



Christmas Treasures

Newfoundland Stories and Christmas Recipes



Lisa Ivany and Robert Hunt

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Dedication

I'd like to dedicate this book to the memory of my two beloved grandmothers. One of the stories in this book, "Young Samaritan," was written using my maternal grandmother's name, Muriel Collins. I was looking forward to having her read it on publication, but she passed away on February 18, 2007. Although she was ninety-two, her death was quite unexpected and we all miss her very much. She was an ambassador of goodwill, touching the lives of everyone she knew with kindness and love.

My paternal grandmother, Sarah Ivany, inspired another story in this book, called "Forgotten Memories." She was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, and for the last seven years of her life, her mind was stolen from us by this dreaded illness. On June 9, 2001, at the age of eighty-eight, her body was taken as well. Even though her memory was never restored, she left her family with precious memories of the wonderful woman she was and the laughter and love she brought to our hearts.

Lisa J. Ivany

I dedicate this book to my children, Stephen and Heather, who have been great supporters of my writing. I hope this collection of stories brings them as much comfort and enjoyment as the first two publications. May they be enlightened, not only by the happy plots, but also by the themes laced with the sadness of growing up in this world, and appreciate their own lives a little more.

Robert J. Hunt

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Both authors extend their gratitude to all the Flanker Press staff for the preparation and publication of this book.

Finally, but certainly not least, Lisa and Robert send a big thank you to the readers who have enjoyed their previous stories, and they hope you like the newest ones in *Christmas Treasures*.

This book contains fictional stories, some inspired by true events. Where necessary, names of people and places have been changed to protect the identities of those involved.



Noah's Song

by Robert Hunt

Begun in 1855, St. Patrick's Church on Patrick Street in St. John's is a beautiful Gothic church. It took many years and hundreds of men working many hours to bring it to life, and the church stood majestically, especially when compared to other churches built in its day. In 1864, nine years after the cornerstone was laid, work officially began on the structure. The foundation was constructed of stone taken from Cudahy's Quarry in the Southside Hills. Unforeseen problems prevented work on the project from advancing for another decade. Additional stone was donated in 1875, and construction began once more. After more than two and a half decades, St. Patrick's Church was finally dedicated on August 28, 1881. It was the beginning of a new religious era.

The church stood regal and proud, waiting for the first voices of praise to be sung to God by its choirs. Many notable voices sang praises to the heavens, but it was not until the bell tower was installed in 1912, and the voice of one Noah Cordon resonated inside the church's walls, did it

officially become a truly memorable place of worship and song. The first time he sang there, Noah was only seventeen years old.

I can remember the story being passed down, from my grandfather to my father, about the remarkable voice of Noah Cordon. It was said that his voice was given to him by the angels, and that no one else could sing the way he could. His voice could make the stained glass in the church tremble. When he sang, it was as if God Himself had thrown a blanket over the whole congregation and silenced the people, awed at this wonderful tenor. Noah and his voice were in demand all over St. John's. His fame progressed, and he was soon considered the voice of heaven itself.

* * *

The story goes that while Sunday church service was in progress at Christmas in 1912, Noah simply walked into the church off the street and started singing along with the choir. His voice was so beautiful and carried so magnificently that complete silence reigned as he sang; people were hypnotized by his voice. No one seemed to know where he had come from or where he lived. He would just show up each week at Sunday service, and his melancholy voice could be heard resonating inside the church as people marvelled at this beautiful apparition sent by God. Then, as quickly as he had come there, he would leave, before anyone could question him. Rumours of Noah and his voice went around town. None of the congregations had ever heard such a beautiful voice as his. People from other parishes started going to St. Patrick's Church just to hear him sing.

For two years people speculated about his origin. Word

spread that he had no home, but was a lost ghost singing to release himself from purgatory. He would appear wearing a cloak that covered his face, his head hung low, and he would sing and then leave the church. The people were left to speculate as to what he looked like and where he was from. No one knew, for they would not dare disturb him while he sang, and they didn't wish to stop him as he left church, for fear of his never returning.

