

Wrapped Up in Christmas Hope

by

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“Harry is such a great dog. Why don’t you have a dog?”

Andrew should have known Greyson would ask that question when he’d suggested they take Bodie’s dog out. Greyson had completed a full section of ten squares, but there was only so long a five-year-old could be expected to sit still. Meanwhile, Harry had been laying with his head on his paws, taking in all the day’s activities and keeping a close watch on Sarah.

Andrew had thought both dog and boy would enjoy stretching their legs on the church’s playground. Morgan had approved the outing so long as Greyson agreed to wear his coat, hat, and gloves. Harry had seemed a bit hesitant to leave Sarah’s side. But once she’d assured the dog she was fine, Harry had headed toward the exit.

“It’s really cool that Harry can catch a Frisbee,” Greyson said, tossing the plastic disk across the yard the way Andrew had shown him. He’d been stunned that Greyson hadn’t known what to do with the iconic toy.

“If I had a dog, I’d want him to be able to catch a Frisbee, too,” the boy continued. “You need a dog.”

“What would I do with a dog when I go to smoke-jumper training?” Applying was something he’d been thinking about more and more lately. He’d pulled up the

site and stared at the application form for longer than he cared to admit. If he knew his grandparents would be okay without him, he'd be gone in a heartbeat. At thirty-five, he'd no longer be eligible to apply. He was only twenty-seven, but the clock's countdown ticked louder and louder in his head.

"I could keep your dog for you," Greyson offered. "I would take really good care of him while you were away, and you wouldn't have to worry at all."

Andrew smiled. "I imagine you would, kid. With having you for a friend, I may have to rethink my reasons for not having a dog."

Greyson beamed. "I could help you pick one."

"You have something in mind?"

Greyson shook his head. "Mom says when we get on our feet and move into a house of our own, that maybe we can go to the shelter and adopt one."

On her feet. Had Morgan's husband left her in a financial mess? Andrew had assumed Morgan had moved in with her grandmother to have help with Greyson until she found a place. He'd not considered that there might have been financial motivations as well. But thinking back on it, he remembered Cole mentioning that she'd lost her job and hadn't been able to find another where they'd been living. What kind of man left his wife and small child without having made sure they were taken care of?

Then again, he was making big assumptions. Other than the little bit she'd told him, and that Cole had told him, he knew nothing regarding Morgan's former husband and marriage.

“But if you needed us to watch your dog, I know Grammy would let us keep him at her house,” Greyson said. “She’s nice that way.”

The *your dog* had Andrew smiling. The kid already had him owning a dog.

“She is, isn’t she?” he agreed. He’d always liked his grandmother’s friend Claudia. “Your mom is nice, too.”

Greyson nodded. “She reads me stories. I get two a night.”

“Two? That’s awesome.” Andrew made sure to look impressed. Actually, he truly was impressed at what a great job Morgan did. “What type of stories does she read?”

“One Bible story,” the boy held up one gloved finger, then a second, “and one story I get to pick.”

Andrew could see that about Morgan: that she’d want her son to have a strong sense of faith.

“Have a favorite?”

Taking the Frisbee Harry had returned to him and giving it another fling for the dog to go chasing after, Greyson told him about the story of a hungry caterpillar.

“Mommy reads it like it’s me who is hungry and eating everything.” The boy giggled, obviously recalling some special memory. “It’s really funny when she does that.”

An image of Morgan making the boy laugh popped into his head and had him trying to see himself there with them. He didn’t fit into the picture...and it astonished him how much he wished he did.

“This week we’ve been reading Christmas stories.

Grammy really likes Christmas books and has bunches on her shelf.” Greyson took the Frisbee from Harry and patted the dog on the head. “Good boy.”

Andrew knew what the kid meant. His grandma had lots of Christmas books on her bookshelves, too. He had fond memories of her having read him many, if not all, of them.

“I like the one about the snowman and a magic hat. I’ve never built a snowman.” Greyson glanced toward him. “Have you?”

“Oh, yeah.” Andrew grabbed hold of his jacket collar and straightened it in a cliché move. “I’m practically an expert snowman builder.”

“Maybe, if it snows, you can teach me how,” Greyson suggested, his eyes big and full of hope. “Like you did with sewing. Building a snowman is a basic life skill, too, right?”

Something happened in Andrew’s chest again. Something that had him wishing he could drive Greyson and Morgan to the nearest place with snow, so they could build a snowman together right away.

“Definitely a necessary basic life skill.” Taking the Frisbee from Harry, Andrew gave it a long fling and said, “I’d like that.”

As he watched Harry take off after the Frisbee and catch it mid-air, it stunned Andrew just how much he really would like to teach Greyson how to build a snowman.

And a bazillion other things, too.

