

# A Christmas Haven

An Amish  
Christmas Romance

CINDY  
WOODSMALL

Best-Selling Author of *The Angel of Forest Hill*

& ERIN WOODSMALL

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*A  
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## A CHRISTMAS HAVEN

All Scripture quotations and paraphrases are taken from the King James Version.

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Hardcover ISBN 978-0-525-65329-5

eBook ISBN 978-0-525-65330-1

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Cover design by Mark D. Ford

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Published in the United States by WaterBrook, an imprint of Random House, a division of Penguin Random House LLC.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Woodsmall, Cindy, author. | Woodsmall, Erin, author.

Title: A Christmas Haven : an Amish Christmas romance / Cindy Woodsmall and Erin Woodsmall.

Description: Colorado Springs : WaterBrook, 2019.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019010299 | ISBN 9780525653295 (hardcover) | ISBN 9780525653301 (electronic)

Subjects: LCSH: Amish—Fiction. | Christmas stories. | GSAFD: Christian fiction. | Love stories.

Classification: LCC PS3623.O678 C54 2019 | DDC 813/.6—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019010299>

Printed in Canada

2019—First Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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*To Mom: my second amazing mom.*

*When you entered our lives, I was grown with children of my own and so very sure I didn't need another mom, so we became friends instead. But now . . . two decades later and forever . . . you are Mom too. I learn from you. I vent to you. I agree in prayer with you. But most of all, in every good, healthy way, I try to keep up with you.*

—Cindy



*To my children: Lucy, Caleb, Silas, and Lincoln.*

*I hope your haven will always be our family.  
No matter how old or independent you come  
to be, and when adventures lead us far,  
remember home is wherever we are.*

—Erin

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# One

Ivy placed the last of the pink-rose centerpieces on a crisp white tablecloth and paused to smell the fragrance of the soft petals. Vintage porcelain teapots held the arrangements, and on each table sat a three-tiered tray with chicken-salad finger sandwiches, pink and blue cupcakes, and chocolate-covered strawberries. The teapots looked so much happier now than when she had found them languishing in an old storage room of this Victorian home.

She smiled. What a beautiful setup for a party. Stacy, the mom-to-be, would be thrilled. A good recommendation from Stacy's family would help Ivy and Tegan get their fledgling party-planning business off the ground. She looked around the room and saw a few family members of the mom-to-be who had come to help Ivy with the preparations.

"Ivy?" Tegan pointed at the empty punch bowl. "Should I go ahead and fill the bowl with the punch?"

Ivy glanced at the clock. "I'd give it ten more minutes. We don't want our punch-flavored ice melting too quickly."

Tegan nodded and returned her attention to the table in front of her.

Sunlight filtered through a stained glass window, highlighting something on the rug. Ivy walked over to pick it up, and as she bent to retrieve

the piece of decorative paper, she felt the envelope of money in the hidden pocket in her apron shift. She'd put most of her life savings from cleaning houses into that envelope and shoved it into her pocket a few hours ago. She couldn't wait to hand off the money as a down payment on an apartment. Everything she longed for was coming together—establishing a party-planning business, getting a place to live with her friend Tegan, and leaving the confines of her Old Order Amish life.

But her *Mamm's* sweet face flashed in her mind's eye, and she swallowed hard. The look in Mamm's eyes bored into her. The money wasn't freeing. It was heavy and dirty.

She straightened her shoulders. No. Today wasn't about guilt or fear. It was about chasing her dreams.

A giggle caught Ivy's attention, and she glanced at the six-year-old who'd arrived with her mom, grandma, and aunt and had been helping them set up tables. During the next twenty minutes, the rest of the guests would start trickling in.

Ivy smiled. "Thanks for your help, Lily. Are you excited about celebrating your new cousin?"

The girl nodded, her blue eyes sparkling and her long, curly brown hair bouncing with each movement. "Yes, yes, yes! I really want to eat *that* pink cupcake." She pointed at one of the nearby dessert trays. "And then Aunt Stacy said I could help her open all the gifts. Did you know that babies make big messes and go through lots of clothes?"

