

Rose Petal

Fairy Rose

*A Christmas
Miracle*

Sky Purington

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by

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Aidan rolled the kinks out of his neck, looked out the window, and studied the heavy sun-licked clouds beneath the airplane.

Soon he would hold Nicole again. It had been too long. The thought of her long, curly blond hair made him smile. The way her bright blue eyes had looked against the cool green Irish grass made him yearn. The way they'd made love for hours in the glade made him want her again so badly it hurt.

He closed his eyes and thought of their first kiss. How she hadn't seen it coming when he pulled her aside on that rainy night and tasted her for the first time. There would never be another woman like her. He never expected to find that kind of love with an American but there she had been, there he had been, and it had been...magic.

The crackling speaker brought him from his thoughts. It was the pilot. "It seems we'll be experiencing some turbulence. Please fasten your seatbelts."

The pilot said more but Aidan paid little attention. He couldn't wait to see Nicole's smile and touch her soft skin.

The pilot's broken voice came through again. "Seatbelts...oxygen mask...you first, then your child."

Would she still feel the same about them once he arrived? Would their feelings be as intense? The woman next to him jammed him with her elbow and he looked at her. "What?"

"I don't want to die!" she screamed as the oxygen masks fell.

The cabin went wild. Women and children were wailing. The plane lurched suddenly. What the hell was happening? Gravity gave way and it felt as if

the plane dropped a hundred miles in an instant. Lights flickered off and the clouds outside turned to a black void. He did what he could to soothe the woman next to him. Surely, they weren't going down. The plane lurched again and then angled so sharply that the overhead compartments flew open.

This couldn't be happening! He tried to make sense of his surroundings but it all happened too fast, too tragically. He had one last wish as the plane careened and reality blew away.

He wanted to hold Nicole one more time.

One year later

Nicole stood on her tip-toes and placed the angel carefully atop the Christmas tree. It wobbled but she kept her hand steady. This topper wasn't going anywhere, not if she could help it. And it didn't.

She leaned back to admire her work and the stepstool gave way. The room flipped as she flew backward. Instead of crashing to the hardwood floor beneath, she landed gently.

"Are you okay?"

She stared up at the glimmering tree. Who said that? She rubbed the back of her head and sat up. The radio played, "Do you hear what I hear?" How ironic.

"God, you're beautiful."

Nicole jumped up and gazed around her small apartment. It stood empty. Of course it did. She lived alone. Turning down the radio, she held her breath and scanned the room again.

Empty.

She picked up the stepstool and quelled a wave of sadness. To decorate this year had been a mental challenge. Regardless, life went on and this was her favorite season. A normal person who had gone through what she had would eternally shun

Christmas, no doubt. Not her. Routine was everything. It was the only way to keep going.

“You’ve decorated wonderfully.”

This time, she spun three times and studied everything carefully. No one loomed within the corners or in the adjoining kitchen. What the heck? Oddly enough, she didn’t panic.

“I’ve missed you so much. Why do you look so surprised to see me?”

She released a nervous burst of laughter and looked toward the Christmas tree. The voice came from somewhere in that direction. Eyes narrowed, she searched. Her knees nearly buckled when a hazy green form shimmered near the tree.

“It’s only me. You look like you’ve seen a ghost!”

Her mouth fell open. It couldn’t be. Could it? Instead of falling weak-limbed to the floor, she took a step forward. Was she dreaming? Was he real?

The form shifted, became even clearer. “You knew I was coming.”

She didn’t know what to think. He was dead. Fear should cripple but it didn’t. “Aidan, is that you?”

He faltered for a moment, confusion evident, before he smiled that slow, sexy smile that was all his. “Last time I checked. I’ve finally made it to America!”

She moved closer, eager to touch the man nearly fully formed. Aidan. How was this possible? She didn’t dare close her eyes lest he vanish. To look at a picture a thousand times and remember was one thing, to actually see your true love standing before you, another. His tall frame became distinguishable, his bright emerald eyes more prominent.

“You cannot be here,” she whispered. “You’re dead.”

He shook his head and smirked. “Always the jokester.” His form drifted closer. “Look at me. Do I

look dead to you?"

He still wasn't...whole. "Look at yourself, Aidan." She clenched her fists and swallowed. "Are you haunting me?"

Aidan laughed, his straight white teeth just as she remembered. "A ghost? Are you mad, lassie?"

This man had touched her like no other. She'd met him in a small café in Dublin, Ireland when there on business. Like her, he was a free lance writer, and sparks had flown the minute they spied one another.

When she flew home three months later, it had been a difficult departure. Last year, he decided he couldn't stay away and flew on Christmas Eve to be with her. Pain gripped when she remembered hearing the news. His plane had gone down over the Atlantic.

There had been no survivors.

Now he hovered before her, not quite a full man, but still the Aidan she remembered with the same sense of humor and matter-of-fact attitude. She bit the corner of her lip. He was still just as handsome.

His lilt brought her eyes to his. "Why do you look so confused, Nicole? You knew I was coming."

Tears sprang to her eyes but she blinked them away. It was obvious he didn't know he was dead. "Yes," she whispered. "I knew you were coming, Aidan."

