



The
Christmas
Remedy

An Amish
Christmas Romance

CINDY
WOODSMALL

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

& ERIN WOODSMALL

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THE CHRISTMAS REMEDY

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*To Adam Woodsmall
(Cindy's son and Erin's husband)*



*You took a leap of faith to attend pharmacy school
and became the first doctoral graduate in the family.
You inspired the best traits of the caring pharmacists in this story,
and your diligence to treat every patient with respect and care
encourages those around you to strive to be a better person.*

Thank you for all your help.

*Without your knowledge of pharmacy law and practice,
this story wouldn't exist.*

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Lolly paused outside the old pharmacy storefront, brass key in hand. How could a building be so dear to her? Because inside the brick, glass, and wood exterior, the beautiful, timeworn store held the hope that medicine brought to her Amish community.

She slid the key into the antique lock and jiggled it. The wooden door that Lyle had painted red last year had a hundred years' worth of paint on it. It creaked as she went inside, closed it, and turned the dead bolt. The customary smell that reminded her of an attic in summertime filled her senses. She unbuttoned her sweater and walked across the rough-hewn wooden floors.

"Hey, kiddo," Lyle greeted her from his workstation—a counter that was two feet above the rest of the pharmacy. His black with silver hair was somewhat disheveled, and his reading glasses had slid down the bridge of his nose. His focus was on whatever prescription he was filling.

"Good morning." She went up the three steps and waited for him to push a button under the counter of his workstation. The familiar buzz let her know the gate had unlocked, and she entered the area where all the prescription medicines were housed—the prescription workstation as they called it. There were a few odds and ends for her to do here, and then she could make her morning deliveries. She'd be back in a couple of hours, by the time the pharmacy opened at ten. "How are you today? Ready to start the week?" She stepped into the storage room and pulled

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out two large plastic bags, one with amber vials and one with white lids. Before leaving for the weekend, she'd noticed that the pharmacy bins were running low. She carried the bags to the counter next to Lyle.

He closed his eyes and rubbed his temples. "It's a very Mondayish Monday."

"What's going on?" She opened the bags of vials and lids and dumped each into its own bin.

"Nothing too bad. I have a wicked headache, but I'll take some Motrin after I eat my breakfast. I'll be right as rain by the time we open." Lyle held up a white prescription bag from his perch. He wagged the bag and put it in the bin that held the morning's deliveries. "Don't worry about me. With the health fair this weekend, you've already got a ton of work to do after these deliveries are made."

A smile tugged at her lips at the mention of the health fair. She'd worked for more than a year toward this goal—first getting unanimous permission from the Amish church leaders to hold the fair and then getting her people interested in attending.

Based on recent feedback and people signing up for classes, the health fair was going to have a fantastic turnout. Hope for the fair and her future stirred anew. After years of proving her faithfulness to her bishop, deacon, and preacher, they had agreed to let her get her GED. She had accomplished that a year ago, and since then they'd approved her continuing her studies. If she could pass the entrance exam into nursing school, she could become an LPN. She personally had no grand desire to have a degree, but legally she had to be an LPN in order to verbally share the information written on the Patient Package Inserts. Until she had her LPN license, every patient question had to go through Lyle. She wasn't allowed even to read from or reword the information on the insert. Be-

sides, with a license she could then offer some basic health care to Amish patients in their homes, especially the ones who often refused to venture out to the *Englisch* doctors and clinics.

Until that time she had to content herself with routine tasks, like refilling the two printers with paper—a roll of prescription labels in one and letter-size paper in the other. She grabbed the needed supplies and went to the first printer.

She turned to Lyle. “Are the morning deliveries ready?”

“Almost.” Lyle looked back and forth between his computer screen and the pill in his hand. He put the pill into its bottle, closed the lid, slid it into a prescription bag, and stapled it shut. He set the bag into the delivery bin.

She pulled an index card out of the hidden pocket in her apron and took a moment to study it. *Granulocytes respond quickly to infectious agents. Define granulocytes.* She knew the answer to this one. It was a white blood cell with granules that secreted its cytoplasm. But how tough would it be to pass the test to get into nursing school?