The First World War started in 1914, and Noah disappeared from St. Patrick's Church as quickly as he had walked into it. Rumour had it that he was off to war, fighting for Canada and her freedom, but no one could prove that this was the case, for no one knew of his history or of his origin. The war years were a time of hardship for all people. Many struggled to make ends meet, as sacrifice upon sacrifice was made by everyone to help the war effort.

Some said that Noah had gone to war with the First Five Hundred, others that he was at sea on a warship. Many said that he was only an apparition. So the rumours went, until one day, during Sunday service in December of 1916, a telegram mysteriously appeared for Father Hearn before Sunday Mass. No one knew where this letter had come from. It just seemed to be there when Father was ready to say Mass. He noticed it lying next to the Bible when he walked to the steps leading up to the pulpit.

Father looked at the envelope, which bore the seal of the War Correspondence Office. It was dated November 15, 1916. He felt strange as he took it in his hands and removed the letter within. As he read, his face paled considerably. When he had read a few lines, he stopped and looked out at the crowd that had gathered for the service. There was complete silence as he began reading the letter to the congregation:

November 15, 1916
St. Patrick's Church Congregation
Patrick Street
St. John's, Newfoundland

It is with great sadness that we inform you that Sergeant Noah Cordon was killed in action in the Battle of the Somme on November 15. He was among the first of a thousand courageous men who went over the hill and into battle with the enemy.

He was one of many Newfoundland men who died with bravery and distinction. We discovered his body, several hundred feet from where he charged into battle. He will be forever remembered as one of those who died defending the rights and freedoms of us all. May God have mercy on his soul.

He had asked me that if anything were to happen to him, I would inform you so that you would pray for him on Christmas Day.

Major Paul St. Croix
Royal Newfoundland Regiment
The Somme, Amiens, France

The silence was deafening as parishioners bowed their heads in prayer at the sad news of Noah's passing. Tears ran freely down many cheeks as they remembered the young man with the remarkable golden voice. Many could recall the awe they felt at the beauty of his voice as it vibrated off the walls of the church. Christmas Day would be a sad day

indeed as they readied themselves for the departure of the man with the voice of an angel.

Father Hearn spoke to the congregation as he slowly laid the letter on the podium.

"I, like all of you, am devastated by this news and I wish to ask each of you here to pray for Noah, and to please attend the Christmas Day ceremony out of respect for him. We will make it a very special day of celebration just for Noah, and we will sing his favourite hymns, especially his favourite Christmas song, "Little Drummer Boy."

In the days leading up to Christmas Day, St. Patrick's was a beehive of activity as people prepared for the December 25 Mass to commemorate Noah's passing. Special decorations were put in the church, and all was ready when Christmas Day arrived. The church was crowded with parishioners. The choir had been chosen by Mr. Ennis, the choir director, and he asked Daniel Park, his best singer, to sing "Little Drummer Boy."

Mass started out quietly, but soon grew in volume as everyone sang in unison with the choir. Christmas songs were sung with vigour and feeling as the congregation gave their praise to Noah. As communion was being prepared, Father Hearn turned his head, made the sign of the Cross, and nodded to Daniel Park to sing "Little Drummer Boy" to the crowd, as Noah Cordon would have if he had been there that day. Daniel was about to start, when suddenly all the lights in the church dimmed. The candles that had been lit in memory of Noah flickered and went out. Silence fell in the church as people looked at one another to see what was happening.

Then, an amazing thing happened. Daniel Park left the choir, walked to the centre of the room as if he were hypnotized, and stood in front of the crowd. He made the sign

of the Cross as everyone in the crowd stared directly at him. Suddenly, all the candles that had gone out started to light, one by one. Daniel turned to face the altar, and an amazing thing happened. "Little Drummer Boy" came flowing out of him like he had never sung it before. His voice vibrated as he reached notes that he knew, in his own mind, he could not reach. His voice changed into the wonderful tenor that many of the congregation knew so well. They knew it was Daniel Park singing, but the voice was distinctly Noah Cordon's. The song jumped from Daniel's throat as he stood in amazement. The people knew that this was Noah's last gift to them before he said goodbye. Then, an old woman started to sing along, then another person picked up the lyrics, and the entire congregation, one by one, started to sing with Daniel as Noah performed his last song.

