

The Christmas Angel

by Posse Gal Pam

Erica slept peacefully, blissfully wrapped in Jack's sports coat. She hadn't intended to fall asleep at his loft, but in the stillness of the night, her thoughts of only him, sleep had overtaken her. Smiling to herself, she imagined herself cloaked in the warmth of his arms, the smell of his cologne intoxicating her. If only he were there with her....

"Erica. Erica wake up" came a familiar voice. The voice at first seemed faint. But as it continued, it became more forceful, louder, like the beat of a drum. "Erica. Erica. Erica." Erica.

Erica opened her eyes slowly, shaking off the fog of her slumber. She smiled as she looked up at the face before her. But as she focused on the face, her smile dropped and she sat up with a start. Sleep's haze gave way to clarity, then utter confusion.

"Travis? Travis, is that you? How? Am I— ? Oh my God, I've died and gone to Hell."

The visitor laughed. "No Erica, you're not in Hell. You're in Pine Valley. There is only a fine difference between the two, I'll admit. But Hell's hotter in Winter. And, no, I'm not Travis. I'm the Ghost of Christmas Past."

"Ahh, I see. The Ghost of Christmas Past. Of course that's who you are. And how do you know my name? Did Greenlee send you? Is this some sort of sick joke? And why do you look so much like Travis?" Erica was clearly becoming unhinged.

"Look, I told you. I'm not Travis. I've only chosen his physical form because it's familiar to you. I'm the Ghost of Christmas Past. Here, I'll prove it to you." With that, the Ghost of Christmas Past turned on the television with a wave of his hand.

"All right.. Nice trick. But turning on a television is not----." She stopped abruptly when she focused on what was on the television. "How? What the—?"

"Christmas season circa 1989," the Ghost offered. "A year of big hopes and even bigger hair. Oh, look there's Jackson. Frankly, I think Travis was better looking."

Erica glared at the ghost. "Are you absolutely sure you're not Travis?" Then she turned her attention to the television. It was Jackson all right. He had come to give her the earrings that his Aunt Dina left him. She watched as her past played out. She re-lived Jack's first "I love you" and all of the love and tenderness they showed each other that Christmas. Erica was filled with emotion. When she spoke, her voice trembled. "That seems like so long ago. We were so in love. We were going to get married----" Her voice broke off. "Please, I've seen enough."

"Oh no, you don't get off that easily. Let's fast forward a year or two. Ahh, here we are."

Erica turned her attention to the screen again. She and Travis were married. But, she was having an affair with Jack. She was promising Jack that they would be together, that she would ask Travis for a divorce right after the holidays. Erica winced at the memory. But,

the ghost showed her no compassion. “So it appears that yet another holiday hope is dashed . Tell me, what is that you have against Christmas?”

Erica could barely speak, her voice a whisper. “I was trying to protect my daughter. I meant well. I loved him so much. I always have. I-----“ Erica began crying softly. “Why are you here? Why are bringing up all of these painful memories?”

There was no answer to her question. “Let’s move on. Oh, here’s a good one. Christmas season 1996, was it? You had just been released from the slammer. And here you are at the Crystal Ball. Roll tape!”

This time, Erica closed her eyes. She couldn’t watch. But the memories played on in her head. She and Jack dancing, holding each other gently, kissing. They had professed their love for each other later that evening. Months later he would propose again—a proposal that she would happily accept.

“So full of hope.” came the ghost’s voice.

“Yes”, replied Erica softly, opening her eyes. “But, you never answered my quest—“

When she opened her eyes, she realized that the ghost was gone and the television was off. Erica’s mind was reeling from what she had seen. So many years right there before her. So much love. So much hope for the future. Had they lost sight of that?

Erica was startled out of her reverie by the opening of the front door.

“Oh, Jack! Oh I’m so glad to see you!!” She ran to him with open arms, grabbing him into a hug. “You won’t believe what just happened here. In fact, I think you’d better sit down. And, by the way, why did you stay away so long? I have so much to tell you—“ Her voice trailed off once she realized that Jack was not reacting. He had not returned her embrace. His face was emotionless.

