



BLAIR MCDOWELL  
**ABIGAIL'S**  
*Christmas*

....a sweet and special story that  
honors both love and the holidays.

-- *Sizzling Hot Book Reviews*

# Abigail's Christmas

written by Blair McDowell

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Abigail looked at the last flight of steps and wondered if she had energy enough left to climb them. When she had first seen this flat under the eaves of the big old house on Sixth Avenue, she had been charmed by it. It had so much more character than the little boxes she could afford in nearby high rise apartment houses. What she'd failed to appreciate, she reminded herself with a wry smile, was that those apartment houses had elevators. She took a deep breath and went up the remaining ten steps to her doorway and glanced at the door opposite to hers. Mrs. Flannigan had told her it was rented and that the new tenant would be moving in this week. So far there was no sign of her new neighbor.

She had agreed to work all day on Christmas Eve. She was a buyer for Toys & Co. and didn't usually work on the sales floor, but they were shorthanded and she had nothing better to do. Working on December twenty-fourth in a big box toy store was an exhausting business. How could so many parents wait until the last minute to buy presents for their children? Abigail remembered her own mother shopping for months for just the right presents, secreting them away in closets and in bureau drawers, then wrapping them after Abigail and her brother were asleep on Christmas Eve. Putting them under the Christmas tree that the family had decorated together before they went to bed. Did Christmases like that exist anymore? It all seemed so harried and commercial now. Particularly in her line of work.

She fished into her purse and found her keys. Sighing, she unlocked her door and went in. The flat was cold. Abigail headed for the thermostat and turned it up, then she kicked off her shoes and plopped down in the big old wing chair she had found in an antique shop over on Main. Her eyes ranged over her little space. The cherry table and chairs acquired from a neighbor downstairs who was moving. The velvet covered Victorian loveseat and old fashioned, glass fronted mahogany bookcases that had been her mother's pride and joy. It had cost her a fortune to have them shipped out from Halifax, but she couldn't bear to part with them. The tiny kitchen area with her hanging copper pots. And through the doorway, her bedroom with its antique spindle bed and cozy down duvet. The place was a bit eclectic, but it was spacious, and suited her.

Abigail sighed. It was Christmas Eve and she was alone. Perhaps she shouldn't have so impulsively moved to Vancouver four months ago. If she'd stayed in Halifax there would at least have been her brother and his family, a few old friends. Here there was no one.

Why had she felt so compelled to move? She shook her head, trying to remember just what the last straw had been. First her father had died, then she'd nursed her mother through that long and debilitating illness. Walter had waited patiently for a while, but when she was seldom able to go out with him, never able to break free for a weekend on the boat in the summer or for a ski trip in the winter, he had found someone who could. Her friends had commiserated with her over his betrayal, but she wasn't sure she even minded. Walter was more a habit than a lover. At the end she'd just wanted to get away from him, from the sympathy of others, from her overly solicitous brother who was always trying to fix her up with his friends, from everyone and everything that made up her sorry life. Abigail wanted a chance to start fresh in a place where no one knew her. Well, here she was. Far away, and alone on Christmas Eve. What was she going to do about it?

Christmas Eve. Abigail looked around the apartment again. It seemed so drab. Why had she not done anything to brighten it up? She hadn't so much as bought a poinsettia. She'd been too busy at work. But surely she could do something to make the place look more like Christmas. It wasn't too late for her to get a tree. There would be decorations and lights for sale someplace. She had to go out anyway. She hadn't had anything to eat since breakfast and there wasn't any food in the house. She'd grab a quick supper at Luigi's and then find a tree at one of the street corner stands. She would not sit here huddled in her chair, feeling sorry for herself. True, she was tired, but a hot shower and something to eat would fix that.

Twenty minutes later, Abigail looked at herself in the full length mirror on the back of her bedroom door. She had exchanged her business uniform for jeans and a soft cable knit sweater in a bright Christmas red. Her dark hair, usually worn back in a severe twist when she was on the job, hung loose and full to her shoulders. She glanced in the glass at her wide curving mouth and dark eyes and decided against bothering with make-up. She felt that she had to wear make-up at work, but this was Christmas Eve and she didn't have to go back to work for four whole days. She grabbed her raincoat and umbrella. Suddenly she felt free and almost —

could it be – happy, as she headed downstairs and out of the door into Vancouver’s usual wet December weather.

At the curb she saw a U-Haul truck. Her new neighbor moving in on Christmas Eve? But there was no one in or around the truck.

