



I Heard Him Exclaim

Z.A. Maxfield

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(Part of His For The Holidays Anthology)

Who Likes a Skinny Santa?

Steve Adams's heart hasn't been in the Christmas spirit ever since doctors put a stent in it and ordered him to clean up his act. No longer filling out his Santa suit or allowed to make merry, he's forgoing the holidays this year and heading to Vegas to indulge in the few vices left to him: gambling and anonymous sex.

His road trip takes a detour when he encounters Chandler Tracey, who's just inherited guardianship of his five-year-old niece. Overwhelmed, Chandler's on his way to deliver Poppy to his parents. But fate has other plans and, after car trouble, Chandler and Poppy accept a ride home with Steve. Though the heat between the two men is obvious, they put it on simmer while they band together to make Poppy's Christmas as perfect as possible.

Steve soon comes to believe that while Chandler *is* the right person to look after Poppy, someone needs to look after Chandler. Fortunately, Steve knows just the man for the job.

I Heard Him Exclaim Details

Date : Published December 6th 2010 (first published November 16th 2010)

ISBN :

Author : Z.A. Maxfield

Format : Kindle Edition 141 pages

Genre : Romance, M M Romance, Contemporary, Holiday, Christmas, Lgbt

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From Reader Review I Heard Him Exclaim for online ebook

Anna D. says

Note: This is the 3rd short story in the His For The Holidays collection.

4 stars

Steve was written too perfectly and what he had to offer (his support, his family, even his idiosyncrasies) and the timing of when Steve met Chandler was much too coincidentally manufactured that it lost its relatability.. it was as if Chandler made a Christmas list to Santa and that list was delivered to Chandler by Santa "Steve" Clause himself.

Aside from the unrealistic nature of the plot, for some reason I really enjoyed it. It worked for me, though I can see how it might not for everyone. Unlike the first book in this collection, Mistletoe at Midnight, which also read like a Hallmark movie, I was happily swept away here with the MCs in their holiday spirit and I didn't mind that the whole thing was like a Christmas miracle. However cheesy it all might have been I really liked it. I thought the attraction and passion between the MCs was sexy, I found Poppy adorable, and I was happy to see the easy ready-made-family HEA at the end.

Ami says

Steve Adams is not in the mood for Christmas -- while he is probably the only man who feels depressed for losing weight and getting into shape, but he was Santa Claus and who likes skinny Santa? On the way to indulge himself to Las Vegas, he encounters Chandler Tracey and his five-year-old niece, Poppy. Poppy's parents died in an accident and as her godfather, Chandler is taking care of her. But while Chandler isn't sure he is up for the job, Steve is sure that the young man can, with a little help from Santa :)

I have only read two stories by Z.A. Maxfield before and I didn't really connect with those. However, this one, oh, this one I LOVE. I think the relationship between Steve and Chandler -- despite it being instant within two days -- doesn't feel rushed. Within that two days, the two men do learn something about each other.

Chandler is the younger guy; getting a five-year girl on his lap is not something he can wrap his head in. He is constantly freaking up, he isn't sure he is up to the task. Personally, I totally get him. I cannot imagine myself having to suddenly taking care a kid as well. His worries and doubt are all right on the spot. Not to mention the fact that he is gay, and there are people who still cannot accept gay parents. Steve, on the other hand, is more relaxed and sure about himself (and Chandler). I think he is a perfect balance for Chandler (I'm not sure how old Steve is, maybe 40-ish?); it is also helped that he comes from a big family.

I wish this story is being made into a TV movie or something, because I truly want to see all the decorations from "The Adams' Christmas Party"; because I'm sure they're all amazing.

Candice says

3.5 stars

This was a sweet story. Yes, there was insta love and pretty unrealistic, but it was a Christmas story and had the kind of ending that you want when reading a holiday book.

Janna says

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Z.A. Maxfield

4.5 out of 5 stars

In *I Heard Him Exclaim* we're treated at Christmas in all its glory, with the commercial bells and whistles (and lights) to match. Main character Steve's family is completely nuts when it comes to Christmas: they decorate their houses outrageously and they live for the festivities. Steve himself used to be equally nuts, and he liked to play the part of Santa, but not this year. He is not in the spirit because he is no longer filling out the Santa suite after a heart operation early that year. He decides to go to Las Vegas to escape the festivities, but on his way there he meets Chandler, who just inherited guardianship of his five-year-old niece, Poppy. The two of them can use Steve's help after their car broke down and their holiday plans got canceled, so Steve decides to take them home. There he and Chandler work together to give Poppy a wonderful Christmas while they feel more and more attracted to each other.

