

Praise for *God Bless Us Every One*

“*God Bless Us Every One* is a delightful holiday novella that is sure to put you in the Christmas spirit. Eva Marie Everson brings her characters to life and tugs at your heartstrings with a sweet romance and a message of family forgiveness. Quotes from Dickens’s *Christmas Carol* give added depth and meaning to the story. Grab a cup of cocoa and enjoy this story!”

—**Carrie Turansky**, author of *A Refuge at Highland Hall* and *Shine Like the Dawn*

“What combination is better than this? Eva Marie Everson and Christmas! *God Bless Us Every One* has all the qualities that make her so special as a writer: characters that connect with readers, a heart-touching storyline, and crisp dialogue . . . all of which keeps us turning the pages until the very end. Everson had me at Merry Christmas.”

—**Sandra D. Bricker**, author of Live-Out-Loud fiction, including the Another Emma Rae Creation series and the Jessie Stanton series for Abingdon Press

“Everson has penned a sweet holiday tale spiked with plenty of peppermint! What better framework for redemption than a community production of *A Christmas Carol*? Throw in a wayward father making amends and an old high-school crush and you have a surefire recipe for discovering the true meaning of Christmas. Everson delivers forgiveness, renewal, and pure joy as sweet and satisfying as a mug of hot chocolate with marshmallows.”

—**Sarah Loudin Thomas**



A Contemporary Christmas Carol

GOD BLESS
US EVERY ONE

EVA MARIE EVERSON

Abingdon Press
Nashville

God Bless Us Every One

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Macro Editor: Ramona Richards

Published in association with Wheelhouse Literary Agency

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Everson, Eva Marie, author.

Title: God bless us every one : a contemporary Christmas carol / Eva Marie Everson.

Description: First edition. | Nashville, Tennessee : Abingdon Press, [2016]

Identifiers: LCCN 2016012082 | ISBN 9781501822698 (paperback) | ISBN 9781501822704 (e-book)

Subjects: LCSH: Christmas stories. | GSAFD: Christian fiction.

Classification: LCC PS3605.V47 G63 2016 | DDC 813/.6—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016012082>

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Epigraphs taken from Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol in Prose Being a Ghost Story of Christmas* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1843).

16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24—10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

*In memory of Rachel LouAnn Richards,
who lived well and brought much joy,
who loved with her whole heart
outshining the stars in the sky.*

1



“Bah! Humbug! Merry Christmas! What right have you to be merry? What reason have you to be merry . . . in such a world of fools as this? What’s Christmas time to you but a time for paying bills without money; a time for finding yourself a year older, but not an hour richer?”

—*Ebenezer Scrooge*

She couldn't believe it. She absolutely could *not* believe it.

Yet here she was, not a week before Thanksgiving. Five weeks before Christmas.

How would she tell Sis? Never mind *how*. *What* would she tell Sis?

Charlie Dixon—the newly *unemployed* Charlie Dixon—slid her iPhone across the top of her desk toward herself. Pushed it back. Picked it up, juggling it like one of those stress balls she wished she had right about now. Then, taking a deep breath, she pressed the Home button with her thumb and entered her passcode.

The screen displayed a photograph of her and Sis shivering in the New York City cold during their last visit there, grinning like girls, the Rockefeller Center Christmas tree lit up behind them. She smiled, then grimaced at the older woman's face, surrounded by a faux-fur hood and pressed close to her own. Sixty-four with nary a wrinkle.

Okay. Maybe one or two. But few would guess that Sis wasn't a sibling at all, but her grandmother. Most folks thought them to be mother and daughter.

"May as well be," Charlie breathed out.

She entered the code for her grandmother's number and waited.

Sis opened the conversation without so much as a greeting. “If you’re calling to tell me you can’t make it next week, don’t.”

Charlie forced a smile. “No, Sis. I’ll be there. I, uh...” She looked up at the ceiling, dotted with amber watermarks. Nothing unusual for Florida ceilings, especially in buildings as old as this one. “I, uh... was thinking... maybe I’d come a few days early.”

“Why?”

“Why?” Charlie coughed out a chuckle. “Why *not*? Can’t a granddaughter come see her grandmother without twenty questions?”

“Mm-hmm. I don’t remember asking twenty questions.”

Charlie’s shoulders dropped a good two inches. She picked up a lone paper clip and twirled it between her fingers. “Sis, I’ve got some time off.” *A lot of time off to be exact.* “I’ve got some time off and—”

“When will you be here?”

She released her pent-up emotions with a long sigh. “Saturday?”

That gave her the rest of the day to pack up her office, return to her apartment, and figure out what she’d do now that—

“I’ve got a meeting with the high school drama teacher on Saturday.”

Charlie smiled weakly. “You’re *really* taking on the Christmas play again this year?”

“I am,” Sis returned quickly, her words determined.

“Even after last year’s debacle?”

“Last year we didn’t have...” Sis’s voice trailed off as though something beyond the conversation had stolen her attention.

“Didn’t have what?”

“Uh, this year our proceeds are going to a homeless shelter. What do you say to that?”