Then, as quickly as it had started, it was over. The church was so quiet that you could only hear the breathing of the person next to you. A young boy in the middle of the church felt something or someone touch him on the shoulder. He looked around, saw no one, and then started to clap his hands at the beautiful song he had just heard. Soon, young and old alike started to clap, and Daniel Park turned to face the audience and did the same, for he knew that it was not his voice that had come from him. He bowed his head and prayed that Noah had finally found peace.

* * *

My grandfather remembered that day very well. He had attended many Masses at St. Patrick's Church in his youth. He would go there for the quiet, to sit and meditate about

life and its many twists and turns. Sometimes, if he listened close enough, he swore that he could hear Noah Cordon's voice resonating as he sat there in the church. He remembers that night very well, as if it happened only yesterday. He remembers because he was there . . . for he was the young boy that Noah Cordon touched on the shoulder. The memory of that night lived with him until his death exactly fifty years later, on Christmas Day, 1976.



A Paramedic's Nightmare

by Lisa Ivany

“Code 10, Security. Code 10, Security,” the switchboard operator announced on the intercom of the James Paton Memorial Hospital. Scott Blackmore and Garry Hillier raced from the medical unit to the emergency room to answer the call. Both paramedics were in their late forties, but that’s where the similarity ended. Scott was of average height and build with a full head of coal-black hair; Garry was short and stocky with only a thin patch of blond hair that had receded to the back of his head.

As they donned their winter coats, the ER nurse gave them a quick synopsis of the call they were in the process of responding to.

“We have a fifty-year-old male who fell from the top of a ladder while putting Christmas lights on his roof. He’s conscious, but complaining of pain in the pelvic area. His name is Cory Flynn and the address is 54 Morgan Drive.”

The two men jumped into the ambulance and turned on the sirens and flashing lights as they left the hospital grounds. The streets of Gander had been plowed earlier and

driving was easy. However, when they arrived at their destination, a light covering of snow camouflaged the icy areas in the driveway. This was duly noted when both Scott and Garry slipped on one such icy patch while carrying the stretcher to the front of the house, where several people had gathered.

"Hi, Mr. Flynn," Scott said when he reached the injured man who lay on the cement walkway. "Please don't move, and keep your head still. Where are you hurt?"

"It's my right hip. The pain is unbearable and I can't move."

"You don't have to move a muscle. Garry and I are going to do all the work."

After surveying the height from which their patient had fallen, they immediately secured a cervical collar around his neck in case there was a spinal injury. They next log-rolled him onto the spine board and attached a head immobilizer before strapping him down for transfer.

"We're going to take you to the hospital now," Scott said.

The woman who had been holding their patient's hand started to cry.

"You must be his wife," Scott said.

"Yes, I'm Natalie."

"Well, Natalie. Cory is going to be just fine." To emphasize his point, he gave her shoulder a gentle squeeze.

The paramedics started an IV, checked their patient's vital signs, and performed a complete body assessment before leaving the scene. Once they had Cory secured in the back of the ambulance as comfortably as they could manage, Garry went up front to drive while Scott stayed in the back to keep an eye on their patient. Natalie and her son followed in the family car.

After transferring their charge to the care of the emer-

gency room physician, it was past 7:00 p.m. and Scott and Garry's shift had come to an end.

"I'm meeting my brothers at Reflections Pub for a beer and a burger. Would you like to join us?" Garry asked.

"Sounds good, but Carly's making broccoli and chicken casserole, twice-baked potatoes, and chocolate cookie cheesecake, and you know I can't resist that combination."

"Sounds like your daughter is trying to butter you up for something again," Garry laughed.