I have to admit that I had a little trouble with getting the image of Steve as an old, wrinkly Santa out of my head after the first descriptions of his physical features. I'm not a big fan of the May-December theme where the age difference between the characters nears the parent-child gap. So, to make this story work for me, I had to make Steve a bit younger and more attractive in my head than the author probably had meant him to be. But apart from that, their love story was easy to enjoy. I loved Chandler and his feelings towards his niece and I found Steve's observational skills regarding Chandler very engaging and sweet. And their smexy moments were certainly sizzling hot and entertaining in their variety. The author succeeded in conveying that Steve and Chandler are so right for each other, even if they only met a couple of days ago. Overall this was a well-written, enjoyable, festive love story with a touch of seriousness and a lot of smiles in it.

Favorite quote:

"[...] men came in two different flavors, and one of those flavors could fix cars. The other, the group to which he belonged, were utterly useless without a cup of coffee in one hand and a computer mouse in the other. He looked under the hood of the car and felt like the apes at the beginning."

<http://erotromreader.blogspot.com/201...>

Plainbrownwrapper says

The narrative voice in this one sounds a lot like Amy Lane to me, in her lighter moods.

Love this line: "Chandler had a way of looking at him that was one part *I've never seen anything this bizarre before* and one part last scoop of ice cream on a really hot day."

Overall -- well, hmmm. The MCs seem too perfect. One, Steve, is a 40-ish guy whose whole family (parents, siblings, cousins ad infinitum) have a collective obsession with Christmas. Most of the family live within a couple of blocks of each other, and every year they compete to see which house can boast the most outrageous Christmas displays. Steve has always -- since he was a little kid -- taken on the role of Santa; he is kind and generous and outgoing and giving, and just all those perfect Christmas traits. The other MC, Chandler, is a younger man who has just been given custody of his 5 year old niece Poppy after her parents were killed in a Thanksgiving car crash. Chandler is overwhelmed with the responsibility. Steve is NOT feeling the Santa this particular Christmas. He's having a bit of a midlife crisis after having some heart trouble and being forced to lose a lot of weight (Santa shouldn't be skinny!). Steve takes off in his Santa-red classic muscle car, heading for Vegas to get laid, but his plans are derailed when he comes across Chandler and Poppy and their broken down car at a rest stop on the highway.

This is all just too...pat. Too "oh, here we are with the perfect setup for some manipulative -- I mean heartwarming -- Christmas cheer". Maxfield is a good writer, and there were genuinely funny and/or touching moments throughout -- AND this wasn't really intended to be a realistic tale in the first place -- but it still felt artificial to me. Hey, I can be a grump when I feel like it. ;-)

3 stars

edited to add -- I listened to the audio version of this a couple of months ago (roughly 10/13). I *really* liked the narrator on this one -- thought he did a great job with both the overall tone and the voices. I'm adding half a star for narration, and rounding up to 4.

Mantastic says

So fun!

Steve and Chandler start the story as strangers. Both of them are on the road trying to escape the memories of what they are missing most this Christmas. The timing is just right for them to cross paths at a gas station along the way.

Overwhelmed with his new responsibilities with his niece, Chandler welcomes the opportunity for something good. He still worries, but accepts Steve help. Steve is just excited that he can share Christmas again.

The attraction between the two is obvious but they have to be more subtle with Poppy in the car. Their own form of hide and seek.

As good as the beginning of this story is, the best parts are when they make it back to Steve's house. Steve's over the top family is fantastically devious. Steve's normal Christmas rituals are unlike anything Chandler

has seen and he finds himself letting go of some of his anxiety. The care, warmth, teasing, and instigating between Steve's family rubs of on Chandler, and Poppy is losing a bit of her haunted look.

