

The Singing Santa

by Diana Leigh Matthews

Lila pulled her keys from her pocket and unlocked the doctor's office door, where she worked as a receptionist. Today would be the last day they were open before the Christmas holidays. She couldn't believe Christmas was only three days away.

After settling in, she walked over to the waiting room and arranged the chairs for their special visitor. She'd worked here for seven years and every year on this day, he showed up, ready to talk with the children and serenade everyone in the waiting room.

It didn't take long to set up, and soon people arrived for appointments. She looked at the clock, 11:05. This year their special visitor ran behind schedule. So strange since he always arrived fifteen to twenty minutes early.

Her eyes darted to the doors as if magically the man in red would appear. Fifteen minutes later, a flash of burgundy blazed past her. She finished checking in a patient and glanced toward the corner. This wasn't the same Santa. He appeared younger, behind the fake beard, and trimmer, as he pulled his pants up and fastened them to suspenders. The suit hung off his lanky frame.

Where was their usual Santa? The one who epitomized the traditional image of Santa Claus, all the way from a belly that shook like a bowl of jelly to his broad face covered with a naturally grown white beard?

She watched this Santa and wondered if he was up to the task. He settled into a chair, picked up his guitar, and then repositioned it. At first his voice sounded hoarse and more like a guinea fowl.

Lila forced herself to keep a smile on her face. She turned to the next person in line when a voice boomed with a deep assertion “Away in a manger no crib for a bed.” Her mouth fell open as her eyes flew to Santa. The man had transformed from a hurried, disheveled drifter into a composed, confident singer with a rich, baritone voice.

She closed her eyes and appreciated the sound. As she went about her duties, she developed a rhythm and discovered his voice soothed her. Before she knew it the day had passed in a flurry of activity. The music had stopped, and she looked around for the singing Santa, but he’d left without her even realizing it.

Lila sighed, regretting once again that she’d not had an opportunity to talk with the singing Santa.

The following morning, she finished shopping before winding her way down the street to her favorite coffee shop.

Placing her order, she waited in line for her beverage.

“Peppermint white mocha,” the barista called.

“Right here,” a man stepped forward and Lila’s mouth fell open. The singer with the same low voice. He turned to leave.

She couldn’t let him get away. Not this time. She pushed through a small crowd and pulled on his shirtsleeve. “Excuse me.”

He turned and gave her a slow, easy smile. “May I help you?” His forest green eyes seemed to see right through her. The man behind the Santa suit was actually cute.

She told him where she worked, and a twinkle appeared in his eyes.

“Gingerbread coffee,” the barista called from behind her.

“Wait here. That’s my order.” She retrieved her drink and turned around, but he’d disappeared. Her shoulders drooped when a low whistle caught her attention. He’d claimed a quiet table in the corner and motioned for her to join him.

She pulled out a chair across from him. “I’m Lila.”

“Miles.”

“I look forward to the singing Santa every year, but you’re not our usual one.”

“No.” He took a sip of his coffee. “That would be my father. He fell and broke his ankle two days ago but insisted I honor his tradition.”

“I can’t tell you how much we enjoy what he does.” They had many who booked appointments on that day just to hear the singing Santa.

Miles told her of all the different places his father visited during the holidays. From the fire station to the doctors’ offices and from the nursing homes to the children’s homes. He’d started over twenty years ago and enjoyed it so much that it became an annual tradition. For him, it had become a way to spread Christmas cheer.

Lila couldn’t believe how much she enjoyed talking with this man as their conversation veered to a variety of other topics.

He looked at his watch. “I have somewhere to be.” His eyes twinkled. “Could I call you sometime, so we don’t have to wait a year until my next performance?”

“I’d like that.” She revealed in the secret of the upcoming concert and handed him her number. “Better yet, would you like some company?”