She decided to walk to the market and shops on Granville Island. As she sloshed through the wet streets, music spilled out of doorways and lights flickered from decorated shop windows. People bustled down the sidewalks, stopped at crosswalks, waited at bus stops, arms full of packages. Everything glistened through the curtain of misty rain. She walked over the bridge that led to Granville Island, leaving the crowds behind. No one seemed to be about in this corner of the city. The streets were silent and dark. She remembered then that the shops on Granville Island closed in the late afternoon, when Granville Market closed. No matter. The restaurants would be open. She turned left and into Luigi’s, the little Italian restaurant she knew and liked.

She shook her umbrella and put it in the stand by the door. A man she’d never seen here before approached her.

“Wet night out.” He hesitated for a moment as if deciding what to do. Then he smiled broadly and said, “Table for one?”

“Yes, please. Where’s Luigi?”

“He’s home with his family. Christmas is a pretty big thing with Italians you know.”

“It’s a pretty big thing with non-Italians, too. But for some of us, family is a long way away.”

Abigail realized that she had spoken sharply. Why on earth had she said that? It made her sound pitiful. She looked at the waiter to see how he had reacted to her rudeness.

He looked back at her quietly through understanding eyes that were a warm deep blue. He nodded as if her comment had held no barb and offered her a menu.

“The gnocchi are particularly good tonight. With a four cheese sauce.”

“Fine.” She smiled to amend for her earlier sharpness. “That will do. With a glass of red wine please.”

As she waited for her food, Abigail looked around and realized that she was the only diner in the restaurant. When the waiter returned with her wine, she asked, "Haven't you had any business tonight?"

"To tell the truth, I was just about to close up when you came in. The chef's long gone, and if you hadn't ordered the gnocchi I don't know what I'd have done. They're all that's left. I was going to have a plate of them myself and then head for home."

"Oh, dear. I'm keeping you here." Abigail started to rise.

"No. No. Please. I'll tell you what. I'll get us both some food and bring over the bottle of wine and we can have our meal together. That is," he looked at her apprehensively, "that is if you don't mind sharing. I hate eating alone."

Abigail thought, so do I. Aloud she said, "It would be a shame to waste the gnocchi. And the wine is already open. So by all means join me. No one should have to eat alone on Christmas Eve."

As he bustled around setting up the second place and getting the food and wine, Abigail studied him. Luigi usually hired college kids to wait tables. This man was definitely not a college kid. He was perhaps thirty-seven or thirty-eight. About her age. With dark blond hair that fell carelessly over his forehead. Tall. Rangy. Athletic looking. Hockey-jock, perhaps? No. Too old and too sophisticated for that. There was a certain assurance in his bearing that gave her pause. The thought occurred to her that he looked more like a lawyer or a business executive of some kind than a waiter.

"How did you happen to become a waiter?"

He gave her a lopsided grin. "I'm not exactly a waiter."

"What do you mean, you're not a waiter? You seated me. You gave me a menu. You took my order."

"Well, I did mention that I was about to close up. I just hadn't locked the door yet. Luigi went home to his family, and I was going to have some dinner and go home to my lonely bachelor pad. When you wandered in, dinner with you seemed like a better idea."

Abigail burst out laughing. "But who are you? And how do you happen to be closing up Luigi's restaurant?"

"Name's Scott, Scott McKenna." He reached over and shook her hand.

"Abigail Johnson. But the restaurant?"

"Ah, that. I know the sign says Luigi's. And Luigi is certainly the mastermind behind the food here, but I'm Luigi's partner. Usually, his very silent partner. Now let's eat this dinner before it gets cold. And here, let me fill your wine glass."

An hour and a half later they were laughing and lingering over coffee.

Reluctantly Abigail said, "I must go. I want to get a tree for my flat, and some ornaments. I can't let Christmas come and go without a tree."

"Let me come with you. I'm a past master at picking out Christmas trees. And if you insist on selecting your own tree, I'm good at carrying them."

"I don't see how I can refuse an offer like that."

They found a tree lot on Granville Street. The trees left unsold were a scraggly bunch. Scott and Abigail wandered up one lane and down the next among the fragrant evergreens, Scott holding out tree after tree while Abigail examined them with a frown and a shake of her head. Finally in the last row he pulled out a huge Scotch Pine. And then quickly put it back. "I can see why this one's left. It's too big for any normal room."

"That one," she said.

"This one?" he asked with disbelief in his voice. "How high is your ceiling?"