He moved forward a fraction. "Come here, Nicole. I need to touch you. I've needed to feel you since the moment you left me. It has been so long, *too* long."

She felt no fear. Didn't care what made sense. To think of and yearn for this man so long and to now have him here was more than she could have ever hoped. If he was a gift from above, so be it. She ran into his arms—only to roll back in time, try to steady the angel tree topper, and fall once again off

the stepstool. This time she hit the hardwood floor. This time the sound of “Do you hear what I hear” played louder.

This time she cried...for the very first time since he died.

An hour later, she sat on the couch and did the most stupid thing she could possibly do on Christmas Eve. She watched saved recordings of the news coverage following Aidan’s plane going down.

Why was he haunting her now? She buried her face in her hands and knew that she was truly in the midst of some sort of mental break-down.

A hum came from the Christmas tree but she ignored it, lost in a misery she had never allowed herself. The hum increased, became more determined. She growled, turned off the television and stood. The hum ceased and the wind whipped up outside, caking the windowpane with snow.

This heartbreak was too great. She turned off the Christmas tree lights only to have the angel on top stay lit. Nicole stared up at the plastic figure with the white skirts and couldn’t contain another burst of tears. Why did it stay lit? She needed it off. She went around the back of the tree and yanked all the cords from the wall.

Still, the angel stayed lit.

She glared up. “Turn off! He died. They all died. Unless you can undo that, don’t shine!”

Yet the angel shone.

She fell to her knees and groaned. Why was this happening? The pain was too intense. Aidan was gone. It had been a cruel reminder tonight, imagining she’d seen his ghost. She sank back, stared at the angel through tears, and cried for all of them, for an innocent flight of people.

The angel flickered and the tree lights turned on, then the radio. “Do you hear what I hear?” blared again then quieted.

Nicole raised her head. This was completely nuts. The television came on. She stood and turned. The same reporter who had originally reported the crash appeared, just as frazzled, just as intense as the first time. "There are more survivors than anyone would have anticipated! They were floating in the water on...well, folks, what I'm hearing is that they were floating on large, glowing rafts. So many alive!"

Nicole staggered forward and grabbed the edge of the sofa. This couldn't be real. But it was. The reporter went on saying how what looked to be the whole plane had somehow, through the grace of God, survived.

A knock resounded on her door and she swung back.

She looked to the angel on the top of the tree. It glowed brightly. The knock came again. On wobbly legs she made her way to the door and leaned her head against it. There was no way she was going to open it and find him. That would make no sense. She breathed deeply and prayed. *Just open the door and find out who's there.* She did.

He didn't let her open it much but pushed right in. The cold air came in with him. She saw the black of his hair topped with white snow, but he couldn't be real...could he?

He slammed the door and stared down at her. "I dreamt of you. The plane went down and then I dreamt I was here." He didn't look at the tree, didn't look at the angel atop it. "Why am I here? I feel like I've been dreaming a thousand dreams and every one of you."

Nicole said a few words, not one came out. She tried again. "You were here, Aidan, then you weren't. I don't know." She went to touch him but stopped and whispered, "I wished for you to be here. I prayed for a miracle and now..."

His expression remained locked in confusion, disbelief, a moment before it erupted in desire and he seized her. His lips were hot, his intention searing. There were a thousand things she needed to make sense of but his long lost lips tore them all away. Was he real? Oh yeah, he was real.

He switched between Gaelic and English when he lifted and carried her to the sofa. This...them, shouldn't exist. But this time he was truly here, this time she didn't question his solidity. How had she gone a year without him?

Clothes were removed so fast she wondered if they'd had them on to begin with. His skin was as smooth and tight as she remembered. The smell of his hair was the same, the strength of his thighs, the same. He'd always been aggressive. With most men, the pace he moved wouldn't work, but Aidan had a way about him.

When he moved into her, the Christmas lights sparkled a million different colors, the air felt a zillion degrees above normal and his murmured words brought her to peak not once but three times before he slowed down.

Ah, Ireland...Aidan.

She sifted her hands through his hair, rubbed her cheek against his. He felt so wonderful. All of this did. Yet surely she dreamt still. After some time he pulled her onto his lap so that they faced the Christmas tree. She didn't hesitate, didn't worry about killing the moment, but leaned over, grabbed a tree hook and stabbed it into his arm.

"Ouch!"

Nicole relished the sight of his blood. "You're alive!"

"One would hope!" He rubbed his arm and smiled. "The last I knew I was in a plane crashing. The next I dreamt of you. The next I was here, with you."

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She nuzzled close and shut her eyes. “I know. I saw it on the news.”

He wrapped his arms around her, his Irish lilt a soothing balm against her ear. “I love you so much. I don’t want to be without you again.”

She clutched him tighter and opened her eyes. “You won’t be. I have a feeling that this is all meant to be, that—”

The volume on the television increased and the news reporter cut off Nicole’s words. “What makes this truly amazing is that this flight vanished a year ago but all the survivors are surfacing, no one knows how this is possible!”

Nicole searched for breath but only found Aidan’s eyes.

All the electricity snuffed out and left only the angel’s glow atop the tree. But they didn’t look, didn’t dare.

One didn’t question a Christmas miracle.