



SOMETIMES GOD ANSWERS
LETTERS TO SANTA



**A DAD FOR
CHRISTMAS**

WENDY DAVY

A Dad for Christmas

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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales, is entirely coincidental.

A Dad for Christmas

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Dedication

To Harper, the newest member of our family. You are a true blessing to us. Love you always and forever.

What People are Saying

Wendy Davy is fast becoming a favorite author for me. I love her unique writing style. Davy's books are clearly written from a Christian viewpoint, and yet they have a certain edgy, life-in-your-face realism alongside tender, sweet romance written from the heart and done extremely well—the kind that is too often missing from the inspirational romance genre. Strong, sassy heroines and brave, dashing heroes who revel in being a lady's "shining knight" make the reader sit up and take notice. 'Flirting with Danger' brings a large dose of suspense into play, alongside a romance that'll garner many a pounding heart and wistful sigh. I thoroughly enjoyed this rollicking trip into the realm of the professional repossession expert. Once again, Davy brings a rockin' story line, wonderful, flawed-but-not-failed characters, and a strong message of faith and purity without once becoming preachy, pious or prudish. Outstanding!

~Delia Latham, best-selling author

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above...”
James 1:17 KJV

1

Reed Mason stood in line at the post office less than two weeks before Christmas, along with many others trying to get their packages out and delivered on time. He didn't mind the wait. He was glad he'd found the red-headed, strawberry scented doll his niece had on her wish list, and the video game his nephew had been asking for. He wished he could be with them when they opened the gifts, but since his sister had moved to Hawaii, he didn't get to see them as often.

At least in Shenandoah Valley, Virginia, he had a decent chance at having a white Christmas. Snow had fallen twice already this season. Maybe it would blanket the earth again on the big day.

Moving forward in line, Reed listened to Christmas music playing on the overhead speakers, and enjoyed the scents of homemade fudge seeping inside from the bakery next door. Maybe he should stop by and buy a half pound of Mandy's peppermint white chocolate fudge. He had plenty of time on his hands. As a high school physics teacher, he had until

the first of the year until he returned to the classroom.

What would he do with his free time? He had plans to mend the backyard fence and put some extra insulation in the attic, as he'd been meaning to do for some time. But, the tasks held little appeal. He'd rather spend the time doing something special. With someone special.

So far, his prayers for a wife and family of his own had gone unanswered. Perhaps next year, he mused. All in God's timing. Until then, he'd find some way to keep himself occupied. Maybe he should get a dog.

As Reed thought about whether a Husky or a Labrador Retriever would make a better companion, a customer finished at the counter and turned to leave. He recognized his new neighbor immediately. He'd met Emma Richards only once, about three weeks ago when she'd first moved in next door with her young son, but she'd made a lasting impression with her long, chestnut hair and beautiful smile.

Reed would've checked on her after that first encounter, but with prepping his students for exams and moderating the state mandated testing, he had been nose-deep in paperwork each night after work and had gotten home well after dark. Upon seeing her again, he wished he'd made the time to visit.

"I wanna go home." Her son—Luke, if Reed remembered correctly—followed close behind her.

Eyelids red rimmed and nose tinged with pink, Emma looked more than ready to go home too. "Almost done," she promised as she stuffed a sheet of stamps into her purse. "One more stop. We need to get to the pharmacy." Her words were punctuated by a sneeze and a cough.

The automatic doors opened, and the wind rushed

in, blocking the boy's response as they exited.

"Next in line." Mable, the clerk, announced.

Reed took his place at the desk, handed over the packages.

"Sending these all the way to Hawaii, huh? I sure would like to go along with them." Mable's ever present smile remained steady. "Good to see some folks like to shop the old fashioned way." Mable took the packages and weighed them. "Seems people these days prefer to shop online, have the items directly delivered with one click of a button."

"Shopping online takes the fun out of browsing the aisles. I like to pick out something special with my own two hands." Reed flexed his fingers.