"High enough. My flat is under the roof. If I put it where the roof peaks it will fit."

"You're sure?"

"I'm sure."

"Okay. This one it is."

They arranged with the attendant to hold the tree for them while they went to buy ornaments.

"The Bay is open until nine," he said. "If we hurry we can get them there."

They were among the last customers to leave the department store, laden down with boxes and bags. All the Christmas lights and ornaments were on sale, and Abigail bought some of everything in sight.

Back at the tree lot, the attendant glared at them. "You're late. I was just about to close up."

"Sorry. We were buying the ornaments for the tree. Merry Christmas."

The attendant looked at the two of them, so happy, so oblivious to the rain, and smiled back at them. He handed Abigail a bunch of mistletoe and holly. "And a Merry Christmas to you, too."

"So where do we have to go with all this?" Scott asked as he took a firm hold on the tree.

"Not too far. Just over on Sixth."

Abigail shivered. The rain had finally stopped, and the temperature was dropping sharply.

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"This is it," she said when they finally reached the big old house.

"You live here?" he asked, incredulously.

"Only in a small corner of here. My flat is upstairs. Up many stairs."

Hoisting the tree further up on his shoulder, he said, "Lead on."

As they entered the house, Mrs. Flannigan opened her door. "I wondered what all the commotion was. I see you've found a tree. Be sure you get the needles off the carpet after you drag that thing upstairs. It's never going to fit you know."

"Good evening Mrs. Flannigan. Merry Christmas."

"Humpf." The door closed. Scott and Abigail looked at each other and burst out laughing.

Inside the flat Abigail said, "I'll make us some mulled cider while you try to get the tree into its stand."

Scott examined the small room. "Just where did you think this would fit?"

"If we move the table and chairs it can go there, against the wall."

"It's at least a foot too tall, and the branches will take up half the room."

Abigail looked at the tree, at the ceiling, and at the man who stood there trying to prop it up in a space for which it was clearly too tall. "Oh, dear. I did so want a big, full tree. We can move the table and chairs over, but I don't know what we can do about the ceiling."

Scott smiled and shook his head. "I'm afraid we can't do anything about the ceiling, but maybe we can take a foot or two off the bottom of the tree. I don't suppose you have a saw?"



“Do I look like the kind of girl who’d have a saw?”

“No. I didn’t think so. I’ll go downstairs and ask Mrs. Flannigan. Is there a Mr. Flannigan?”

“I think so but I’ve never seen him.”

A few minutes later Scott was back with a small hacksaw, and soon after that the tree was standing securely if slightly tilted to the left in its holder. Abigail handed Scott a mug of hot cider and the two stood admiring the results of his labor.

Abigail studied the tree. “Is it a little off center?”

“Not if you lean a little this way when you look at it.”

Abigail laughed. “I haven’t had so much fun in years.”

He stopped what he was doing and looked at her, suddenly quiet and serious. “Neither have I.”

For a long moment they stood simply gazing at each other. It was Abigail who, embarrassed, turned away to start unpacking the lights. She handed them a string at a time to Scott and he began stringing them around and through the branches.

“So how did you end up in the restaurant business?”

“Sort of by accident. In high school I was a hockey player — a pretty good one. I figured I’d be playing professionally. But I had an accident and injured my knee badly. With surgery it was fixed up, but not well enough for professional hockey.”

“You know, I thought hockey player when I first saw you. So what did you do?”

“I went to college. Took a degree in business and management. I tooled around for a few years working for other people then went out on my own. Started my own business, McKenna Solutions. I love good food, and the restaurant business has always interested me. So many restaurants don’t make it past the first year. They can have a wonderful chef, but if they don’t understand good management and don’t know how to market their business they fail. That’s where I come in. If they’re well located and offer good food I can keep them from failing. I have a number of clients here in Vancouver, and in Whistler and Lake Louise and Calgary. I travel among them.”

Abigail opened the boxes of fine glass ornaments and together they began placing them on the tree. “So that’s what you’re doing at Luigi’s?”

“Not exactly. Luigi was on the verge of bankruptcy when he came to me. I liked his cooking, and he’s in a great location, so I decided to buy into his business. He gets to cook, which he loves. I get to eat his cooking, which I love. And we both make money.”

“You live here in Vancouver then?” Abigail asked.

“Not really. I keep a small place here, but home is in the mountains, near Canmore.”

“I’ve never been there. It’s near Banff and Lake Louise isn’t it? I’ve heard it’s beautiful.”