“That’s . . . that’s nice, I guess.” Just like Sis to come up with something so heartfelt. “What inspired that?”

“Well, there’s something—someone . . .” Sis’s voice trailed. “How about if we talk about it when you get here?”

Charlie glanced at the wall clock across the room. She had less than fifteen minutes to pack up and get out. “That’s probably for the best. I’ve got an appointment in a few so, I’ll . . . what time is your meeting on Saturday?”

“Three.”

Testament, North Carolina, was a good eight hours by car. Nine to nine and a half if she stopped her usual half dozen times. If she left at her typical departure time—five in the morning—she’d arrive by two. “I should be there already, but I’ll be tired.” In other words, don’t ask me to be a part of this.

“Of course you will. Call before you leave.”

Charlie nodded as though her grandmother could see the action. “I will.”

“Love you more than blueberry pie.”

Tears formed at the words, an old exchange between the two of them. “Love you more than peach cobbler,” she returned.

Charlie ended the call, stood, and looked around her. There really wasn’t that much to gather—a few framed photographs, a silk plant spilling its leaves down a laminate shelf, some books, a stuffed black bear she’d been given by one of the students here at Miss Fisher’s School for Girls, one of the ten most exclusive private schools in the nation, located in the heart of Florida’s equestrian farmland.

She turned and peered through the open plantation-style slats of the window blinds at the rolling green grass of the

outer complex, then beyond to where about a half dozen horses grazed. Class was in session, so no one milled about other than the occasional employee, mostly those who worked with the horses.

Charlie glanced at her watch and sighed. Ten minutes. She needed to hurry. She grabbed the cardboard box sitting empty by her desk. Her stomach tightened, remembering the look on Clara Pressley's face as she shoved the box into Charlie's hands not an hour ago. "Pack your things, Miss Dixon," she said, her face pinched. "With your latest shenanigans, your days at Miss Fisher's have come to a close."

Shenanigans.

If only she'd had a minute to explain her actions, perhaps Mrs. Pressley wouldn't—no, who was she kidding? Mrs. Pressley had taken an immediate dislike to her the moment she'd taken the role of headmistress six months earlier. Even then, Charlie had seen the writing on the old proverbial wall. She and Clara Pressley were cut from two very different cloths.

"At least I'm not stuck in the 1800s," Charlie muttered as she placed a short stack of her personal books—mostly collections of modern plays—at the far left corner of the box.

"What are you doing?"

Charlie's body jerked at the words coming from her open office door. She placed a hand on her chest. "Marjorie . . ."

Marjorie Phelps, French II teacher by day and Charlie's best friend and roommate, stood just inside the office.

"Nooo," Marjorie breathed, walking to where Charlie stood. "Tell me she didn't do it, *s'il vous plaît*."

Charlie reached for the manila envelope stuffed with her severance details, most of which she hadn't read. "Oui. She did it. And all because of the musical I chose for the Christmas pageant."

“And right here at Thanksgiving...” The petite blonde crossed her arms and frowned. “You’d think she could have waited until after Christmas.” She reached for the framed photo of the two of them taken at Ocala’s last celebration of the Kentucky Derby from the bookcase and slapped the stand flat against its back. “What are you going to do?”

The thick brunette braid Charlie typically wore had worked its way over her shoulder. She slung it back. “I’ll start with this office. I only have a few minutes to clear out of here before security comes.” She glanced at her office desktop computer. “My passwords have already been changed by IT, so I can’t even get into my files or e-mail my students.”

“But you’re friends with many of them on Facebook, right?”

“Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat.” She raised her brow as Marjorie continued with the packing. “All that social media stuff Mrs. Pressley thinks is the devil’s workshop.”

Marjorie shook her head, stopping Charlie from going on before the walls took names. “We’ll talk about it later. How long do you get to stay in our apartment?”

“Until the end of the week.”

“*What?*” Marjorie nearly dropped the potted silk plant.

“Careful there,” Charlie said, reaching for it. “I’m going to Sis’s on Saturday.” She shrugged. “And I’ll figure it out from there.”

Tears formed in Marjorie’s eyes, God bless her. “Does she know?”

Charlie shook her head. “No. And if I can help it, she won’t.”

Marjorie stole a look at her watch. “I gotta go . . . five minutes ’til the bell.” Which meant five minutes until security arrived. “I actually . . . I just wanted to see if . . . well, it doesn’t

matter.” She wrapped Charlie in a quick hug. “I’ll see you back at the apartment.”

Charlie grabbed the stuffed bear as Marjorie reached the door and glanced back at her. “You’ll be okay?”

“I’ll be fine,” Charlie said, though she wasn’t sure how truthful the words were. She placed the stuffed bear at the top of the box. “We never know what the day will bring,” she said. The words rang with such rhetorical truth she nearly laughed out loud.

Marjorie smiled. “But as Sis always says, whatever the day brings never shocks God.”

Charlie pointed at her. “That’s right.” She forced another smile. “See ya tonight.”

Marjorie slapped the doorjamb. “*À plus tard.* Later.”