Mable nodded her agreement and then recited a list of questions. Reed assured her that his packages held no hazardous materials. As she pressed buttons on the register a large plastic container filled to the rim with mail caught his eye. "Lots of Christmas cards going out?"

"That bin is where we put the undeliverable letters to Santa," Mable explained. "Carl tells the kids he will deliver them to the North Pole himself." She chuckled. "God bless him."

"Carl sounds like a good man."

"He is. That's why I married him."

The personal touches of country living made Reed fall in love with Shenandoah Valley nearly a decade ago when he'd first graduated from college and started his career. He'd had his choice of working in many big cities, but he had never regretted choosing the small town of Oakburn as his home. Nestled amongst the Blue Ridge Mountains, Oakburn had all the small-town charm he could hope for.

Reed paid the postage and stepped aside to make room for the next customer as he placed his change into his wallet. The door opened, wind blew in and one of the letters in the bin fluttered and dropped onto the floor. He scooped it up, hesitating when he read the crayon colored words on the front.

To God who lives in heaven. The child's handwriting looked crooked and staggered. Intrigued, Reed studied the folded piece of red construction paper. It had no envelope, just one crease down the middle concealing its contents.

He held up the letter for Mable to see. "What does Carl do with the letters to God?"

"Oh, those are his favorite. He prays for whatever it is the kids wish for. But he has already told me he can't handle even one more this season. Why don't you take that one home and do the honors?"

"I'd be happy to." Reed stuffed the paper into his jacket pocket. He was overdue for some prayer time anyway. While he was at it he might just make one more plea to God for that special someone to enter his life.

2

Emma finished at the pharmacy and was as eager as Luke to get home.

Luke tugged on her arm as they neared the car. "Look, Christmas trees!" He pointed to a lot across the street. "Can we get one? Please?"

One of Emma's favorite Christmas traditions was to explore a tree lot and pick out that one distinctive tree with the most personality, but today her enthusiasm fizzled. With this nasty cold all she wanted to do was crawl into bed and sleep.

"I thought you wanted to go home?" Emma reminded Luke. With Christmas getting so close, her six year old son had every right to be excited, but she hadn't wanted to leave the house today at all. She'd needed cold medicine, and stamps were a necessity if she were to get the Christmas cards out in time, so she'd made the trip into town.

While leaving the post office, she'd noticed her neighbor, Reed Mason, standing in line. She should've said hello, or howdy neighbor or something as she'd walked past him. But with her head aching and nose stuffy, she hadn't felt like making conversation. Reed seemed nice enough. He'd introduced himself the day she and Luke moved into the neighborhood and said if she needed anything to ask. She appreciated the offer but took it for what it was; a neighborly gesture.

Settling in had been a whirlwind as she situated

their belongings. Downsizing wasn't easy, but she simply couldn't stay in North Carolina anymore. The house they'd lived in had been a lovely two story in an upscale neighborhood. It was the house she thought she'd grow old in with Ben. But, since he'd passed, the structure had seemed too big, too rambling. Held too many memories.

As a writer, Emma could work from anywhere. She'd chosen this area of Virginia after visiting with a friend a few months back. Once she'd made up her mind to move, Emma had placed her home up for sale and never looked back. But, if this was the right place for them, why did she still feel like something was missing from her life?

Emma looked at her son. So energetic and full of life. Although she didn't feel up to shopping right now, she didn't want to dampen his spirits. "I bet you can pick out the best tree on the lot."

Luke's hazel eyes widened. "Really? Do you mean we can get one?"

She heard herself saying yes even though she had no idea how she was going to muster the energy to tie the tree to the roof of her small car and transport it home, much less drag it inside, set it up and decorate it.

As if sensing her dilemma, Luke grinned. "Don't worry, Mommy. It's gonna be all OK. God knows what we need. I made sure of it."

Emma's heart melted at her son's faith-filled statement. "Then let's get over there and find our tree."