I'm glad that through all the holiday cheer that the problems they had in the first place didn't go away. Maxfield was able to deliver great tension breakers when things got too heavy, but Christmas was in no way a cure-all. Instead it allowed them both to lay it out on the line. The worst case scenario being they would part ways after the holiday and Chandler got his car back. But if it worked, they knew there wouldn't be anyone else for either of them. Funny how much being completely 100% from the start with someone cuts out a lot of the doubt and insecurity in a relationship.

Katharina says

Very cute Christmas story with likable characters and a sweet ending! It includes all ingredients needed for a lovely holiday read: a hot Santa, Christmas-crazy family members, a sad past event, insta-love, awesome chemistry between our protagonists, and a nice little niece to complete the perfect family setup. The characters are developed enough to show flaws and insecurities as well as their shining good personalities. I loved how Chandler struggled with the guardianship of his niece because I think this is a very realistic take on the situation. And if the whole story is a bit unrealistic (especially in how fast the relationship develops)... well... it IS a holiday story after all :D

Lauraadriana says

Sexy, sweet and lovely. A really nice Christmas story complete with a SUPER SEXY Santa. What's not to love?!

♣ Irish Smurfétté ♣ says

This story started out strong, a well plotted chance meeting and good early glimpses of the three main characters: Steve, Chandler and Chandler's niece, Poppy.

For those of you who don't usually go for kids in their stories (I'm with you on that in a lot of cases), Poppy is a pretty fab five year old. Overall, there are truly wonderful humorous moments, sweet gestures between Steve and Chandler and members of Steve's family are used well in piecing together the puzzle.

It's all uneven, though, unfortunately. Things would be rolling along and then a bit of odd dialogue would make me tilt my head. Steve and Chandler would be talking and then one of them would do something that just didn't seem to match up with the personality. Sometimes things felt right, like they were moving at an appropriate speed and then the wheel would start to squeak and wiggle and throw the pacing off. Now, this isn't horrible by any means. I liken it to when there is a fantastic cast but the movie ends up being meh. Steve and Chandler are actually two very interesting characters and they deserved a bit better treatment, a bit more depth. But like I said, this isn't at all horrible and it's definitely still a funny, sweet story in which I was glad to meet Steve and Chandler.

DaisyGirl says

4.5 Stars

Steve Adams is Santa Claus at heart. One year ago, Steve had a wake up call when doctors put a stent in his artery and ordered him to clean up his act. Since then he has quit smoking, eats healthy, exercises, and has dropped a lot of weight. The new and improved Steve is lean and mean but no longer fills out his beloved Santa suit. Sadly, this year, Steve's heart just isn't into the Christmas spirit so he decides to forgo the holidays and heads off to Vegas to indulge in the few vices left to him: gambling and anonymous sex. At a truck stop, Steve encounters Chandler Tracey and his five-year-old niece, Poppy. Chandler recently inherited guardianship of Poppy after her parents were killed in an automobile accident on Thanksgiving. Overwhelmed with grief and parental responsibility, Chandler is on his way to deliver Poppy to his parents. Fate, however, has other plans and, after car trouble, Chandler and Poppy accept a ride home with Steve. I Heard Him Exclaim is Steve, Chandler, and Poppy's Christmas tale about the healing power of love.

I really enjoyed this story. I loved both MCs, especially Steve. He's got that perfect blend of strong and vulnerable. I felt so bad for Chandler and Poppy. The gravity of their loss was staggering and I was rooting for them all the way. Chandler was a little too soft and caving under the pressure but luckily Steve was there for him to lean on. I loved the craziness of the Adams family and how they celebrate Christmas with total abandon. Their love and acceptance of Chandler and Poppy was heartwarming to read. I had one minor gripe: I am not a fan of the "boy" endearment. Anything but that. Well, maybe not *anything*. On a positive note: I loved the book cover. Very pretty.

Bottom line: a sweet tale of love and loss during the holiday season. I hope to revisit with this family again!

Denise H. says

----> :) This is a different, sweet Christmassy M/M love story !!

Older, Steve Adams had a heart attack and stent implanted last year, and this year he's too thin to be his usual Santa self. He decides to skip the holiday and headed to Vegas for some R & R, but at the rest stop, he meets a lovely man struggling to cope with his new responsibility, his niece Poppy. On top of that, their borrowed car won't start, so Steve takes a look. With a couple of twists and turns, the unlikely trio are all going to Steve's family for Christmas.