“Holly Noelle, before I forget, I have something for you.”

“Hmm?” She tucked the card back into her pocket.

Lyle reached under the counter and behind a large paper bag. He pulled out a beautiful bouquet of pink carnations in a cut-glass vase and set them on the marred glass countertop. A familiar ache she’d never be free of caused memories to crash in on her. She touched the petals. They were just as soft as she remembered. She leaned in and drew a deep breath before opening the envelope of the small note card nestled in the bouquet.

With Sympathy -

She lifted a carnation from its glass container. “You remembered.”

Her *Daed* used to give her a pink carnation on special occasions, usually when she'd worked hard toward something and accomplished it. She'd been fourteen the last time he'd given her one, in celebration of her months of spending endless hours in his cramped office space, which was overrun with paperwork. She'd finally gotten his dairy farming business affairs in order, including years of receipts for tax purposes. A week later he died.

"Thank you." Her hoarse voice was hardly more than a whisper.

"Sure thing, kiddo," Lyle said. "I know it'll be an emotional day for you. Hard to believe he's been gone ten years. And even though I don't mark his passing each year, I never forget. You just let me know if you need to take a break or to shift some of your deliveries to another day."

Holly swallowed the lump in her throat. "No, I want to work. Today of all days." She set the card inside the bouquet and moved the flowers to the far side of the cash register. She picked up the bag Lyle had just put in the delivery bin and read the insert—name, address, and medicine. "This is a new medication. He'll have questions."

"I know."

She returned the bag to its bin. "*Ya*, you know, but the question is whether you'll be where you can hear the phone when I call."

He chuckled. "That is always the question, isn't it?" He tapped out something on the keyboard of his computer, verifying another aspect of the dispensing process. Lyle never rushed through the correct process to make very sure that every client got the right medication and that the new prescription wouldn't be dangerous in combination with other medications the patient already took. "Be done in a minute, and when I am, I'm going upstairs to shower and eat. And take something for this headache."

“Okay.” She knew the routine, but he always stated it anyway.

She checked the list of meds and addresses. Each year they were making a greater difference in the lives of the Amish. They were pushing past indifference and lack of understanding. She hated those descriptions of her people. As a whole they were passionate and sharp but not when it came to medical issues and taking the medicines that had been prescribed. But Lyle, Doc Jules, and Holly had spent years trying to make inroads. Her people were responding—but slowly, because the Old Ways of ignoring health issues and discounting the importance of medicine was a way of life just as surely as traveling by horse and carriage. So the road ahead was long, but the Amish in this rural area weren’t where they used to be. For that she was grateful.

Indifference and ignorance had stolen her Daed’s life, and there hadn’t been a more passionate, intelligent man in Raysburg. What a horrendous waste. If he’d gone to the doctor sooner . . . If he’d then valued the doctor’s advice and taken his medication . . .

Now she had to miss out on a whole lifetime with him.

Closing her eyes against the onslaught of the invading grief, she tried to refocus on her task. She opened her eyes and finished mentally mapping her way between the addresses on the delivery list. “That’s quite a list of deliveries for today.”

“It is. I’m not sure you’ll be back here by opening time, which is fine. So I’m telling you now, if that happens, relax and breathe.”

Not be back on time? She glanced through the addresses, thinking of the shortcuts she could take in the carriage on dirt roads. “I think I can do it.”

“Only if I finish checking these scripts off, right?” Lyle studied another pill in his hand and glanced at the computer screen.

She chuckled. “Right.”

“While I finish here, could you flip through my morning to-do stack of papers? I think I needed to call someone first thing today, but I don’t recall the specifics. This headache is really messing with my routine.”

“Sure.” She laid down the list of addresses to deliver to and retrieved Lyle’s always-growing stack of papers in the bin next to his workstation. “Was this it—‘call to confirm tent rentals for Saturday’?”

“No, I did that already. I believe it was for a patient that came in yesterday.”

