



December 2019

# Twelve Days of Christmas

*By Sharon Charles*

Isabella slipped quietly from the Great Hall, crowded with servants, dancing, feasting and boisterously enjoying their Christmas merrymaking. Normally the lovely 19-year-old would have joined in the partying... especially the lively jigs and elegant waltzes. But tonight, her heart just wasn't into celebrating. Days ago, her parents were called to the aid of an ailing relative on the mainland, leaving Isabella in charge of the castle over the holidays. She was grateful for their trust and was doing her best to provide truly jolly events for the castle staff and their families. But she was weary of the noise and just couldn't muster up much

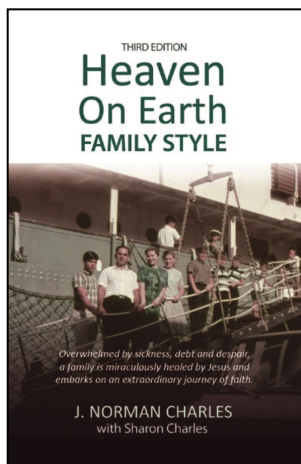
Yuletide joy. She retreated to her chamber in the "keep" of the fortress which was her home. Closing the door, she plopped wearily at her desk and picked up the most recent letter from Benny... the love of her heart.

Five years had passed since that Christmas when Benny had rescued her from Sir Drake, a villain of the worst sort. Isabella smiled at the memory. How fiercely she had fought Benny's efforts to save her. How patiently he had persevered to get her to safety. And how absolutely amazed she

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CHRISTMAS! A time of year when we are particularly mindful of God's love for us... He gave His son Jesus to live among us... and to DIE for us, taking upon Himself our punishment for sin. Through HIM we have eternal life. As He Himself said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except THROUGH ME. (John 14:6)

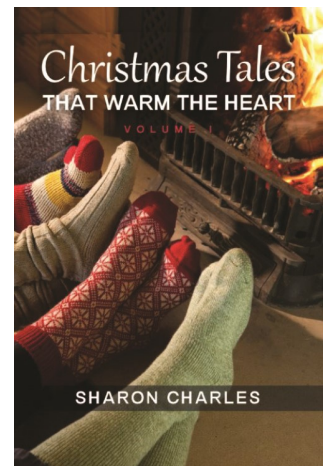


Many of you look forward to Sharon's annual Christmas story which, this year, is actually a sequel or continuation of last year's story. You may wish to read the December 2018 story on our website. Go to [AbundantLivingMinistries.org](http://AbundantLivingMinistries.org). Scroll way down and click on "Read our Newsletter." Select December of 2018.

And, in thinking of Christmas stories... **and CHRISTMAS GIFTS**, you still have time to purchase the just-released book *Christmas Tales*, containing 12 of Sharon's prior stories.

Also published this year (after 10 years out of print) is the Third Edition of *Heaven on Earth, Family Style*... the story of Norman & Betty Charles' (my parents) lives... an inspirational, encouraging, true story of God's grace, mercy, generosity, and power!

**Available on Amazon for \$12.99. Or at ALM office for \$11.00.**



May the Christmas season this year be especially meaningful to you, your family, and friends. May we, who know Christ, be bold and clear in giving HIM the honor during this festive season!

**John Charles (for Sharon and the rest at ALM)**

P.S. Some of you are able to give a special year-end gift which is tremendously helpful. Thank you so much!

If you want a gift to be recorded in 2019, the check must be dated AND the envelope postmarked by 12/31/19. (This is an IRS requirement.) Hand-delivered gifts must also take place by 12/31/19. If you prefer using your credit card, please call our office (717) 626-9575 to process your gift with VISA, MasterCard, or Discover. And, you can always give via PayPal, on our website. Just go to [AbundantLivingMinistries.org](http://AbundantLivingMinistries.org) and click on "Donations."

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## Abundant Living Ministries

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was to finally discover that her deliverer was not an impudent peasant, but actually Prince Benedictus, son of their beloved King.

