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Spirits of Christmas

Meg Allison

Holiday eBook Freebie

Wishing everyone a holiday season filled with love and happiness.

Spirits of Christmas
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One

It was their first Christmas Eve together—yet Camille found herself completely alone.

For a long time she stared out the window, watching the storm clouds cover what was left of the setting sun. Soon it would begin to snow. The weatherman had predicted a blizzard and warned people to find shelter before it began. But Ian had been called out on an emergency. Someone needed him. Apparently more than she needed him.

Camille Bryant-Spain had relished their first weeks in this tiny cabin in the woods—this mountain hideaway so far from Savannah and the terrifying memories she'd put behind her. Ian had wanted to come home. She had wanted to be with Ian...and so they moved here together, the ink on their marriage license barely dry. No, she didn't regret it, on the contrary. She loved Ian more than she ever dreamed possible.

She had also known his job would take him away. She just hadn't been prepared for it to be so soon.

She rubbed her arms to chase away the chill and turned back to the tree standing near the hearth. The scrawny little pine stood barely over five-feet and looked rather barren. But she had hoped with a Charlie Brown type faith that once she gave the little thing some love and lights, it would blossom.

She frowned. The lights hadn't done it. Maybe more decorations would?

Boxes of gold, red and green bulbs glittered with reflected light on the floor. Tinsel shimmered, its strands dancing in the movement of warm air from the hearth.

Yellow and orange flames leapt over a large log in the fireplace. The room was bathed with warmth and light, but none of it seemed to lighten her mood. None of it mattered without Ian by her side.

He'd left a week earlier—promising he'd be back in plenty of time to help her pick out and decorate a tree. Apparently the demon he had been dispatched to kill worked on its own time table.

Fighting back the melancholy, she stooped and gathered the tinsel in both hands. All the tree needed was a bit of love—all Ian needed was her patience.

As she draped the garland over the limbs, she thought about their time here together. She'd wanted to leave Savannah behind—at least for a while—and begin their new life somewhere far away and different. She hadn't quite counted on the remoteness of Ian's house in the mountains, but she loved it here. It was quiet. Peaceful. The voices of the dead let her rest here in the Pennsylvania mountains. In fact, she hadn't heard one voice since the summer.

They spent days on end getting to know each other in the most intimate of ways, often cuddling before the fire, their bodies entwined. It had been heaven on earth, but now, without him at her side, the doubts were beginning to prick at her mind.

His face filled her thoughts. She could look into his dark eyes and see eternity. His smile made her heart leap. His voice sent a shiver of awareness down her spine.

He could make her laugh and make her so damn mad—all in the space of few minutes. Her heart ached from missing him. When he was gone, there seemed to be a vacuum, a huge empty space in her soul.

She stepped back to examine her handiwork and sighed. It still looked so pathetic. Tears blurred her vision. She had wanted to share this with him. How many special days would they miss because of his calling? But how could she ever ask him to ignore a call for help? It was his duty, his gift. She could never expect him to hide it away when it had taken him so many years to find and accept it.

"What are you really afraid of?"

Camille froze, her heart almost stopped. It had been months since she'd last used her own gift. She wasn't sure she was ready to speak to the dead. Not without Ian at her side.

"Be at peace, baby girl."

A lump formed in her throat. "Mom?"

"Yes, baby girl. Don't be afraid. You never had to be afraid of me."

A chill swept over her skin, as soft and light as a feathering of snowflakes on bare flesh. Camille shivered and swallowed back the fear. It was a familiar sensation, but one that still made her heart race. Would she ever get used to it?

With a deep breath for calm, she turned from her task and faced her fears. A gauzy mist shimmered in the air behind her. As she watched, the sparkling air seemed to darken and take shape. Soon the feminine outline was visible, and then individual features began to sharpen in an oval face. The outline of torso and limbs were draped in a long gown of opaque, floating gauze. It must be where the image of sheet-clad specters had originated, she thought as the air around her turned icy.

Even before the mirage had completely formed, Camille felt a hitch in her breast and tears sprang up behind her eyelids. She knew that form—knew it as if she'd seen this image everyday of her life even though it had been years.

So many years...

A face formed from the mist. Her mother's wide blue eyes smiled back at her and her mouth lifted at the corners. Camille had to remind herself to breathe.

"Mom..." she repeated, this time without the question in her voice. "...I didn't think I'd see you again."

Her throat seemed to close up as her mother lifted a translucent hand toward her. Marguerite dropped her arm and shook her head.

"I keep forgetting I can't touch you." She smiled and Camille felt she could almost see a shimmering of tears in those eyes. "I wasn't sure they'd let me visit again. But I needed to see you, baby girl. I needed to let you know how very proud I am of you."

"Mom, I would have died if you hadn't..." she choked on the words. "I'm sorry...I'm so very sorry."

"For what, honey? You and your sister—you girls were my world. I know I failed you."