Tegan walked over from the table she'd just finished, dusted off her hands, and then smoothed her knee-length mauve lace dress. "Yeah, I have a little brother who was born when I was about your age, and I can confirm that."

Ivy nodded and grinned at the young girl. "You're pretty sharp."



Lily looked Ivy up and down. “Do the Amish have parties for babies?”

“Well, sort of. But not like this. Usually women take homemade gifts and clothes to the mom after the baby is born.”

What Ivy didn’t say was how quiet the Amish were about pregnancy, an odd practice in her book. She loved helping the *Englisch* create such beautiful celebrations. The Amish would consider today’s event extravagant, with too much focus on an expectant mom. But no need to let Lily in on all that.

“Well, you should tell them it’s fun. Or I can tell them for you.” Lily gave a thumbs-up.

Tegan shrugged and pushed her long brown hair behind her shoulder. “Guess she’s solved your problems.”

Ivy forced a smile. If only it were that easy to change the minds of men and women who were convinced that following an old set of rules was the way to live. Most were reluctant to make a big deal about birthdays or any other special occasion except wedding days. Why weren’t all kinds of milestones honored? Some special events should be celebrated in such a way that they become a lifetime memory. The common Amish practice of ignoring or, at most, having a low-key observance of important days grated on her nerves, to put it mildly.

“Wow, look at this place. It’s beautiful!” Clara, the seventy-something owner of the Victorian-era home, walked into the dining room. Her eyes moved from floor to ceiling, taking in the draped pink and blue tulle and fairy lights. She turned a slow circle as she looked around. “Truly beautiful.” She smiled at Ivy. “Now’s a good time for me to talk if you have a moment.”

Tegan mouthed, “Good luck.”

“Sure.” Ivy waved to Lily and Tegan and followed Clara into the kitchen. The second floor of the spacious old house had been converted into an apartment with two bedrooms, a full bath, and a kitchenette. Clara lived in part of the main floor. The tenants had full use of the big kitchen except when the beautiful dining room was rented out for special events like today’s baby shower. Ivy’s heart raced a few beats. Would Clara let Tegan and her move into the upstairs apartment? If Clara decided to post the vacancy, she’d definitely get other applicants who actually had things like credit and a job history that consisted of more than dairy farming and cleaning houses. Tegan had the credit and the job history, but she didn’t have the money for the down payment without her parents’ help. And Clara likely thought, as many Englisch did, that since Amish young people didn’t have a credit score, credit card, or job history outside the Amish community, that renting to someone Amish was a risk.

Clara sat in a chair at the small round table in the kitchen’s sunny breakfast nook and gestured for Ivy to join her. She folded her crinkly hands in front of her on the table. “I’ve been thinking about your offer. I do want you and Tegan to live here. I really do. You both would be wonderful tenants, and God is my witness that I’m ready for nice girls to share my home with me. But I have concerns.”

Ivy nodded and leaned forward, trying to calm the butterflies in her stomach.

Clara gave a half smile. “With her good credit Tegan has met the prequalifications I require, and her parents paid her first and last months’ rent. Of course you don’t have all those things, and I’m okay with that. I understand. But Tegan’s parents have said it’s a sink-or-swim time for their daughter, and we both know she can’t afford the apartment without

you. What I need you to know is that I cannot live on half of what that apartment is worth. I need the money from paying tenants to cover my living expenses. Without that money it'll be a struggle to afford heat come winter."

She wouldn't let Clara down. "Yes, that makes sense. I promise that paying the rent won't be an issue. Our party business is small right now, in part because of all I can't do to help Tegan grow it while I'm living Amish. But once we're here, we'll be able to throw all our energy into expanding the business, and, if need be, I can supplement my income with my old, faithful job of cleaning houses."

"I'm glad to hear you say that. I thought you felt strongly about living here. I would be thrilled if you and Tegan moved into the upstairs apartment after the current tenants move out in October."