"Oh, m' Lady! I'm so sorry... I just noticed thee had left the ball. Art thou ill? Can I bring thee something? Friar Jon says that laughter is an excellent tonic. Maybe thee shouldst go back to the party..." A rust-haired young woman, only a year Isabella's junior, burst into the room and rushed to her mistress' side. Shorter and a little rounder than the beautiful Isabella, she was a perky and pretty lass. Her plump hand reached out to feel her employer's forehead.

"I'm fine, Marelee. Really I am!" Isabella insisted. This spirited girl had been her personal attendant for only a few months. When her mother announced she had hired a woman to attend to her daughter's daily needs, Isabella had expected a gray-haired matron. She was shocked to be presented instead with this cheery and very chatty peer. "But Marelee, I've had enough Christmas frivolity... I just want to be quiet."

Marelee glanced at the folded paper in Isabella's palm. "Yes m'Lady. I understand completely. Thou art surely missin' thy prince tonight. Friar Jon says that absence makes a heart of true love, long powerf'ly."

"Ah yes... I believe Friar Jon is quite accurate about that." Isabella had resigned herself weeks ago to the fact that her handmaid couldn't help quoting this saintly cleric in practically every verbal exchange. Soon after starting her service to Isabella, Marelee shared that this Friar Jon had come to the rescue of the peasant girl and her siblings, when their parents died of a fever. If it hadn't been for his frequent visits, his gifts of food and clothing, and his wise counsel, the girl was certain every one of them would have died of starvation or sorrow.

"I don't know how he did it," Marelee had explained, "but Friar Jon seemed t'know just when we was needin' help and then... there he'd be! He still stops by our wee hamlet from time t' time and sits and talks like we was the only people needin' help in the whole of England."

A sudden sharp knock startled both girls. Isabella gave a nod to Marelee who cautiously cracked the chamber door and peered into the dark corridor. With a gasp of surprise, the servant turned back to her mistress. "It's Sir Jephridous, m'Lady!"

"Well, invite him in, of course!" Isabella instructed. The tall handsome knight was her Benny's trusted assistant. He rarely left the side of the Prince... except when asked to hand-deliver a letter to Isabella. Marelee ushered the young man into the sitting room.

"Sir Jephridous, please come in. A very merry Christmas to you! And..." Isabella couldn't hide her eagerness... "would you happen to have any word from the Prince?"

"Thank you Lady Isabella. And a very merry Christmas to you as well. And please, you may call me Jeph... that's

what the Prince calls me." He gave barely a glance at Marelee who stood awestruck in the presence of such a man of distinction, in spite of the fact that he could barely be more than a couple of years her senior. He stepped towards Isabella and handed her an envelope, clearly sealed with the royal insignia.

"A sincere thanks to *you*, Jeph... for bringing this." Isabella had to admit to herself that if her heart were not so totally smitten with Benny, this soldier could seem quite appealing. "Will you stay at the castle for a few days and join in our Christmas celebrations?"

"My deepest gratitude, m'Lady, for such a gracious invitation but I must leave tonight to return to the Prince. Drake and his armies have been wreaking havoc in many villages. We anticipate more attacks this week and Prince Ben is bound to stop him. We believe we are very close to capturing him and putting a stop to his shenanigans. So the Prince and I have a busy week ahead. But I know His Highness plans to be at his father's on the sixth of January to celebrate Epiphany."

"In that case, Marelee, take Jeph to the cook and see that he gets a good hearty meal. Then, if you don't mind, Jeph, please come back to me before you leave. I will write a reply to Benny and you can deliver it to him, if you would be so kind."

With a nod, the two disappeared down the passageway and Isabella tore open the precious letter. As her eyes travelled down the page, she felt her heart beating faster and faster. The smile, absent from her face only a few minutes earlier, now returned in splendor as she read and re-read the question she had been hoping, for months, to be asked. Reaching for paper and quill, she began to write... "My dearest Benny, my Prince... Yes! Yes! Yes!..."



