and his dad would be alright.

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Aaron and Sheriff Thomson had been walking for over two hours without much to say to each other. The Sheriff did check in every now and then with the other teams over the radio, and so far no one had found so much as a leaf out of place. It was as if Simon just up and disappeared. Inside Aaron was falling further and further apart with each step. He knew that something bad had happened to his son and he was upset. In fact, he was blaming God not only for taking his wife, but now for taking his son.

Sheriff Thomson vocalized another one of the many prayers he had said while walking trying to find Simon and at that moment, Aaron had all he could take.

"Why do you continue to do that when you know how I feel about God!' Aaron rudely snapped at Sheriff Thomson.

"Because I know how God feels about you and Simon."

"How God feels about me," Aaron retorted. "I can tell you how God feels about me. He hates me. That is why he took Abigail from me."

"Now," Sheriff Thomson interrupted, "You don't mean that."

"Yes," Aaron replied, "And another thing. Apparently God hates Simon because if he didn't why haven't we found him."

"We haven't found him because we haven't looked in the right place yet."

"The right place," Aaron sarcastically repeated.

Sheriff Thomson stopped in his tracks and looked Aaron directly in the eye, which cause Aaron to stop as well. He spoke with the conviction of a thousand men as he stated, "That's right. We haven't looked in the right place yet."

"Well, then why doesn't your God tell us where the right place is then," snapped Aaron.

"What makes you think he hasn't?"

"What? You have got to be kidding!!"

"Really," continued Sheriff Thomson, "I've been praying for direction and my God has never let me down."

"Yeah, well, apparently you and I have different Gods."

"Well, my God is very interested in your family."

"Is that so," added Aaron with a snort. "Well, he has a funny way of showing it."

"I tell you what," began Sheriff Thomson, "I will make a deal with you. I believe that my God wants to show himself to you. I believe this so strong that if we don't find your son alive and well, I will not only never speak of God to you again, but I will stop going to church myself."

"I wouldn't put so much faith in that God of yours." Retorted Aaron. "It only sets you on a pedestal from which to fall off of."

"However," continued Sheriff Thomson ignoring what Aaron said, "When we find your son alive and well, you have to sit down and allow me to share my God with you."

"Don't waste your breath," replied Aaron, "Your God ain't coming."

"Do we have a deal?"

Aaron paused for a moment. “Haven’t you heard what I have been saying?”

“Yes,” responded the Sheriff, “Have you heard what I have been saying?”

“Yes, I heard you,” snapped Aaron, “And for the life of me I can’t fathom why you are going on about this.”

“Because just as you can’t imagine a world without Simon,” Sheriff Thomson explained, “I can’t imagine a heaven without you. So, I ask you again, do we have a deal?”

For a moment, Aaron did speak as he was shocked at what the Sheriff just said and in order to hide his shock, he resorted to sarcasm. “I’ll tell you what, If you God helps us find my son *alive and well* I will not only allow you to tell me about your God, but I will go to church with you.”

The Sheriff extended his hand, “Deal!”

Aaron took the Sheriff’s hand and gave it a good shake.

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As soon as Aaron and Sheriff Thomson’s hands broke from the sealing of the deal, a blinding white light ripped right through the forest. Instinctively both men raised their hands to shield their eyes and turned away from the source. For a moment, time seemed to stand still as Aaron slowly removed his hand and found that he could see and not only could he see, but the light that should have been burning his eyes seemed calming and welcoming at the same time. However, what was most important was that Aaron could see his son standing in a small clearing not fifteen feet from where Aaron and Sheriff Thomson were standing.

As soon as Aaron was able to move, he ran into the clearing. At first, all he saw was his son, but as he entered the clearing he could see two large men dressed all in white and glowing standing on either side of his son. Simon’s face lit up as he saw his father and ran to meet him. Aaron dropped to his knees and met his son’s grasping hug. Tears were running down Aaron’s face.

Just then Sheriff Thomson broke out from the trees and immediately dropped to his knees. The two men looked at one another and then spoke together as one, “Don’t not be afraid, for we were sent by God when Simon called on him.”

“Thank you,” replied an elated Aaron.

“Don’t thank us,” continued the men, “Thank God.”

“Dad,” interrupted Simon, “I saw mommy.”

“You what?”

“I saw mommy,” continued Simon, “She now lives with God in a really awesome place.”

Aaron looked back at the men, “But how?”

The men continued, “Because God doesn’t hate you, Aaron. He loves you.”

“He does.”

“Yes,” continued the men, “Now go and raise your son for God has big plans for him.” As the final words left their mouths, the two men suddenly vanished into the night air.

After a moment, Aaron looked over to the Sheriff and then back at Simon. If he had not witnessed it with his own eyes, he would never have believed what had just happened. Even so, he had no idea how he would ever explain it. In fact, he was glad that Sheriff Thomson was there as a witness to what happened otherwise Aaron feared no one would believe him.

“So,” Sheriff Thomson broke the silence with, “I’m guessing it won’t take me long to explain how my God loves you.”

Aaron laughed.

“Oh,” added Simon, “And mommy wants you to know that she can’t imagine a heaven without you either. And neither can I because I prayed for you to make peaces with God.”

Aaron looked back at his son and smiled, “Thank you, Simon. Thank you!”

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