*They are moving out in four months?* Ivy struggled to take a breath. The last she'd heard, the tenants were staying through the first of the year. Still, Clara was willing to accept Ivy as a tenant. A grin tugged at the corners of her mouth. "Really?"

"Of course, dear. You're such a bright spot in the day, and you always make people smile. I'd love to have you as part of this home."

Ivy's heart warmed. "That's great to hear. I brought my portion of the down payment."

Tegan was going to be so excited. She couldn't wait to get out of her not-so-safe neighborhood. They could live in this beautiful home and work on their business. And Ivy would be available to pop in and check on Clara if she needed her. She enjoyed the sweet woman's company.

Ivy looked at the delicate lace curtains adorning the window by the table. Mamm's windows at home would never be decorated like this. Mamm. She was going to be crushed. But their relationship could mend

in time, couldn't it? For years they had worked side by side, whether cleaning homes or milking cows, talking long into the night, laughing until their sides hurt.

The nagging questions returned: *Is it right to move into an English home, even one as beautiful as this? Does my desire to do so make me ungrateful for the family and life I was given?*

Ivy pushed the thoughts aside. She reached into her dress pocket and pulled out the envelope. She'd managed to put back a few dollars from every house-cleaning job for the last two years. Inside the envelope was one thousand dollars in cash. It was hard to let go of so much money when Mamm and she were barely making ends meet, but she had to be brave. Her dreams were worth it, right?

She slid the envelope across the table to Clara.

Clara smiled. "I'm looking forward to your moving in here."

Ivy's heart skipped as she rose from the chair. "*Denki*, Clara. I best get back to my work."

The rest of the afternoon was a blur. The party went off without a hitch, but Ivy found her good mood faltering here and there. Mamm would eventually understand, right?

After cleaning up and bidding farewell to everyone, she called a driver to take her home. She usually drove a horse and carriage to get where she needed to go. Sometimes Tegan gave her a ride, but neither of those were available today. For the first time in a month, the traveling blacksmith was coming by the farm to shoe the horses, so she was without a rig, and Tegan was meeting up with friends in town.

The June sun wasn't about to set, but she'd barely make it home in time for the evening milking. Thankfully she had eaten some of the sand-

wiches at the party, which should sustain her through the two hours of chores this evening.

The car rushed past the beauty of homes and farms that dotted the countryside. Some of the farmland was no longer used, abandoned through foreclosures or sitting idle because dairy cows had been sold and milking parlors had shut down. The overhead on a dairy farm often exceeded what could be earned. Cows were costly to feed, and vet bills were nonstop.

More than ten years ago, not long after *Daed* died, Mamm “loaned” most of their herd to dairy-farming relatives. That reduced the workload as well as the overhead so they were manageable, but it also meant that no milk broker would take the time to pick up their small amount of milk. The farm would’ve gone under had it not been for the Troyers, an Amish family who used to live just over the hill from them. After the Troyers lost their dairy farm, they moved closer to town and started a new business—making specialty cheeses and yogurts. Their business continued to grow, and they depended on Mamm for their milk.

But did Mamm really expect to continue to run the dairy farm year after year with just Ivy to help her? They had only ten cows. Some were in various stages of being a dry cow and couldn’t be milked because they were pregnant or had a new calf that needed their milk. So Mamm and she milked only eight of the cows most months, but all the prep work and cleanup still required two hours every morning and every evening.

After Ivy exited the car and waved to the driver, she saw Mamm walking to the barn, just as she had done every morning and evening for the past ten and a half years. How long did Mamm want to keep this up? At fifty her health was great. But Ivy’s sister, Holly, was marrying this

December. Her brother, Red, lived in another town and was courting a girl he would marry. Neither of her siblings would live on this farm or even be close enough to help much.

“Ivy.” Mamm’s cheery voice washed over her as they embraced, but rather than Ivy feeling the usual comfort, knots formed in the pit of her stomach. “How was the job today, sweetie?”

“They loved it.”