Isabella and Marelee climbed into the little skiff and, grabbing the oars, the servant propelled the vessel out into the frigid waters of the D'Argent River. It was December 28. They were on their way to surprise Benny at Bailederi Hall, the residence of his monarch father.

Within hours after Benny's aid had left her on Christmas night, Isabella hatched her plan. She and Marelee would head to the King's castle too, and arrive well before the festivities on January 6.

"Marelee, it will be a marvelous way to celebrate the coming of the wise men to the Christ Child," Isabella had announced. "You know Epiphany is the highlight of the Advent season and I so want to experience it with Benny! My parents are away, and the castle steward can easily take care of things while we are gone. The Prince has asked me to *marry* him, Marelee... I *must* see him! I am only listening to the love in my heart and certainly that can't be wrong."

"Mmmph... Friar Jon would say, 'a heart of love still needs to listen to a head of sense.'"

"Marelee, watch your words. You are, after all, paid to do my bidding. This makes perfect sense to me."

"Yes, m'Lady. Please forgive me. It's just that..."



Isabella shot a warning glare and Marelee lowered her eyes in submission. "We'll need a day to get affairs in order here and another day to prepare for the trip. We'll need some heavy woolen clothing...peasant garb, so as to not draw attention. And we should each take a small bag with a gown suitable for our destination. I calculate the journey itself should take about three days. We can be there by the New Year."

"Actually, m'Lady... if we was to go by river rather than road, t'would be a day shorter. The road east to Bailederi winds up and down and twists terrible. We'd be goin' a mighty long way 'round t'get there. My village is only an hour north from here, and I can get us a boat there. Then it's a straight float east to the King's house."

"That sounds like a wonderful plan... let's do it!"

And so here they were, gliding peacefully down

the river, the water shimmering around them in the light of the December sun. Marelee, obviously strong and experienced, managed the oars. Isabella patted the precious letter, tucked into a pocket of her cape. She opened the leather bag at her feet and surveyed the doeskin shoes Benny had given her years ago. She had saved them for the day when she would dance with him, as his wife. And now, here she was, on the brink of marriage. Her heart was bubbling over the prospect of being with Benny. She hummed contentedly and then, with a grin and a melodramatic sweep of her hand, began to sing, "row, Girl, row this boat... speedily down this stream... oh Marelee, oh Marelee, isn't life a glorious dream?"

The rower burst out laughing. "M'Lady, I b'lieve thee could be England's new bard. Such a ditty could be catchin'. Although, Friar Jon says our best dreams t'aint nothin' t'all compared to what the Almighty likes t'do for His children."

"He's right Marelee. God certainly outdid Himself when He brought Benny into my life. What about you, Marelee? Do you have a dream?"

The russet curls bobbed up and down. "Oh yes... Me had a best chum when we was just urchins. But he grew up and moved away t' better things. Friar Jon says if God takes somethin' away He brings it back again or somethin' even better. So that's what I'm awaitin' on." The servant giggled and began pulling even harder on the oars.

The hours passed and soon the fading light alerted the young women that they would need to find a place to spend the night. Scanning the shoreline, Isabella spotted a wood and straw structure at the top of a path that wound its way into the forest. Marelee guided the boat into the tall reeds and they climbed the bank to the abandoned shack backed up against the thicket. It wasn't much, but



the hut was roomier than they expected and it would provide much-welcomed shelter from the cold.

Inside, Marelee produced some bread and cheese and a flask of water and the two adventurers admitted that this meal tasted better than many fancy banquets at the castle.

"Friar Jon says luxury has more t'do with companions than possessions," the servant girl quipped.

Isabella shook her head, "My gracious, you amaze me with your quotes, Marelee. You are quite an interesting person. And... I've been meaning to ask just how you got your name. I've never heard of anyone else named Marelee."