“Jack, is there something wrong? Is it Bianca? Jack?”

“I am not Jack. I am the Ghost of Christmas Present.”

“Christmas Present? The Ghost of Christmas Present? Look, whoever is behind this is doing a bang up job. Let’s just call off this charade. If—no, WHEN—I find out who is putting you people up to this, you will be sorry that you ever met me!” .

“I’ve already been told that would be the case, Ms. Kane. I must say that you certainly live up to the legend.”

Unamused by the visitor’s sarcasm, Erica replied “Please let me show you the door. I think you need to go before I call the police.”

“I’ll go, right after you have seen this.” The Ghost of Christmas Present handed Erica a large, sealed envelope. “Open it.”

Erica tore open the envelope. It was filled with photos of Jack which had been taken over the past 48 hours. They depicted a fatherly Jack with Greenlee, offering advice and

comfort; a compassionate Jack hugging Bianca and Reggie ; a concerned Jack advising distraught Kendall; and a loving Jack holding Erica close.

“Why do all of you lean on Jackson for support?”, the ghost asked somewhat rhetorically.

Erica did not hesitate with her reply. “Because we trust him. Jack always does the right thing. I may not always agree with him. But, in the end, Jack always follows his heart — and his conscious.”

“Has he ever let you down?”

“Yes----and No. He has refused to lie for me. He has forced me to be honest with myself and with others. In those moments—during Bianca’s custody dispute and during my kidnapping trial—my narrow view was that he had betrayed me. But, in looking at the broader picture, and with the maturity of hindsight, I know that he has only wanted the best for me. He wanted me to be able to love the person that I see in the mirror every day. Other men have loved me superficially. They’ve fallen for the image of Erica Kane. But, Jack loves me—the real me. He loves **who** I am, not **what** I am. I had difficulty seeing that before. But, I see that now. And look at him, in these photos. He loves us all.”

“But look at him. He’s being pulled in so many different directions. How can you be sure that his love for you will never fade?”

Erica was stunned by the question. It was as if he had been reading her thoughts. “I, I don’t know. That’s what scares me, I suppose. Jack and I have been through so much together. He has never, ever failed me. I wish I could just allow myself to be loved by him. I wish I could just have enough faith in his love for me.”

“Faith. Yes, that is a difficult concept for you isn’t it Ms. Kane?”

“I beg your pardon? What exactly do you mean?”

“Well, you just said that Jackson has been there for you through some very tough times. You’ve also said that he has never truly let you down. Yet, you are still insecure in his love for you. Is that right?”

“Yes, yes, I suppose it is.” Erica replied softly.

“Tell me, Ms. Kane. What would it take for you to have faith in Jackson—to believe in his love so strongly that you would never doubt it, not even for a second? Does he need to constantly reassure you of his love?”

“He does that.”

“Okay then, does he have to commit to you by asking you to marry him?”

“He has done that, several times.”

“Well, maybe he should live a life devoted to only you.”

“No, that would be—“

“Selfish?”

“Yes. And ridiculous. Besides, he’d never go along with that.”

“I agree. So what is it that you need from him exactly?”

Erica turned away and pondered the question. She searched her heart for the answer. Then it dawned on her. She needed nothing more from him. He had given himself to her entirely, completely. Had she done that for him? In that moment, Erica realized that she had been her own worse enemy. Sure, she had faith in Jack. But it had been superficial: faith that he would always be there when she needed him, faith that he would always offer the right advice. But, the faith that she had lacked was deeper than that: faith that the depths of his love for her were endless, that she could give her heart to him without fear or reservation. Her eyes were open now. She would do everything in her power to show Jack that she did have faith in him and in his love for her. Erica turned to thank the Ghost of Christmas Present, but he was gone.

There was knock at the door. Erica opened the door to a beautiful raven haired little girl with pale blue eyes. She looked as if she was no older than 10 or 11. She seemed curiously familiar, somewhat reminiscent of Bianca at the same age, with Jack’s blue eyes.