“Oh, hmm.” She flipped through a few papers and saw an offer from a security company for a remote-controlled surveillance camera. They had the mandatory ones inside the store that monitored everything that took place behind the pharmacy counter. But after someone broke into an independent pharmacy in a small town a few hours away, Doc Jules had suggested Lyle look into surveillance of the entryways and the store itself. She resumed digging through the stack until bright red writing on a document caught her eye: “Past Due. \$45,640. Redbird Pharmaceutical Distribution.”

Her heart jolted. A past-due notice on a bill that large? She shouldn’t ask about it. It wasn’t her store, and he wasn’t family, even though he often felt like it, but . . .

“Lyle . . . what’s this?” She handed him the paper.

He took it from her and peered down at it through his reading glasses. “Oh, that’s from our medicine supplier, and I have that already set up to pay online on a specific date. It’ll only be a week late once paid, and there’s no penalty.”

“But . . . that’s so much money. Do we have that kind of money? I know things have been tight after a slow summer.”

“We will by later in the week. It’s just part of the business, kiddo. It’s why this place is open seven days a week.”

“I thought you stayed open on Sundays to help people.”

“Well, that’s true. But I also need their business. We’re doing fine. Trust me.”

She wanted to trust him, but he might hide the truth in an attempt to protect her. Finances were usually tight after the quieter summer months, and since the financial downturn a few years back and subsequent law changes, the pharmacy wasn’t making nearly what it used to.

Lyle set the paper down and moved back to filling the script.

Could Greene’s stay open in the long term? Lyle was nearing retirement age, and if he had to shoulder this much responsibility every month, even with Adrienne as a relief pharmacist, he might choose to retire before finding a replacement. But the Amish people needed this place, and that wasn’t going to change.

“There you go.” He placed another bottle in a white paper bag and then put that bag in the plastic bin Holly used for deliveries. “After I eat and shower, I might be in and out between now and opening time. I have a few calls to make and some errands to run.”

She picked up the bin. The new thought of the pharmacy’s uncertain future swirled together with her grief over missing her Daed, but she had deliveries to make. Chin up. Put a smile on. “Okay. See you around ten.”



Joshua moved supplies from the horse-drawn wagon to the baby chicken nursery. He strode back and forth, trying to make quick work of the process. He had no time to lose. This old shed-type building hadn't housed chicks in two years and never this late in the season. Had he made the right decision to take on these birds in October? "Labor-intensive" didn't begin to describe what the first two weeks with newly hatched chicks were like.

"How are you doing, Son?" His Daed carried in a box of warming bulbs. His white hair and beard reminded Joshua of unmarred winter snow. For being almost seventy, Daed was sturdy, but he couldn't tend to this farm on his own anymore, especially with *Mamm's* new diagnosis. Diabetes wasn't rare, but it was a fresh burden.

"I'm good." Joshua had already set out four large metal bins made especially for chicks. He was doing all he could for his Mamm's health, but for now he had to focus on something he could control, and that was keeping these chicks alive. While his older brothers and sisters nursed and tended to their baby humans, he was here, still living at home and preparing for baby chickens. And with the way things went between him and the only girl he'd actually liked, he might always be here tending chicks instead of elsewhere with newborns. He pushed those thoughts aside, determined not to start thinking of her again. He had no doubts she didn't think about him. "I'm better now that you've found the last item on my list."

Daed set the box on a high shelf next to the other warming lamps. “You look stressed.”

“I’m feeling the pressure. A hundred hatchlings arriving between eleven and noon?” He didn’t need to explain to his Daed that when the chicks arrived, they would not have had a bit of water or food since hatching yesterday. Joshua and his Daed would have to deal with each one individually, giving them water and then food. If they didn’t handle them with quick finesse, some would become too weak to swallow by midafternoon. “I’ll get everything set up in time.” He hoped.

When the hatchery he’d always ordered his birds from called him, asking if he’d take a hundred hatchlings, he was sorely tempted to say no. He never would have ordered chicks for his free-range farm this late in the season. Young ones often didn’t fare well in Pennsylvania winters, even in a heated barn, but someone had ordered a hundred Easter Egger chickens, and then two days before they were hatched, the person canceled the order. Without a home all would die from lack of attention, or they would be killed so they wouldn’t suffer.