"Well, m'Lady... me mother said she wanted to call me 'Merrily' bein' as she wanted a happy child. But me folks never did learn their letters and when she told the magistrate m'name, he wrote it down as 'mare' and 'lee.' So, I'm part horse and part shelter from the wind."

"Well, I think you should get your name changed to its intended spelling," Isabella declared.

"Oh, no need, m'Lady," Marelee replied. "Friar Jon says 'thy name is how thou lives it, not how thou writes it.' So, I try to live on the happy side... not the horsey side!"

The two travelers giggled together like 12-year-olds and, using their bags for pillows, settled down to sleep in the now-almost-pitch-black room.

"Marelee," Isabella whispered after a few moments. "This journey makes me think of Mary and Joseph and the Magi. I wonder if they also went to sleep on a night like this, dreaming of what the next few days would bring. Oh Marelee, I'm so content. It may be dark in here, but truly all is calm and all is bright in my heart."

Her servant murmured sleepy agreement but, as she drifted to sleep, from far back in her memory came Friar Jon's words, "Beware... thine enemies do their worst work in the dark."



The nightmare erupted just before dawn. The sound of horses' hooves, like an approaching tempest, jolted the girls from their sleep.

"Quick!" Marelee hissed. "We've got t'flee. Grab thy sack. We'll hide in the reeds by the river."

In a daze, Isabella staggered to her feet and slung her bag over her head. But as Marelee cracked the door, their eyes were blinded by what seemed like a wall of torches before them. Five churlish knights with blazing lights forced open the door and burst into the room. Though the young women struggled valiantly, they were no match against brute strength. Within seconds, both girls' arms were held fast by four foul-smelling, grizzly-looking soldiers. Isabella recognized the horrid dragon symbol on their armor and shuttered... Drake's men. And then the apparent leader lifted his torch higher, illuminating his diabolic features. It was a face etched forever in Isabella's memory... Drake himself. Her terror mounted.

"My, oh my... quite the lovely lassies we have here... just the company we tired gentlemen need," the fiendish voice gloated. He stepped closer to Isabella and ran his

rough hands over her cape. The crackle of her precious letter caught his attention. Reaching into her pocket, he withdrew the envelope and, spotting the royal seal, quickly scanned the letter. A sinister smile formed on his lips. "Well, well, well... I do believe it is the lovely Lady Isabella who has fallen into my clutches. I didn't even recognize you in your peasant garb. Quite a stunning woman you are now... not that scrawny rat I knew years ago."

"Why you...!" Marelee struggled to free herself from her captors, but they held her fast.

"Oh, such a loyal slave you have here. How noble that she would try to protect you. Seems you have a way of attracting gallant rescuers, Isabella. But unfortunately for you, I don't think this puny little worm can help you tonight. I thought my men and I had just found a convenient spot to rest our weary bones and enjoy a little Yuletide ale... but it looks like we've got a much bigger prize."

"Change of schedule, men. I planned, at daybreak, to scout out another village to add to our conquests but it appears we have the Prince's bride-to-be right here before us... just the bait our army needs to ensnare him. And once we have him, we'll have what we need to lure the King himself into our trap. I may be on the throne even sooner than anticipated. What a merry Christmas season this is turning out to be... for me!" He chuckled sadistically. "Bring her along. We need to ride back to the main road and rejoin the rest of the troops. Then we can set our trap."

"What about this one?" one of the knights asked, pulling Marelee forward.

"Oh, no need for her!" Like a sudden streak of lightning, Drake whirled, swinging his iron-clad arm brutally into the side of the unsuspecting girl's head. The crack was sickening and the battered victim crumpled to the ground.

"Marelee!" Isabella screamed... but already she saw the girl's blood spilling from beneath her red tresses. "Marelee! Marelee!" Isabella cried as she was dragged from the hut. "Oh, Marelee... what have I done?"

