



Counting on Christmas

Excerpt

In the living room that night, everyone is pleasantly exhausted. They try on the new clothes they were given, fiddle with the new gadgets, play with the new toys.

"Can we do this again next year, Aunt Jess?" Taylor asks.

"If the fates allow," she replies.

"Awesome!" Ethan adds.

In the far corner of the room, a shimmering tableau appears.

It is Mrs. Claus, the Limping Boy, the Homeless Girl, Dudley, and George Bailey. They smile and wave, then disappear.

"It really is the most wonderful time of the year," Jessica says quietly to herself.

She finds her guitar leaning in the corner.

"This is a new one," she announces to her family. "It's called 'Counting on Christmas.'"

She sings her newest song.

The smiling faces of her family fill the room with peace, love, and happiness.

In the end, Christmas wasn't the only thing I could count on to make me happy. It was family. The one thing we take for granted when it's the one thing we should treasure most.

At the end of the song, the tiny bell ornament on the tree swings to and fro with a silvery tinkle.

Jessica goes to find out what caused it to ring.

She peers closely at the ornament.

Reflected in its lustrous surface, she sees a sad woman about her own age standing on the bridge above Dry Creek, staring into the water.

Outside on the walkway leading to the house, all the *luminarias* are upright and burning brightly. The colorful Christmas lights fringing the house glow merrily. Through the large picture window stenciled with frosty Christmas images, the Christmas tree sparkles amid the joyous chaos. It resembles the last scene in the movie, *Holiday Inn*.

Jessica rejoins the circle of family and friends.

The courthouse clock chimes the midnight hour.

A full winter's moon hangs high in the night sky.

A ring circles the bright moon.

It begins to rain.