3

Finished with his errands, Reed drove his truck into his peaceful, tree-lined cul-de-sac. His house was the next to last on the left, with his new neighbor residing to his right. The quaint neighborhood had modest sized homes with landscaped yards and spectacular mountain views. With the Shenandoah River bordering the backside of his property, he considered himself beyond blessed. He shifted his pickup into park and cut off the engine. Taking a moment, Reed thanked God for leading him to this place he called home.

Reed carried in the fudge he'd purchased at Mandy's Bakery. His three bedroom, open concept house seemed quieter each time he entered. Today, it was too quiet. Even his footsteps seemed to echo louder than usual on the hardwood floors. Not wanting to sit idle and dwell on the fact he was going to spend this Christmas alone, Reed stepped out the back sliding glass door and onto the deck. Fresh, crisp air surrounded him, and the scents of pine and nature suffused the area. The river meandered past and continued on through acres of fields and farmlands.

His wooden, four foot high white picket fence needed repairing but it wouldn't hurt to enjoy the view for a few minutes. He was on vacation after all. As Reed settled into an Adirondack chair the child's letter he'd picked up at the post office crinkled in his pocket.

He took it out, smoothed the edges, wondering what the kid had asked God for. A new bike? Perhaps the latest and greatest electronic device? Maybe a trip to a theme park.

Reed opened the letter. The first lines knocked the wind from his lungs:

Dear God,

My Mom is sick. I tink she mite dy like my dad did wen I was little. Mom crys sometimes wen she tinks I am sleeping. Wood you send a dad to take care of me so she wont worry about me down here on Earth? I been goin to yur church and praying to yur son. I tink hes gonna tell you about me, but I wanted to send you a letter to make shur. Oh and God please make shur the dad you send likes puppies.

The last sentence made Reed smile. He drew in a breath and reread the words written in green crayon. Judging by the handwriting and spelling, he guessed the author to be about five or six years old. The child had not signed a name, and Reed could only guess if it was a boy or a girl.

Resting the letter on his chest, he looked out over the horizon. Reed had grown up with two loving parents and he remained close to them to this day. He couldn't imagine losing either of them at such a young age. Much less both of them.

Suddenly restless, Reed stood and walked inside. He used a magnet to place the letter on the fridge and read the words again. The message struck a chord, deep in his heart. There had to be a reason the letter ended up in his care. A deep desire to care for this child overwhelmed him, as if the letter had come to him for a specific purpose, but that thought was almost insane. What could he do with an unsigned letter scrawled in crayon?

Father, I don't know who wrote this. But You do. Please help this child and the mother. And if it's Your will, please send a dad to care for, love and support them.

He'd probably never know who the child was, but there had to be someone he could help. Perhaps that was why he'd read the letter, so that he would help someone, if not this specific child. Reed glanced out his kitchen window at Emma Richards's house just in time to see her car pulling into the driveway with a huge Christmas tree strapped to its roof. It looked as if Emma and Luke could use his assistance. A sense of purpose filled him. He picked up the box of fudge and headed outside.

4

Emma parked, grabbed a tissue and sneezed into it. She hoped the cold medicine she'd taken would kick in soon. She glanced at the rearview mirror. Luke had fallen asleep in the backseat sometime during the fifteen minute ride back from town. Alarm skittered through her. Luke had outgrown naps. She hoped he wasn't coming down with her cold.

She unbuckled, leaned over the seat and placed her hand against his forehead. No fever. Somewhat reassured, she let him sleep while she got out and worked to untie the tree attached to the car's roof. Luke had picked out the largest one he could find, and the lot attendant had secured it on top using double and triple knots in the twine.

Emma tugged on the string but the knots didn't budge. Perhaps if her body didn't ache and fatigue wasn't weighing her down, she could tackle this task with ease, but today every movement took extra effort. She would leave the tree where it was for now but she had already promised Luke she would set it up in the bay window tonight so the deer that visited the backyard could enjoy the twinkling lights. Entertaining the deer was Luke's idea. His love for animals and other living creatures amazed her. He'd brought in lizards, tadpoles and butterflies last summer at their old house. She wondered what he'd find here in the rural setting, especially with the Shenandoah River

bordering the backyard. She didn't mind him checking out harmless reptiles or even the insects, but she drew the line at snakes. At least it was winter and the snakes were hibernating.