The savage men lifted their prisoner onto a horse and bound her hands tightly to the saddle pommel. Her tears ran hot and her heart broke in anguish as she watched the soldiers shut the door and then prop a torch against it. Within seconds the place that, only moments ago, had been their sweet haven, was now a raging fiery tomb. Her friend... her precious friend... was dead and, along with her, had perished both girls' beautiful dreams!



As captors and captive rode swiftly down the trail, Isabella wept inconsolably. Drake and his cold-blooded henchmen savored devilish thoughts of their anticipated conquest. But none of them spotted the hooded figure that stepped silently into the shadows as they thundered down the path.



A very eager prince, along with his right-hand man, rode up to the castle and announced their arrival to the gatekeeper. Benny could hardly wait to see the amazed expression on Isabella's face. Her wonderful letter, expressing such glad acceptance of his marriage proposal, had filled him with joy and desire. He couldn't wait to see her. So... he concocted a plan to surprise her. Leaving his militia encamped a few miles away, he and Jeph galloped to Isabella's home. Now he was at her door, about to sweep his dearest into his arms.

Ben's face fell when a gray-haired steward, not Isabella, approached from the courtyard. And it fell even further when the man explained with great apology that Lady Isabella and her attendant had left two days earlier. All he knew was that they were heading for Bailederi Castle to meet the Prince.

"I didn't think it wise for two young damsels to head out by themselves, but they assured me they would be all right and Lady Isabella could not be dissuaded. She told me her mind was made up. She instructed me to keep the Christmas festivities going for the servants here. And that's what I've been doing," the elderly man added.

The Prince bowed respectfully. He and Jeph remounted and headed back down the road.

"Well, my man, I guess this means a slight delay in my plan. Nevertheless, I'm bound I'm going to surprise Lady Isabella yet. But Jeph, it does concern me to think of those two women travelling this territory unescorted. Drake's battalions are scattered all over this countryside. I pray they don't meet up with any of them."

"Your Highness, there are two ways to get to Bailederi from here... road and river. That red-haired servant of Lady Isabella's strikes me as strong and brave. I wouldn't put it past her to go by river."

"But she would have had to persuade her mistress, and I judge Isabella to prefer riding to rowing. I tell you what... you take the river route and I'll follow the road. Hopefully, they're already safe at Bailederi but, if not, one of us should find them somewhere along the way. We'll meet up at the Castle in a day or two." As they pulled on the reins to head in opposite directions, Benny called back to his friend, "Jeph... I must admit... this thing called love leads its captives on some unexpected paths."



Intent on his mission, Benny stopped only long enough to rest and feed his horse and to inquire in each village and hamlet along the way as to whether anyone had noticed two young women journeying through their midst. No one had. He was concluding that they must have gone by way of the river after all. Up ahead lay one more town before Bailederi Castle. If the girls weren't in this town, perhaps they were already safe at his father's house. He hoped with all his heart that Isabella had not fallen into Drake's cruel hands. But he had a nagging sense that she was in danger.

When an angry-looking knight galloped past, that sense turned to certainty. Benny saw the blur of a dragon. One of Drake's men! The scoundrel himself was surely close by. Benny removed a peasant's cloak from his saddlebag, tying it around him to hide the royal emblem on his tunic. Reaching the crest of the hill, his worst concerns were confirmed. Just below him lay the village but, in the wide plain beyond, was a vast sea of soldiers... Drake's soldiers... encamped only a day's ride from Bailederi.

His father would undoubtedly come under attack any day. The future of the kingdom was at stake. And somewhere in all this mess was Isabella.

Benny led his horse as nonchalantly as he could, into the town square. Peasants and merchants, along with groups of Drake's soldiers, filled the narrow streets. Benny was grateful for all the activity. He moved inconspicuously among the crowd and soon spied the building he sought. Tying the reins of his horse to a nearby post, he ducked into the little chapel. Kneeling in prayer at the altar was a young monk. Benny approached him quickly and pulled back his cloak to reveal his royal ensign.