Erica smiled at the girl. “Hello sweetheart. Are you lost?”

“No. I’m not lost. Actually, I’m here to see you. I’m the Ghost of Christmas Future,” the girl responded, sounding much older than she appeared.

“I think I know the drill now,” Erica replied laughingly. “So, what does my future hold? Is Jack in it? And, will I ever find my—“

“Whoa! Lady, I’m not a fortune teller. I’m the Ghost of Christmas Future. I’m here to clue you in on what your future *might* be like if you don’t start steering your ship in the right direction. Haven’t you ever read Dickens’ ‘A Christmas Carol’?”

Erica laughed. “My, you are a bit precocious aren’t you?”

“A bit. Actually, I come from a long line of highly intelligent women—though you wouldn’t know it from some of the choices they’ve made. Which brings me back to my reason for being here.”

“Ah yes, that. Well, what visual aids did you bring? Let’s see, we’ve done television, photos, what’s next, a Broadway musical all about me?”

“Wow, what an ego. No, this one won’t be about you at all. It’s about Him.” The girl pointed to a nativity scene that Jack had placed in the corner, on a small table.

“Jesus?”

“Why not. That’s who Christmas is about, isn’t it?”

“Well sure, but what does that have to do with my future? Where’s the lesson for me in

the birth of Christ?”

“Hey, you’re the adult. You tell me. But first, answer this question for me: Do you really buy into that whole ‘virgin birth’ story? Sounds pretty fishy to me. What do you think?”

“Well, you’re awfully cynical!”

“Hey, I’ve watched reality TV—your generation’s creation by the way---- I know a fishy story when I hear one.”

Erica was amused by the enchanting little girl. “Well, I’m not deeply religious, but I think that whether you believe the story behind his conception or not is irrelevant. I think the real miracle of Christmas is the notion that when a child is born, the world is given a Divine gift. A child is a blank slate, a well of untapped potential. The birth of Jesus gives us hope that every new life can make a difference.”

“Wow, that’s really beautiful. So, what your saying is that no matter how he got here, the world is a better place because He was born into it.?”

“Yes, that’s it exactly. And every child has the potential to effect great change—either positive or negative— on the world into which they are born.”

“Oh, I think I get it now. But, what determines whether a child grows up to do good versus evil?”

Erica thought about it for a moment. She thought about her own life—about how differently Kendall and Bianca had seemed initially, and how Kendall had changed and grown over the past year. “I don’t want to sound corny, but I think that love is what makes the difference. If you show a child love, unconditional love, then love is what she gives in return.”

The girl smiled at Erica. “Thank you for the education on the power of love. I think my work here is done.”

Erica smiled back. “I don’t understand. I thought that I was supposed to learn the lesson.”

“You have. You will. You’ll see. Until we meet again....”

“But, wait—“ Erica reached out to hug the girl, but she vanished, leaving a confused Erica to ponder the gifts of wisdom that her visitors had bestowed upon her. When she drifted back to sleep, the voice she heard was Mona’s:

Erica, you have always had all of the answers. But, it’s all right to admit to being confused and scared. Tonight you learned that what the Bible tells us is true—that of these three things —faith, hope and love----the greatest of these things is love.

Erica, our trials give us hope. Our triumphs give us faith. And the people who stand beside us through it all—they teach us to love. And, my sweet angel, that is the greatest of all gifts. I have always wanted to see you happy. I think you know who and what makes you happy. Erica, don’t be afraid to fulfill your destiny. With Jack by your side,

you will not fail. I love you.

Erica awakened suddenly, reaching out to her mother. Instead, when she opened her eyes, she found herself in Jack's embrace. He had returned. "You were having a dream—" he started.

"No, it wasn't a dream, Jack. It was so real. I can't even begin to tell you how happy I am to see you." Her eyes welled up with tears. Jack didn't ask any questions. He just held her, loving her as he always had and always would.

The End