"No—" She stepped forward but Marguerite held up a hand.

"But we all make mistakes, baby girl. And I thank God every day that you forgave me mine. I also thank the fates for giving me the chance to prove myself again."

"You don't have to prove anything," Camille said.

"Maybe not to you, but for myself. I wanted you to know that this gift of yours is changing. I won't be the last spirit you'll see, Camille. It may be a bit frightening at first, but you'll grow used to it in time."

Camille could only stare. "You mean...there will be more? I'm going to see more ghosts?"

"Yes, but only the ones who need you the most. There are many who need to talk—and some who need your help in other ways."

"And you're telling me this now? Tonight? Isn't that bit too *Dickens*, Mom?"

The apparition smiled softly. "You always did like a good story, baby girl. But rest assured they won't start bothering you tonight. You need no warnings, only comfort."

Her form began to fade and Camille felt her panic build. Her mother would never visit again.

"Wait, there are things I want to ask...things I need to know."

"I have to go now, love. This form is too hard to hold for long. Be at peace—let your heart be still. Your man is safe. He's doing his best to get home to you. You have to have faith in yourself, in him. Everything is as it should be."

Her mother stared at her for a moment, her head tilted to one side. "But before I go, I ask you once more. What are you really afraid of?"

Camille blinked back the tears that stung her eyes. "I'm afraid of being alone again. What if he decides he doesn't love me? That he doesn't need me like he thought he did?" A shudder swept over her and she folded her arms as the fears ran free. "What if he meets a demon he can't defeat? How can I live without him now that I've found him?"

"You have to keep believing...and take one day at a time. It does no good to look so far ahead—to borrow trouble, like my grandma used to say."

Camille took a deep breath. "I know, I'm trying. I guess it's just all this quiet..." she glanced around, "I'm not used to being so isolated from the world."

"Well, all that is changing," her mother announced. "The dead need you, baby girl. They've given you a rest, but soon they'll need to speak. I think you need this as much as they do. It gives you purpose. Identity. It always has."

"I'm scared, Mom. I don't want to open myself up again."

"I know...but I'll watch over you. Your home has been blessed—no evil will enter here unless invited." She glanced away and stood silent as if listening. "Your young man will be there when you need him most. He's coming home."

"How do you know?"

Marguerite shrugged. "I can finally use my gifts now that my spirit is whole. But now...I have to go. You need to rest, and you need to listen."

"Wait, don't leave. Not yet..."

The mists dissolved and she stood staring at the empty space where her mother's form had been. Her stomach clenched as tears rolled down her cheeks. Had she really seen and heard her mother or was she finally losing her mind? Camille had come so close to that abyss—too close for comfort.

She knew fear often clouded thoughts, distorted the senses. Fear was something she lived with now. They'd made such big changes, such huge decisions over the last few months. Even though she'd sworn to Ian that she was happy, Camille still felt some misgivings. What if they were doomed to fail? Neither of them had ever witnessed a normal, loving relationship on a daily basis. How could they possibly create one?

The last thing she needed was to add frequent sightings of the dearly departed.

Two

It was after midnight when Camille sat on the sofa, a mug of cocoa in hand as she stared at the tiny lights on the tree. It still looked rather scrawny, but lovely. The decorations made it appear almost regal.

Christmas carols streamed from the stereo—a jazzy, instrumental version of The Little Drummer Boy. She took a sip of her drink and grimaced. Cold already. She had been so lost in thought that she had forgotten all about it.

Ian still hadn't come home or called. If it hadn't been for her mother's reassurance, she might be pacing the room, sick with worry. But she knew he was safe. She only prayed he would make it back to her soon.

Camille had never loved anyone so deeply—had never felt such passion or longing. The strength of it frightened her at times. Her only comfort came from the knowledge that Ian felt the same for her, despite her fears.

It was only times like these when she was alone that the old misgivings crept up and made her doubt...made her wonder about their future.

The music changed to another carol. Smooth, slow notes soothed her mind, easing away the tensions. She laid her head back against the sofa and yawned. The fire crackled merrily in the hearth, but even the flames seemed to calm themselves until they moved with the slower rhythm of the song.

Her eyelids grew heavy, her thoughts drifted until she felt as if she were floating. Peace filled her...the same peace she had felt the first night as Ian's wife. It had all been so right lying their in his arms. If she were to ever lose that...

"Camille..."

Her eyelids fluttered but she couldn't quite open them. For a moment she almost forgot to breathe.

"Josiah?" she asked finally.

"Yes, little one," the familiar voice replied. "I'm here."

Tears formed beneath her lids. "I thought you were gone. I thought I lost you."

His soft chuckle warmed her heart. She had missed her spirit guide, but had been sure he moved on—that he had left Ian to fill his place as her protector.

"You won't be rid of me that easily," he said as he read her thoughts.

"Why haven't I heard your voice? Felt your presence?"