"Oh, Your Highness!" the startled cleric jumped to his feet.

"Quiet, my brother. Listen... can you ride?"

"Yes, Your Highness... I can ride like the wind."

"And do you think you could get to Bailederi Castle without riding on the main road?"

"Yes... I know the trails through these woods like I know the Scriptures."

"Well, then I hope you're quite a Bible scholar," Benny chuckled. "And do you have a quill and parchment for me to write a letter?"

"Yes, Your Highness." He led Benny quickly to a small desk in the back of the room. The prince scribbled his message, pressed his ring below his signature, folded the paper and handed it to the youth.

"Take my horse and ride like Satan himself is chasing you and deliver this message to the King."

"I will, Your Highness. But please be careful. That horrid Drake has overrun our town and talk is that he will soon besiege Bailederi. The townspeople are terrified and feel helpless to stand against him."

"Do you know if Drake is keeping any prisoners?"

"I've heard he's been holding some for days in a shack on the east side of the village."

"A hundred thanks to you, servant of God. You will be richly rewarded for your service. Now be on your way and may the Almighty accompany you."

"He always does, Your Highness," the young man smiled as he rushed out the door.

Benny walked back to the nave of the chapel. On a small table in front of the altar was a simple nativity scene. Beside it stood a crudely-carved wooden cross. Benny gently touched the Christ Child. Then, with both hands, he wrapped his fingers around



the cross and drew it close to his heart. Reverently he knelt at the altar and Prince Benedictus surrendered the coming hours to God. Resolutely, he rose, placed the cross back beside the manger, and headed out to pay whatever price was necessary to rescue a most-precious prisoner.



In the twilight of Epiphany's Eve, two young pilgrims, bearing sacks on their backs, emerged from the forest. They were weary in body, but strong in spirit. Just ahead loomed their destination, glowing in the golden light of winter's setting sun. As they trudged up to the imposing stone fortress, the gates suddenly swung open and striding



toward them was a most majestic figure. He held out his arms and welcomed them into his embrace. His son and his beloved were home safe, at last.



Hours later, now washed, fed, and warmed, the couple sat with the King in his chamber and implored him to tell them what had transpired over the last days. They knew, of course, their part of the saga. After the Prince managed to overpower her guards and free Isabella from her shackles in the little shed on the outskirts of the village, the two had fled on foot into the forest. Isabella, weak from days with no food, had to lean heavily on Benny as they travelled far from the enemy-ridden plain below the village. But as they made their circuitous journey, evidently a lot was happening elsewhere.

"Having been warned of Drake's approach," the Monarch began, "I sent out messengers throughout the kingdom. Loyal subjects from far and wide, along with our own forces, rallied and surrounded Drake and his men. The battle was intense, but brief and decisive. We'll not be needing to deal with that rogue knight ever again."

"But how did you gather *so many*?" Benny asked.

"Oh, when it comes to my son and his lovely bride, I would call all of heaven and earth, if necessary, to bring them safely home."

"But how did you rally them *so quickly*?" Benny persisted. "That monk could only have provided a day or less of warning."

"No... the monk reached us almost a week before the battle began. And that was sufficient time to summon my forces."

"But that's impossible," Benny insisted. "I only met him in the village chapel just three days ago. I told him to fly... but he certainly couldn't have arrived more than a day before the battle."

"Oh, *that* monk!" the King chuckled. "You're right... he

arrived shortly before the fighting began. It was the *other* monk that sounded the alarm in time for us to prepare.”

As if on cue, the chamber door swung open and an elderly cleric with a broad grin and twinkling eyes stood before them.

“That’s him,” the King announced. “I think you know him well, Son.”

“Friar Jon!” Benny rose and embraced the old gentleman. “I should have known!”