“As close to heaven as you can get.” Scott mused. “But what about you? You said at the restaurant that your family isn’t here in Vancouver?”

“They’re in Halifax. That is, my brother and his family. They’re all that’s left. My parents are both gone.”

“I’m sorry. No boyfriend then, no husband or ex-husband?”

“An ex-fiancé, if that counts.”

“Nope. Can’t say that it does.”

“What about you? Wife, girlfriend?”

“Married once. Too young. It didn’t take. She wanted bright city lights and night life and I’m just a country boy. I can hole up for days in my mountain cabin with nothing but the elk and deer for company.”

“That sounds heavenly to me.” Abigail stood back to look at the work in progress. “I think if you stand on that chair you’ll be able to put the angel on top,” she said, unwrapping the beautiful ceramic tree top ornament they had chosen together.

“I think that about does it. Ready to throw the switch?”

“Okay. Here we go.” Abigail drew her breath in sharply. Never had she seen a tree as beautiful. “I don’t know how to thank you,” she began. “I couldn’t have done this alone. And I so needed this Christmas tree.” Tears came to her eyes as she sat on the love seat and gazed at the shimmering lights.

Scott said softly, “So did I, only I didn’t know it. But there’s one more thing needed to make our Christmas Eve complete.”

He went over to the kitchen counter and picked up the mistletoe. He walked back to the loveseat and held it over her head. Then he kissed her gently. "Thank you, Abigail Johnson. I expected to spend just another lonely evening, and instead...well, thank you."

He sat down on the loveseat beside her, put his arm around her and pulled her close.

Too soon, Abigail thought. It's too soon. I shouldn't have let him kiss me. But it was so nice. So...she snuggled down against him, her head on his shoulder and was asleep in moments.

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Bells were jingling. Abigail rubbed her eyes and sat up. She was in a sleigh pulled by two horses. The snow was falling softly, large white flakes landing on the fur robe tucked in around her.

"Welcome back, sleepyhead."

Scott was beside her, his hands on the reins.

"Where are we?"

"On our way to my chalet, of course. You've been asleep ever since we left the reception. The wedding must have really tired you out."

"The wedding?" Abigail felt totally disoriented. Wedding? What wedding? Surely she couldn't have slept through a wedding.

"Our wedding, silly. Remember, you said 'I do'. I said 'I do'. The preacher said 'I now pronounce you...' I know you were tired, but you can't have forgotten our wedding." Scott laughed.

But she had. She had no recollection of anything after they had finished decorating the tree. Married? She looked down at her left hand. There was a wide gold band on her third finger. How could they be married? She barely knew him. Then she thought, that's not true. I know him better than I know people I've known for years. I just haven't known him for as long. Confused, she snuggled down in the fur robe.

"Not much farther, darling."

As they rounded a bend in the track the house came into view. It was built of honey colored logs, and was set against the mountainside. Snow clung to the roof and to the eaves, welcoming lights glowed in the windows and smoke curled up from the chimney.

The sleigh stopped at the front door and a man hurried down the steps to take the reins from Scott.

"I'll look after the horses. You go on in where it's warm. Mary has laid a supper for you."

"Thanks, Fred. It's been a long day and Abigail is tired."

Scott came around to Abigail's side of the sleigh and lifted her down. "Welcome home, Mrs. McKenna." He carried her up the steps and through the open door. "Over the threshold, in the best tradition." Then he stood her on her feet and reached down to kiss her. "You taste of cold and snow. Welcome to your new home."

Abigail looked around her. There was a fire blazing in a huge stone fireplace and a table was laid out in front of it with a platter of cold chicken and fruit. In a silver ice bucket, champagne waited to be opened. Through a wall of windows she could see the mountainside and the drifting snow.

She looked at Scott "I don't understand..." she began.

"I don't either," he said. "How could two people be so lucky? A week ago we didn't even know each other. And here we are married. I just know it seems right, and I've never been happier."

It did seem right in a way. But it made no sense. How had it happened?

"Come sit by the fire. I'll pour us some champagne. You didn't eat or drink anything at the reception. You must be hungry. Wasn't it great that your brother and sister-in-law made it on such short notice?"

"Bill and Janice were there?"

"Of course they were, darling. You spoke with them at the reception. You *are* tired, aren't you." Scott handed her a glass of champagne. "Here's to us. To years of Christmases together. Although I know none can ever be as beautiful as this one has been. Have I told you how much I love you? And what a beautiful bride you are?"

