

An Almost Perfect Christmas

by

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Excerpt

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Hours later, Christy came into the living room, carrying a tray filled with Izzie's teapot, cups, saucers, and a plate of Christmas cookies. The three of them had just finished watching *Miracle on 34th Street* and Christy thought a snack was in order.

"How about that tea party we talked about, Izzie?" she said.

Izzie set her dad's iPad on the sofa cushion beside her. "That would be fun."

Aaron, who'd been reading a book, got up to clear off the coffee table. He glanced at the iPad and asked, "What are you looking at there, Izzie?"

"Wedding dresses."

Aaron caught Christy's eye and she offered a little shrug to let him know she was as clueless as he over Izzie's choice of iPad entertainment.

Izzie snatched up a cookie that had red sprinkles on top. "These are pretty, Christy. Are these the sour cookies?"

"Southern Sour Cream Cookies, yes." Christy picked up the pot and poured tea into three cups.

"Mmmm." Izzie smacked her lips. "They're soft and sweet. Not sour at all."

Christy chuckled. "I'm glad you like them."

Aaron picked up the small teacup between his index finger and thumb. "So... why are you looking at wedding gowns?"

Izzie looked at the iPad and then up at her dad. "I've been thinking."

This child has been doing a lot of that today. "About weddings?" Christy asked.

“Yeah, and other stuff,” she admitted.

Aaron took two cookies from the plate and sat down in the easy chair. Until this moment, Christy would never have thought that a man could sip tea from a child-sized teacup and retain his masculinity. He was doing a fine job of it.

He caught her pressing her lips together at the sight of him and he gave her a quick wink. Warm tendrils curled in the pit of her belly.

“I wish I had a pony,” Izzie said. “I was looking at pictures of horses. They’re so pretty. And... and I wish I had a puppy. Did you know there are about a zillion kinds of dogs? And I wish I had a boat. Wouldn’t it be fun to ride a boat whenever you want to?” Then her words came a little faster. “I was thinking about weddings ‘cause brides are so beautiful. I’ve never been to a wedding. I’ve never seen a real bride up close.” Then she lifted both shoulders. “Or a groom, either.”

Aaron chewed a bite of cookie then swallowed. “So all of this thinking that you’re doing... does this mean you’re adding to your wish list?”

Christy could almost hear Aaron’s thoughts. How do I buy this child of mine a pony? A dog? A boat? A wedding?

“No, not really.” Izzie shook her head. “We’d need a farm for a pony. And a puppy would be lonely at home if I have to go to the hospital. And I’m too little to drive a boat.”

Relief lightened Aaron’s chuckle. “Yes, all those things are true.”

Izzie turned her head and stared at the white, lacy gown on the iPad. “But we could have a wedding. It would be pretend, of course. We just need a bride and a groom. A pretty dress. Big and poofy, like Princess Belle would wear. Some flowers. A ring.” She gazed across the room at her father, blinking. “We could do it.”

Aaron’s moment of relief vanished and he looked like a deer caught in headlights. Funny how talk of frilly dresses and flowers and rings did that to a man. Christy decided to save him.

“I’m sure I could find something around here that could serve as your wedding gown. A white sheet, maybe? And I could dress it up with something fancy...” The rest of her sentence trailed as she thought about making a dress.

“I... yeah, I could be the groom.” Aaron nodded.

Christy was pleased that he recovered so quickly.

“Ew! Daddy!” Izzie’s face squished at the idea. “That would be too weird.”

“Oh.” He actually looked disappointed.

But Izzie brightened. “But you could be the groom. If Christy was the bride.”

Izzie looked to be holding her breath as she awaited Christy response.

Now it was Christy’s turn to suffer a momentary bout of muteness. Then she saw Aaron offering her an I’m-game-if-you-are grin. There was nothing else for Christy to do but lift her hands and say, “Okay.”