Now it was Isabella on her feet. “Friar Jon?” she exclaimed. “I feel like I already know you... I’ve heard all about you. Marelee...” her voice broke. “Marelee, my handmaiden, quoted you always. She said you were her best friend. But... Marelee’s dead.” Isabella buried her head on Benny’s shoulder.

“Now, now... no need to cry, m’Lady. Friar Jon says what we think is the end is often just the beginning.” Isabella’s head jerked up at the sound of a wonderfully-familiar voice.

“Marelee!” she shouted and in a flash the two young women were hugging and laughing with delight. “I thought you had perished!” Isabella cried.

“And truly, me thought so too, when that awful Drake slugged me. The blow stunned me, but m’ life t’weren’t over yet. I lay there a’wondering what t’do and then remembered Friar Jon always said, ‘When thy enemy rushes in the front door, look for a back window!’ So that’s what I decided to do. When they dragged thee out and shut the door, I dove through that back window as the flames licked me heels. Then I rolled like a roly-poly hedgehog into the woods. When I heard the horses ride off, me headed for our boat. And who should be there waiting but...”

“Friar Jon!” Isabella guessed.

“That’s right and we rowed like crazy until that old dingy sprung a leak and we started to sink. Me near died a second time. I thought Friar Jon would get us t’shore, but he said walking on water was not his speciality... only God’s Son had mastered that. If it hadn’t been for another miracle rescuer, we’d both have drowned in the river.”

“What do you mean?” Isabella asked. “Who rescued you?”

“I guess that was me,” a male voice boomed from the hallway. A tall, handsome young knight joined the group.

“Jeph!” Benny was by his side, bear-hugging his assistant and slapping him on the back.

“Yes, Jeph pulled alongside us in a much sturdier craft and hauled us both safely aboard... quite a feat considering my size,” Friar Jon chuckled. “With three sets of strong arms rowing hard, we made it to Bailederi in short order and alerted His Majesty that Drake was nearby and plotting attack. The King sounded the alarm and the rest of the story you know.”

Prince Benedictus sighed and surveyed the happy group. “You know, tomorrow ends the twelve days of Christmas. We will commemorate the coming of the wise men to Jesus... our King of love... all those years ago. It seems so fitting that our own wild Christmas journeys have

ended in such joy. And I believe Epiphany would be perfect if it were to include a celebration of love. Friar Jon, would you be willing to perform a wedding tomorrow? Isabella and I talked this over on our way back home. We have waited long enough!” Benny looked at his bride expectantly. “What do you say, my darling? You did bring your dancing shoes, didn’t you?”

In answer, Isabella squealed with delight and threw her arms around Benny.

Friar Jon stroked his chin. “Well now, that might be difficult since I have a prior commitment on the morrow right here at the castle.”

Benny’s face fell.

“Of course, if the other couple would agree, I suppose I could conduct two weddings!” Friar Jon cocked his head toward Jeph and Marelee who were now standing tight against each other, arms linked.

They laughed and nodded and Marelee spoke up... “You see, m’Lady, Sir Jephridous was the childhood chum I told you ‘bout. I thought when he left and became a high and mighty soldier that he’d never think of me again.” She flashed a smile at Jeph who was beaming at her, love shining in his eyes. “I was wrong. But really, Friar Jon... His Highness and Lady Isabella... well, they’re royalty. Jeph and me... we can wait to be married another day.”

Isabella hastened to the servant couple and reached out her hands to them. “You two risked your lives for Benny and me. You are *not* servants... you are *friends*! I think a double wedding will be so much better than my very best dream!”

“However... Friar Jon,” Isabella spun to face the old monk. “I know they’re just letters on a page... but do you think on their marriage certificate you could spell my friend’s name... M-E-R-R-I-L-Y?!”



And so that Christmas ended, just as the very first Christmas had... with a beginning. For a King, a prince and his bride, their friends, and a funny little old cleric who managed to show up precisely when needed, there was so much more yet to come. With great wisdom and much love, they would rule their precious kingdom together, and they would all live very, very *merrily* ever after!

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