She wanted to share the details of the beautiful flowers, lace doilies, and fine china, but she held back. Mamm mucked stalls and sloshed through manure and mud to complete tasks she took pride in. Between milking cows in the morning and evening, she cleaned homes, often on her hands and knees, scrubbing away other people’s filth. She asked about Ivy’s job because she loved Ivy, not because she understood or even wanted to. Not really.

“Of course they did.” Mamm squeezed her shoulder, and as Ivy followed her into the milking parlor, the familiar aroma of hay and cows hit her.

Mamm had spent years hoping Ivy’s love of useless dainty things—from fine china to electric twinkly lights intertwined with colorful tulle—would be overshadowed by something with more substance. After all, Ivy’s sister had a heart for what really mattered—working at a pharmacy and helping the Amish stay healthy.

As much as Ivy loved and respected her Mamm, she couldn’t stay. The Old Ways weren’t for her. With the exception of their common faith in God and His Son, Ivy thought differently on a lot of topics the Amish held dear. How could she stay inside a strict society she didn’t agree with?

Mamm climbed the ladder to the hayloft, not missing a beat even as she hoisted herself over a broken rung. Ivy kept intending to fix that. It

was just one of dozens of things that needed repairing in the barn and milking parlor. But they never had any time it seemed. Still, despite all that needed repair, the structure itself—beams, trusses, stud walls, and foundation—was solid.

Ivy stood aside while Mamm tossed down the first bale of straw, and it landed with a thud. Ivy picked it up and tossed it next to the first stall. She and Mamm had this dance down pat after so many years. Prepare the stalls with straw, and fix the cows' postmilking meal of silage and hay. Let the first group of cows in, put on disposable latex gloves to prevent spreading mastitis and spreading germs to the cows, clean the teats with a predip iodine solution, dry them with a towel, strip the foremilk, attach milking machines as soon as the solution dried, clean the teats again after the milking, and finally treat the animals to their dinner. The whole process had to happen twice. Since they had only enough milking machines and working stalls for four of the presently eight milking cows, the whole process took longer.

Didn't Mamm ever dream about being done with this part of her life?

After the first set of cows were milked and cleaned, Ivy grabbed two pitchforks off the barn wall. She passed one to Mamm, who would put hay and grain in the trough again while Ivy put another layer of fresh straw in each stall. *Just tell her.* She hated keeping secrets from her Mamm. Doing so had been eating at her insides for two months.

"I . . . Well, there's no easy way to tell you this." *Say it.* "I put a payment down on a room at Clara's."

Mamm's pitchfork fell to the ground with a thud. She stared at Ivy. "What?"

Ivy's throat suddenly felt dry. "I want to move out. Um . . ." She swallowed. "I *am* moving out . . . in October."

Mamm gave a slow blink and then bent down to pick up her pitchfork. She stabbed at a bale of hay and shoved it into the feeding trough with a little too much force and then repeated the motion. Was she going to say anything?

Ivy noticed the cinder block they used to shore up the leaks in the cows' water trough was askew and too much water was leaking out. She knelt down to push it back into place.

Hyperstripe, Ivy's favorite gray-striped barn cat, hopped on top of the block and rubbed her face against Ivy's, purring. She wanted a milk sample, but Ivy gently nudged her aside.

Was the conversation with her Mamm really over for tonight?

"Why?" Mamm's singular word rang louder in Ivy's brain than the dropped pitchfork.

Ivy stood. "There are things I long to accomplish that can't be done if I stay under Amish rule. It's not you. I love you, but I have dreams. Really big ones. You know that, don't you?"

Mamm stopped stabbing at the hay. "What I know is, our way of life is worth every rule. You think this is about who you are, but I know it boils down to your dreams of party planning. You need to make your dreams line up with the Old Ways. That's how our people have lived for hundreds of years."

How could Mamm be so dismissive? "Like Holly's dreams did?"

Holly was educated, was still in school actually, *and* had been baptized into the faith, which was unheard-of among the Amish. And her education, as well as her Englisch position at the pharmacy, had been sanctioned by the bishop.