"You've got that right. I grounded her last week and she's trying to convince me to let her go to the Christmas formal tomorrow night."

"Maybe you should lighten up a little, Scott. She is seventeen years old, after all, and this is her senior year."

"I just don't want her going anywhere with that creep, Jarod Connolly. That's the reason she's grounded in the first place. She's been hanging out with him and his punk buddies and coming in past curfew far too often lately."

"It's been my experience that the more you try to put a wedge between two lovesick teenagers, the closer they become. It's called rebellion, my friend. Just remember, she'll be old enough to make her own decisions next year."

"Don't remind me," Scott sighed.

* * *

Large puffy snowflakes descended slowly from the sky and, combined with the coloured lights on most of Gander's homes, gave an appropriately festive picture for the eighteenth of December. Scott enjoyed the display of decorations and felt in good spirits by the time he turned onto Sacchi Avenue. This was short-lived when he saw a familiar black jalopy pulling away from the curb in front of his home. Jarod

liked to call his car a vintage Camaro, but Scott saw it as a piece of junk and wondered how the relic continued to run.

He parked in the driveway, noticing that it had been cleared already, along with a path up the candy cane-lined walkway to his split-level home. It was a chore he had been dreading. *Carly must have been really busy today*, he thought. The foyer was decorated with greenery and miniature twinkling white lights. The top of Scott's head brushed underneath a cluster of mistletoe hanging from the ceiling.

"Hi, Dad, you're right on time," Carly called from the kitchen. "I'm just taking dinner from the oven."

"Smells great," he said. "How did you find the time to cook dinner, decorate, and clear the driveway, too?"

"I can only take credit for the cooking. Jarod did all the shovelling and most of the decorating."

"Make sure to thank him for me."

Scott had to admit that at least the boy wasn't lazy, although he hated being indebted to him. Of course, he was quick to realize that Jarod was probably just trying to make a good impression so Scott would relent and let Carly go to the dance with him. Little did they know, his firm decision to ban his daughter from attending the Christmas formal had been weakening in increments all week long.

Scott knew he was being overprotective, but when Diane walked out on him nine years ago, he was left to raise two daughters alone. Unfortunately, a fatal accident caused by a drunk driver had taken the life of Carly's twin sister, Allison, three years before. This had a devastating impact on both Scott and Carly, and since that time he was petrified of losing her as well. She was all he had left in the world and he wanted to keep her safe, but he knew he would have to loosen the reins at some point or risk losing her love.

As he ascended the stairs to change out of his uniform

and wash up before dinner, he paused on the landing, as he often did, to look at the portrait of his daughters. He saw two identical sets of blue eyes, shoulder-length flaxen hair, and heart-shaped faces staring back at him with impish smiles. He thought of Perry Roth, the teenager who had killed half of this precious pair. Anger burned within Scott as he thought how the young man had gotten off so easy. He had already completed his sentence and was now home, in time to spend Christmas with his family, while Allison remained in a cold grave, for eternity. Protected by the Young Offenders Act, the boy spent fewer than two years in the correctional facility in Whitbourne. Scott had hoped he would be tried as an adult and serve hard time in prison for the crime he had committed, but that was not the case.

It was with great effort, but he managed to shrug off these negative thoughts by the time he seated himself in the dining room. Indeed, hearing Jim Reeves sing Christmas carols in the background set a festive tone. Carly was pulling out all the stops.

"This is fabulous!" Scott commented on his first taste of the casserole. "It tastes better every time you make it."

"Thanks, Dad. Can I get you anything else? Maybe some extra bread or more wine?" she asked.

"Honey, quit fussing. I have plenty of everything, so sit and enjoy your dinner."

Scott grinned at his daughter's obvious tactics to put him in a good mood before she broached the subject of the Christmas dance again. He knew how much she wanted to go and be with her friends, so he thought he'd put her out of her misery.

"I've been thinking about letting you go to the dance," he said.

"Really?" Carly squealed.