Weren't they?

"Hello again, Emma."

Emma jumped at the sound of the deep, male voice. She'd been so caught up in her thoughts she hadn't heard any footsteps. Reed Mason walked up her driveway with his dark-haired good looks, dreamy blue eyes and a box of fudge. His engaging smile showcased a set of adorable dimples.

Ben had wanted her to move on with her life. Find someone new. She'd told him she would try to be open to a new relationship, but hadn't really considered it in the three years she'd been a widow. She hadn't crossed paths with a man that even tempted her. Until she'd met Reed Mason.

She blinked. What was she thinking? Sure he was easy to look at, but other than the fact he was her neighbor, she knew nothing about him. Had to be the cold medicine making her loopy. She was a single mom. Single, being the keyword.

"Hey there," she managed to reply before sneezing again.

"Bless you." He stepped beside her, handed her the box of fudge. "For you and Luke. A housewarming present."

"Thank you." She peeked inside the box wishing she could smell the white chocolate dotted with red and white peppermint candy pieces, but with her stuffy nose, she couldn't detect a thing. "Looks good."

"It's my favorite. Mandy's Bakery only makes it at Christmastime, so I'm always sure to buy some each

year." Reed nodded toward the tree. "Need a hand?"

Emma considered denying she needed assistance. She'd managed much more daunting tasks in the past. She could do this, too.

"I'd be glad to help," he prodded as if sensing her hesitation.

"Well, if you don't mind. But I need to get a knife to cut—"

"I've got it." Reed withdrew a pocketknife and sliced through the twine. As he lifted the tree his muscles bunched beneath his coat, his broad shoulders carrying the load easily. He stood the tree upright on the driveway. "You chose a nice one." He nodded his approval.

"Luke picked it out." Standing back a little, Emma sized up the tree. "It looks even bigger now than it did on the tree lot." If it was too tall she would have to saw off some of the trunk. She hadn't unpacked Ben's tools yet from the move. "Maybe we should leave it outside for now."

"No worries." Reed's gaze seemed to penetrate her thoughts. "We can make it work."

Emma blinked. There hadn't been a 'we' other than she and Luke for a long time now. It sounded peculiar coming from Reed. She'd only spoken with him the one time before now; the day they'd first arrived. She'd seen him coming and going since then, had glimpsed him in his backyard a time or two.

So, why was he here now bearing a housewarming present and being so helpful?

"I don't want to impose. Luke and I can manage." She made sure Luke was still sleeping in the car, grabbed hold of the tree and dragged it up the driveway. The thing had to weigh a hundred pounds.

She broke a sweat, even though the temperature couldn't be more than forty degrees. Why did she have to get sick and appear so weak in front of this strapping guy? She didn't want him to think she needed him to run to her rescue.

"I've got plenty of time." Reed followed along. "I'm a physics teacher at Oakburn High School. It's winter break. I'm off until the first of the year."

Well, maybe just this one time. She released the tree and it thumped to the driveway. "It's heavier than it looks."

"No problem." Reed picked up where she left off and hauled the tree onto the porch.

Emma loved the white wrap-around covered porch with the built in swing, and the house's pale yellow exterior and planter boxes. One look at the house listing online and her heart was set on the cute little place. She'd purchased the home as-is, so the price was great. She already felt comfortable living there. She just hoped she could get the plumbing fixed soon. The bucket under the kitchen sink would only work for so long.

"How do you like Oakburn so far?" Reed propped the tree near the front door, tucked thumbs into his jeans pockets and looked around. "Can't get much of a better view in my opinion."

She agreed. The view was spectacular. Reed sure did make an impressive sight with his square jaw shadowed by just enough dark stubble to hint at mystery. And those blue eyes, clear as the Carribean Sea. She took in his broad shoulders again. Very nice. And his solid, thick biceps. The man even had attractive, rugged hands. She sensed he'd noticed her perusal and jerked her gaze away to the surrounding