"You needed time to heal...and privacy with your new husband." She could hear the smile in his tone.

"You like Ian, don't you?"

"He's a good man."

"My mother was here."

"Yes," he replied softly. "I know."

"But why can't I see you? Can't you appear to me as she did?"

"It's not that simple, child. There has to be a purpose for a spirit to appear in human form. It takes a lot of energy and concentration."

"Then why are you here?"

"I felt your sorrow...your doubt," he said. "No one should be alone on Christmas Eve."

"Thank you." She tried to hold her tongue but couldn't. "Is he all right? Is he safe?"

"Yes...Ian is well. He has completed his task and is on his way back to you. Sleep now, child. Be at peace."

Her heart lifted and she snuggled deeper into the sofa cushions.

"Thank you," she whispered as she let the darkness pull her under.

In her dream she found herself standing on a sandy beach, the waves crashing against the shore. The sun rode high in the sky as if it were midday. She sighed at the feel of the warm sand between her toes as the scent of saltwater teased her nostrils. Camille sighed. She had visited this place before in her dreams, with Ian.

She glanced up and down the beach, anxious for a glimpse of that familiar profile...those granite features surrounded by his long dark hair blowing in the wind. As far as she could see, the beach stood empty. Isolated. She was alone. Her heart sank.

"Trust him," Josiah whispered in her mind.

She shook her head. "I'm still afraid. How can we create what we've never had? Never seen? I don't know how to be a good wife."

"Trust," he repeated. "Trust in what you share. Your love is stronger than any trial thrown your way."

"I want to...I really do." But her doubts wouldn't leave her alone.

Her relationship with Ian had happened so quickly. They had met and fallen in love beneath a shroud of danger. She couldn't help but wonder if their relationship would thrive in the mundane routine of daily life.

Of course, there would always be some danger in their world as Ian set off to protect another chosen one from demons. There would always be an air of the unknown surrounding them as she met spirits of the dead and tried to help them move on to the next realm.

Josiah sighed. "Do you wish me to lay your fears to rest? Do you wish me to show you what is to be?"

Her heart stuttered in her chest. "Is that possible? Can you really do that for me?"

"Yes, of course...you know of my gifts by now, little one. If you wish to see, then I will allow it."

"Then why didn't you tell me this in the first place? Why let me suffer with doubts?"

"Because knowing one's future can be a dangerous thing," he replied. "Sometimes, if we know too much, we can try to force or change the outcome. In the process, we often change our destiny altogether. Too much knowledge can be a dangerous thing."

"So, it's better to trust with your heart...and let the future unfold."

"Yes."

"Then why did you try to force Ian and me together in the first place? Weren't you breaking your own rule by showing us what we could be to one another?"

"Yes, and it almost drove him away. Even an old spirit like me can make mistakes, Camille. Now ask me your questions—I will answer all."

She stood quietly, thinking of the past months and all the changes in their lives. The warm ocean breeze lifted her hair from her shoulders as it swirled around her. She felt the heat of the sun on her face and the warmth of the sand beneath her feet...yet all the while she could hear Christmas carols playing softly in the background. It was as if she were standing on the threshold between two different worlds.

Camille stared at the deep blue-green water and made her choice.

"Will Ian and I be happy together?" she asked.

"Yes," Josiah responded at once.

"Will we ever have problems?"

He hesitated a moment. "Yes...but not as many as some."

She nodded. "Fair enough. Thank you, Josiah."

She felt his surprise. "That's all? You have no more questions of me?"

"No, not now," she said. "I've decided to trust Ian...and myself."

"Then I will go for now." She felt a soft touch to her cheek as if a ghostly presence placed a kiss there. "Merry Christmas, little one."

The next moment she felt as if she were lifted off her feet to float in mid-air. The beach and ocean wavered before her eyes, a mirage that soon dissipated into nothing as her mother's spirit had done. The warmth of the fire surrounded her, caressing her face. The music grew louder and louder until she hear every note. Then the soft cushions seemed to cradle her.

"Camille?"

She stretched slowly and opened her eyes, blinking in momentary confusion. A face loomed above her—features hidden by shadows, but she knew that profile. She had memorized that voice and the scent of his skin. Her lips curved into a heart-felt smile.

"Ian?"

He sat down beside her and gathered her into his arms. "Yes, honey, I'm finally home."

"I knew you would be," she said as she wrapped her arms around the man she loved. "I know you'll always move toward home."

Author Biography

Meg Allison is a wife, mother of five amazing children, and a writer of romantic fiction. Life is never dull and it's often noisy. Meg reads and writes to escape the real-life drama. A graduate of the University of Charleston with a bachelor's degree in Mass Communications, in a former life Meg worked as a reporter for a large newspaper in Charleston, WV.

Website: <http://www.megallisonauthor.com>

Blog: <http://megallisonromance.blogspot.com>

Samhain Author Page: <http://samhainpublishing.com/authors/meg-allison>