Mamm's eyes opened wide. "Is that what this is about? Your sister broke through the rules, and you feel you deserve to do that also? If so,



there's no comparison here, Ivy. Your sister gained special permission in order to provide much-needed medical advice to our people about their prescriptions and need for medication.”

“No. She gained special permission to be her real self and follow her heart's desire. It just so happens that what she longed for was beneficial to the physical health of the Amish community, so the bishop agreed to it.”

The hurt in Mamm's eyes was undeniable. Was Ivy being selfish? Hadn't she given up years of going her own way in order to support this family and the farm? “Mamm, I love you. You're an amazing Mamm, but I've been searching my heart for a while now, and the Amish way doesn't fit with who I am.”

Did Mamm have tears in her eyes? Mamm took a deep breath. “You just want freedom to run off with Tegan and plan parties. All this time I thought it was just a hobby.”

“That's not what this is about.”

Her Mamm stared at her.

“It's not, Mamm. It's a symptom. If I have a cold, sneezing isn't the cause. It's a symptom of the real issue. A party-planning business is run out of the home. Connecting with clients requires a computer and internet access and spending a lot of time doing social media. I need to be able to fill rooms with supplies that include bolts of tulle and silky fabrics, twinkly electric lights, bins of lace tablecloths, china, and helium tanks to fill colorful balloons draped with ribbons. The list goes on and on, and none of that includes the hours I need on the internet. Clients need to be able to tell me the kind of music they prefer, and I need to be able to listen to music for hours while devising a playlist for the party. But none of that is the issue. Those are just symptoms. The real issue is this life doesn't

free me to be me. I *am* tulle and lace and twinkly lights, Mamm. But every single day I put on plain clothes, and twice a day I work for hours in muck in this barn as if that's who I am. If our people knew who I was, they'd be done with me, so I pretend, and I can't keep pretending."

"Living the Old Ways doesn't come natural for young people. I'll give you that. But it's not a matter of pretending. It's sacrificing our frivolous desires in order to pursue what really matters. The world offers ease and fun, but the Amish are a strong community with a durable faith, and nothing the world has can compare to that, not in the long run."

Mamm wasn't going to hear her, which seemed odd. She had listened well to Holly and Red, but Ivy's pleas were falling on deaf ears. It was time to draw this conversation to a close.

"Look, Mamm, I can still clean homes with you if you'll allow it"—she looked at the line of cows chewing their hay—"but I can't work this farm forever."

"You're talking nonsense. If I sold the cows and rented the barn to a nearby farmer, I think we'd still be having this conversation." Mamm clicked her tongue. "As it happens, I talked to Red yesterday, and he said he's been thinking about coming back home. He'll free you of needing to help milk cows."

Regardless of what her brother said that sounded as if he might return, he wouldn't. He had a good job and a girl in Rocks Mill. He'd moved there more than a year ago to be closer to his girlfriend. Now he worked for her Daed, and her whole family had latched onto Red. He'd been home only once since he left. He wasn't moving back.

Ivy spread straw in the last of the four stalls. "It'll be nice when he comes home for another visit, Mamm. He's good help during those times." She would leave it at that, and Mamm could read between the

lines. Holly helped most mornings, probably five out of seven days, but with her classes toward her licensed practical nurse degree and working at the pharmacy, her evenings were too busy. In six months she'd be married and gone.

Mamm scooped grain out of the bin and tossed it into the trough over the hay. "Ivy, what are you thinking? You want to leave your family—and your faith—for a fancy apartment?"

"No." Why did leaving the Amish have to equate to losing one's faith? "I have faith, and I'm not losing it. And it's not about any one thing. It's about everything life could be if . . ."

"If"—Mamm's hand trembled as she wiped her sweaty brow—"you were free of the rules."

The conversation was circular. What could she say to help her Mamm understand? "Forget the rules. I'm trying to tell you the Amish ways aren't my ways. Holly and Red followed their hearts wherever their hearts led them, and I'm asking you to understand that I need to do the same."