For the first time, Abigail looked down at her clothing. She was wearing white. A full skirted white velvet wedding dress.

She was dreaming. Clearly she was dreaming. Any minute now she would wake up. She smiled. Meanwhile, she might as well enjoy herself. She took a chicken leg off the platter and

bit into it. "I'm hungry," she admitted, as she took a swallow of the champagne. Both seemed disturbingly real.

Scott settled back in his chair and watched her eat, a smile playing at his lips. "I've always admired a girl with a good appetite."

"You'd better get some of this while you can. I warn you I'll eat it all if you don't."

"There's more where that came from."

They finished off the chicken and the bottle of champagne, laughing and talking. Abigail listened carefully for any clues that could shed some light on this very confusing situation. But nothing made sense. She was here with Scott. They loved each other. Yes, she admitted to herself, she loved him. And they seemed to be married. But she couldn't remember anything after decorating the tree.

There was a moments silence between them and Abigail became aware of Scott's blue eyes burning into her.

"It's time for bed, Mrs. McKenna."

"Oh." Well why not? This was only a dream, wasn't it?

Scott pulled her to her feet and led her up the staircase to the big room that occupied most of the second story of the chalet. It was a very masculine room, done in earth tones, all rather dark. The bed was massive, with great pine posts, and was covered with a fur throw.

I'll have to do something about this, Abigail thought. We'll need to put something of me in this room. After that she was incapable of thought. Scott pulled her to him and kissed her, a kiss she felt to the depth of her being. Then he turned her around and started to unbutton the eighteen tiny buttons that went down the back of her gown. As he unbuttoned each one, he kissed the morsel of flesh exposed.

Abigail shivered and her ears were ringing, ringing, ringing...

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Abigail opened her eyes. She was curled up on the love seat, a quilt thrown over her, and the phone was ringing. She jumped up and moved to answer it.

"Merry Christmas, Sis. Did I get you up? I forgot about the time difference."

"Oh, Bill! You can wake me anytime. It's so good to hear your voice."

"I hate it that you're alone there for Christmas. Are you okay?"

"I'm fine, Bill. And I've had a lovely Christmas so far. I have a beautiful tree. And I have four days off. And, Bill, I've met someone. Someone special."

"Hmm. Don't go rushing into anything, Sis. You know I get prior approval."

Abigail laughed. "I won't forget. How are Janice and the kids?"

"They're all fine and pushing me to let them talk to you."

Twenty minutes later, after Abigail had spoken to all the Johnson clan, she hung up the phone and looked around her flat. The kitchen had been tidied up, their mugs and the pot in which she had heated their cider washed and placed in the dish drainer. The boxes and bags that had held the Christmas ornaments were neatly stacked in a corner. Clearly Scott McKenna was a tidy man. Would she see him again? She hoped so.

What a strange dream that had been.

Sunlight streamed in her living room window. Walking over to it, she looked out. Snow! Snow in Vancouver. It was just a dusting, but it was snow on Christmas day. Smiling, Abigail headed for the shower.

She was just stepping out of the shower when she heard a knock at her door. Who could that be? She hadn't pushed the buzzer to let anyone in the front door. Hastily she pulled on her terrycloth robe and wrapped a towel around her wet hair.

She went to the door and spoke through it. "Who is it?"

"Carry-out. I have croissants and Cappuccino here for a Miss Johnson." She recognized Scott's deep voice.

Abigail threw the door wide and propelled herself into his arms.

"Careful. You'll have this coffee all over the place. Good morning to you, too. And go get into some clothes. I can't be responsible for my actions if you go around looking like that."

Abigail laughed and retreated to the bedroom. When she returned to the living room Scott was standing at the window.

"Isn't it glorious? The snow makes everything so fresh and clean." He turned and saw her standing there in her white wool slacks and soft pink sweater. "Mmm. I like that," he said. He came over to her and held her at arm's length. "You're even more beautiful than I

remembered. He kissed her lightly, a promise of more to come. "Let's have our coffee before it gets cold."

"But how did you get in? Surely you didn't ring Mrs. Flannigan's bell. If you did, I'll never hear the end of it."

"No, I wouldn't dream of disturbing Mrs. Flannigan. As a matter of fact, I have my own key."

"Your own key?"

"I sort of live here. At least when I'm in Vancouver. Remember I told you – my lonely bachelor pad?"

Realization dawned. "You're my new neighbor. The U-Haul van was yours. You've rented the flat across the hall!"

Scott laughed. "Guilty as charged."