He put fresh heat bulbs in the four brooder lamps and went out the nursery door and around the building to check on the gas-powered generator. Besides the fact that the chick nursery wasn’t ready to receive them, Joshua had two additional strikes against him in this venture. He’d never raised young ones this close to cold weather, and he’d never raised Easter Eggers, period. He wasn’t sure how many he could keep alive until spring, but he had to try.

The gauge on the propane tank indicated it was half-full. He’d order more this afternoon, but this was plenty for the next few weeks. On his way back from the generator, he stopped at the wagon and grabbed a large box of old newspapers and a crate of cedar shavings. His Daed was

standing there, looking confused, and his brows were creased. Was he worried about Mamm? It'd been a tough weekend for all of them, but she was home now, resting. Or was he concerned about the chicks that were arriving?

“Daed.” Joshua set the newspapers and crate of cedar shavings on the floor. “Don’t let anything worry you. We’ll take good care of Mamm and the chicks, I promise.” Joshua grabbed a stack of newspapers. “Besides, these birds lay colored eggs. Can you imagine what a huge seller that will be at Easter? Free-range, naturally colored Easter eggs.” He passed the newspapers to his Daed.

“True.” His Daed took the hint and began spreading newspapers in the metal bins. “I hadn’t considered that part.”

Joshua nodded. “You’re having a hard time considering much of anything right now except worrying about Mamm. But you have to trust me. I’ll see to it that everything runs smoothly—Mamm’s doctor’s visits, her meds, and the farm.” He didn’t feel as confident as he sounded, but his Daed needed to be reassured.

“You know, Son, ten years ago when you wanted to change to free-range and expand this business, I never would’ve expected it to take off like it has.”

His Daed had said that same thing to him on numerous occasions, maybe because ten years ago he had balked at the idea when Joshua wanted to tear down the battery cages and convert the farm to free-range. “You feel bad for not believing me sooner, but looking back, I can’t believe you trusted a teenager about any business ideas.” Truth was, Joshua grew up hating to see chickens cooped up in a tiny space. It just seemed wrong to treat God’s creatures like that, and he’d told his Daed so numerous times over the years. Then at fifteen he stood his ground, making his

Daed hear him. They'd argued for weeks, but his Daed came around to seeing Joshua's point. "Free-range chickens have proved to be a worthy investment, ya?"

The Smucker family's free-range chicken farm had been experiencing a surge in popularity at the farmers' markets recently as many people—Amish and Englisch alike—were paying more attention to humane farming practices, to his Daed's delight and Joshua's reserved liking. He was definitely glad that the farm was doing better financially. However, a higher demand for eggs meant more work for him, the only one of the thirteen siblings who still lived at home.

His Daed continued lining the floor with newspaper. "I'm surprised you found all this stuff in storage."

"Me too. I thought I might have to buy more than just the chick starter feed when I go to town. Oh, before I forget, I called several drivers earlier and found one who was willing to take me to Raysburg to that Greene's Pharmacy the doctor told us about. He should be here a few hours after the chicks arrive, so I'll get them squared away, make a quick trip to the pharmacy, and come back to nurture them some more."

"I just can't see making your Mamm give herself a shot of that stuff every single day." Daed shuddered. "Surely there are other things we can do for her."

"Not according to the doctors at the hospital. Or the clinic doctor that gave us a second opinion. It's not just a temporary 'spell,' as she's been claiming from time to time for years. She has diabetes. I don't like it either. But we're not gambling with her health, so we do what the doctors say. Every time."

"None of you kids ever needed to take any of these expensive medicines that so many Englisch are on, and neither did your Mamm and I."

Joshua shrugged. “We avoided having to go this route for as long as possible, but this weekend was scary. I never want to see her faint like that again and end up in the hospital. The docs say we have no choice but to get her on a specific medicine, and I believe them. So let’s not have this conversation again, okay?” He didn’t want to argue with his father, certainly not today when he had so much to get done.

His Daed sighed. “You ready to take care of these little fluff balls?”