"Their hearts did not lead them to forsake their heritage, an ancestry that many Amish died for in the beginning. Even when I was a girl, Amish men went to jail for taking a stand against the government, which was trying to make us do things their way. What we have as Amish people is precious and worth the sacrifice. Can't you see that?"

Ivy's heart ached. Her mother would never understand and never accept Ivy's decision.

"I suppose this is my fault." Mamm leaned her pitchfork against the wall and walked toward the second set of cows.

"Fault?" Ivy followed her.

Mamm pulled on a fresh pair of latex gloves. "It's what everyone will

think and say, and it's the truth. I've raised you too worldly. I allowed too many things to make your life easier after your Daed passed. I hired a driver to take you back and forth to school, and I let you become close to our Englisch neighbors. Being friends with Tegan helped you through your grief after your Daed died. I should've realized what kind of influence that would have on a twelve-year-old."

"There's no fault here, Mamm. Our lives were forever changed when Daed died, and we all did what we could to survive it." Ivy pulled on a new set of gloves. "Including all it took to keep this dairy farm functioning. But we're not at that place anymore. Why do you want to keep doing all this?" She gestured to the cows.

"It's your Daed's family's farm. It's where I'm supposed to be. He wouldn't want me to sell it." Mamm picked up a container of the predip iodine solution.

"Are you sure? He'd want you to be happy. Red and Emily will probably marry soon. And we know Holly and Joshua are going to wed in December. What if you sold this farm and moved in with one of them or at least rented a home nearby? They're going to have your grandkids. You'd be in a home full of new life. Not on an old dairy farm with your single daughter, working too many hours each day."

Mamm set down the container of predip and turned to look at Ivy. "I would work this farm every day by myself for the rest of my life if it meant you staying Amish. This is going to break everyone's heart. It's breaking mine just to think of you leaving. And it could cause serious problems for your sister."

"How so?"

"If you leave our community before Holly gets married, how will her

new bishop feel about her plan to continue working at Greene's Pharmacy? Her sister gone into the world, and she's asking to work full time as a married woman? It'll be hard enough as it is."

*Oh.* Ivy hadn't considered that. "Mamm, I'm sorry. I didn't think about that, but—"

"Of course you didn't think about it. You're moving too fast. All of this is too fast. Did you sign your name to a contract?"

"No, but—"

"Good. That settles it. Nothing happens until after the first of the year. Maybe by then you'll come to your senses."

Just how old did her Mamm think she was? At twenty-three she didn't need her Mamm's permission. She'd promised Clara that paying on time wouldn't be a problem. "I can't wait until then. I gave my word. Daed always said that's just as binding as a contract." She didn't make enough money from milking cows to cover each month's rent. But she could make enough from party planning *if* she was free to give her time to that instead of this farm.

"You shouldn't have entered into any agreement before talking to me. Go back to that woman and tell her that *if* you move in, it won't be until January." Mamm picked up the predip again and headed toward the second set of cows. "Fix this, Ivy."

How could she possibly return to Clara and ask to change the move-in date to January? Clara said she needed the money for her livelihood. Clara and Tegan were depending on Ivy to keep her word.

No. She wouldn't do that to either of them.

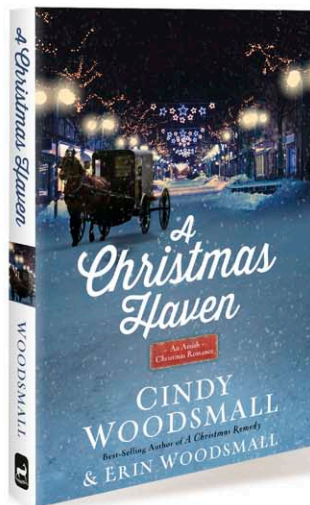
But if she left months before Holly's wedding, would it ruin her sister's chance of getting married?

She hadn't banked on her Mamm feeling this betrayed. It was as if the foundation of their relationship was cracking under Ivy's feet like the ice-skating pond in late winter.

Could she actually leave and break her Mamm's heart? Could she stay and break her own?

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