"But why didn't you say anything last night?"

"What? And spoil the fun? Besides, what if you had turned out to be some kind of awful demented witch? I'd have had to move out in the middle of the night, the way I moved in."

"But I didn't turn into some awful witch, did I?"

"No. My Christmas angel is more like it."

He paused and then spoke hesitantly. "After I left you last night I couldn't sleep. I walked the streets all night just thinking about you. About us. I think I could fall in love with you, Abigail Johnson. I think I might just like to spend the rest of my life with you. But I'm a cautious man. I think we need to get to know each other better first." He paused. "If you think I'm crazy, just tell me so and I'll go away."

Without words, Abigail went to him and put her arms around him. Then she reached up and kissed him with all the longing in her heart.

He was the one who broke the kiss. "I lied. I *am* in love with you. I don't need more time to know that. I'd be a fool not to recognize it."

"And I love you. But I want us to take time to get to know each other."

"Then how about coming to the cabin with me for a few days now? I'd like to show you where and how I really live. It's so different from city life."

"I'd like that. I've got four days off. Can you get me back by Tuesday?"

"I think that can be arranged."

"I'll just throw a few things in my duffle bag then." Abigail went into her bedroom and started to pack while Scott leaned against the doorway, his eyes following her as she efficiently filled her small case.

"About this cabin of yours," she said as she packed. "Would it by any chance have a wall of windows overlooking the mountains and the valley below?"

"Yes. That's a pretty accurate description of the view."

"And would there be a big stone fireplace?"

"Of course. What would a mountain cabin be without a fireplace?"

"Hmm. Two stories? With most of the second floor a large bedroom?"

He grinned. "You're beginning to scare me. Either you read a lot of Architectural Digest or you're clairvoyant. I'm not sure I'm up to a wife who knows things before they happen, so please tell me that you're into magazines with lots of pictures of mountain cabins."

Abigail frowned. "I don't have second sight. At least, I don't think I do. I certainly never had any evidence of it before." She paused, her eyes widening. "Did you say wife?"

"That's where this is heading, isn't it? Isn't that what we both want?"

"Yes." She looked directly at the tall, tired, disheveled man who had entered her life only a day ago. "Yes it is."

"Good. I'm glad we have that settled. I'm not impulsive. I'm a very deliberate man. But this just seems right to me. More right than anything I've ever done."

"To me also."

Then, unable to stop herself, Abigail persisted, "About the cabin, would it be the sort of structure that some people call a chalet?"

"That's what my architect called it. I prefer to think of it as a cabin."

Abigail nodded. There was just one more question she had to ask. Should she ask it? If she didn't, she would never know whether it had been just a dream or something more.

"Do you have a sleigh?" Let him say no, she prayed. Then I'll know I'm not crazy, that it's all just coincidence.

"No, I don't have a sleigh," he said.



A smile of relief flitted across Abigail's face.

"Of course if you want an old fashioned sleigh ride, I can borrow Fred's sleigh any time I want."

"Fred's?"

"Fred and Mary Boone. They live in Canmore. They look after my place when I'm not there."

For a moment Abigail went still with shock. Then, as she looked at Scott's beloved face, the dream and the reality became one. It was Christmas. Why was she questioning this wonderful gift? She should thank God for the inexplicable, and accept it for what it was.

Scott was talking, oblivious to the turmoil in Abigail's mind. She brought her attention back to what he was saying.

"...so I know you want us to take some time. We need time just to be together. You need to meet my folks. I'd like to meet your brother and his family."

Abigail smiled, remembering her brother's words. "He's already told me he has to have prior approval. Don't worry. I know you'll like each other."

"So how long do you figure we have to wait before we can get married? he asked. We're not children. A month? Two months? No pressure. I'd just like to know. Chalk it up to my methodical mind."

"I had more in mind a year."

"Doesn't a year seem a bit excessive? Do we really need to wait that long? "

"I'm afraid so." Abigail said reluctantly. "We'll spend as much of it as possible together. But it has to be a Christmas wedding. Anything else might be tempting fate."

"I'm not sure I understand. But if that's what you want..."

"I think it's the way it has to be."

"Will we get married in Halifax, where your family is?"

"No. We'll marry in Canmore. Our families will come. We'll borrow the sleigh from Fred and Mary. And the dress...I have to find just the right dress. It has to be white velvet, but it's not going to have eighteen buttons down the back. They take way too long to unbutton. I'm thinking of having a zipper put in it."

**The End**