Good. Daed was changing the subject. Joshua secured the extension cord to the wall and snaked it around to connect to the warming lamps. “Yeah. I’m not thrilled about the tedious tending the chickens will need when they get themselves all pasty. But it’ll be worth it come springtime when they are laying pretty colored eggs that fetch extra money at the markets around Easter.”

“I’ll share the chicken diaper duty with you. Don’t worry. I’ve never been afraid to get dirty. Knew that when I went into this business.”

Joshua had just begun sprinkling the shavings over the papers when he heard car tires on the gravel driveway. He looked at his Daed. “Isn’t it too early for the shipment?”

“Unless that’s your driver.”

“Good grief, I hope not.”

They stepped out of the shed, crossed the free-range field, and headed toward the driveway. Joshua shut the gate behind them, keeping his current chickens contained.

A familiar-looking man maybe in his forties got out of a red car. “Is this Smucker Farm?”

“Yes, I’m Albert Smucker.” Daed approached the man, hand held out.

“I’m Chad Richards, manager of Real and Fresh, a grocery store.”

He shook Daed's hand. "I spoke with a Joshua Smucker at the farmers' market a few weeks ago."

Suddenly it clicked, and Joshua could place where he'd met the man. "That's right. Hi." Joshua moved next to his Daed and offered the man his hand. "Chad is opening a grocery store about an hour from here, Daed, and he's using all local items that are available. He was looking into carrying our eggs."

"I like the sound of that." Daed gestured toward the henhouse. "You want to come meet our birds? My son and I would love to show you around."

Chad glanced at the old battery cage building. "I'm sure you both know this, but in order to be called free-range according to the law, the chickens can have as little as a few minutes a day outside. I won't accept that, let alone anything less. I wanted to come by to make sure your farm went beyond that, you know?"

"Sure. See those battery cages?" Joshua pointed. "They haven't been used in more than a decade. We use that building for storage now. I think you'll be pleased with our flock and their houses." Joshua motioned to the wide, picturesque farmland with chickens visible behind the fences. "I can give you pictures to take with you to show your customers as well. Want to take a walk?" He had time. He could show this man around and still finish setting up the brooding pens before his driver arrived.

"That'd be nice."

As Joshua let Chad through the gate to where the chickens roamed, he heard another car in the driveway. *No way*. He turned. Well, the good news was that the baby chicks hadn't arrived. The bad news was that his driver, Fred, had.

“My dad will walk with you. Excuse me for a minute.” He really wanted to show Chad around himself. Joshua had made the contact, and his Daed’s mind wasn’t as clear as usual right now, but at the same time he *needed* to get his Mamm’s medicine.

Fred beeped the horn and rolled down his window. “My plans changed for the day. If you need to go to Raysburg, it’s now or not today.”

Joshua couldn’t go by horse and buggy. It was too hard on a horse to travel there and back in one day, and it’d take the whole day to do it. “We agreed—”

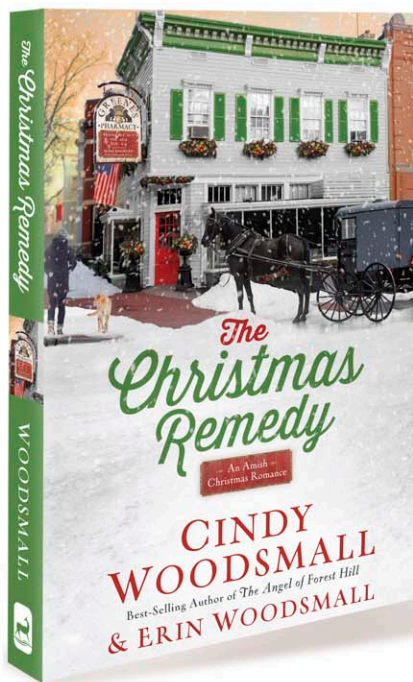
“I know that, but you said it had to be today, and I have right now. Actually, I have one hour to get you there and back, which gives you exactly seven minutes to get the prescription and get back in my car before I have to go. Unless you can wait until later this week.”

“No. Let me give my guest a quick goodbye.”

His Daed would have to handle this grocery store manager on his own. Joshua had to get to the pharmacy. His Mamm was more important than any amount of chickens, eggs, or money.

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