Younger Chandler is insecure about raising his dead brother's child, even though he loves her, and wants to do his best, he's fearful of failing.

Big hearted Steve sees what he wants in Chandler, someone he can care for, love and cherish, along with darling Poppy. Steve 's family, the "Adams family", are outgoing, loud, and welcoming. Steve and Chandler take every opportunity to steal their time alone and the M/M hot sexiness is scorching...whew !

Loved these deeply moving characters, and the surprisingly sweet tale. It's not totally realistic, but in a mushy Christmas story, it works well.

This heartwarming tale will leave you smiling and hopeful. ENJOY !!!

"...it just goes to show, if you need a little Christmas, it always pays to find someone who needs it more."

=====

Dina says

First, let me say that I didn't get the title of this book. *What* did you hear him exclaim? Who are *you*? And who is *him*? Does that have anything to do with the story? (My confusion didn't affect my rating, of course. I'm just curious.)

Steve Adams has always loved Christmas and dressing up as Santa to spread the merriment around, but he isn't in the mood to celebrate the holidays this year. He can't fill out his Santa suit anymore, thanks to the new lifestyle he's been forced to embrace after the scare he had almost a year ago, when he had to have an angioplasty and doctors put a stent in his heart. Ordered to clean up his act, he quit smoking, dropped a lot of weight, and started exercising regularly and eat healthy. He's on his way to Vegas, to spend the holidays and avoid the Christmas festivities he'd have to join if he stayed at home, when he meets a somewhat distraught younger (and attractive) man and his 5-year-old niece.

Chandler Tracey and his niece Poppy, whose guardianship he inherited after his brother and sister-in-law were killed in a car accident only a month ago, are on their way to spend Christmas at his parents' when car trouble leaves them stranded on the road. Being a nice guy and all, Steve offers them a ride and the trio is soon back on the road. As Steve and Chandler spend time together and talk about their recent life-changing experiences, the sexual attraction between them grows and they begin to wonder if there's more to it. Well, duh! :)

I thought this was a very sweet Christmasy story, but it was also very unrealistic and I couldn't suspend my disbelief enough to enjoy it without frowning over Chandler's and Steve's foolishly trusting behavior. Chandler was neurotic about Poppy's safety, which was okay considering he was as insecure as only new parents can be, so how come he didn't think twice before accepting Steve's ride offer? Steve was a complete strange and you just don't climb into a strange's car like that, especially when there's a safe alternative available. Steve's safety wasn't in any danger when he offered Chandler and Poppy a ride, but I thought he pushed his luck when he invited them to stay at his house. On his defense, he knew Chandler better by then, but still.

All in all, this was an okay read, with some quirky but likable characters and a good amount of holiday cheer. There wasn't much conflict in the story, but that was fine because I wasn't expecting it. The HEA felt a bit forced at first, but a nice epilogue cemented it and made it okay. After all, all's well that ends well.

Note: This story is also available in His For The Holidays anthology.

Ula'ndi Hart says

Overall book rating: 4

Audio Book: N/A

Book Cover: 3.8

Did it have the Holiday/Christmas feel? Why YES! Yes it did!

Don't you just absolutely ADORE Steve?? I do. I adore him.

I really liked Chandler and Poppy as well but Steve stole the show.

All things sticky sweet and Christmassy good in my opinion.

No aeons of unnecessary Drama. Just the right amount of Christmas magic and GOOD PEOPLE.

Nikyta *Miss Forgetful* says

This was my favorite out of the whole His For The Holidays anthology.

When Steve lost all his weight due to medical problems, he lost all his spirit for Christmas as well. He leaves for Vegas to cope with his lost love of being Santa and runs into Chandler and Poppy at a rest stop. Chandler's on his way to his parents' house with his niece, who he's the new guardian of. Both Steve and Chandler are lost, looking for two separate things but Fate has something else in mind when Chandler's bad luck keeps bringing Steve to his rescue.

I loved the way it was so deep into Christmas and how Steve was a real live Santa who just lost his spirit. I enjoyed seeing Chandler and Poppy show Steve you can still be Santa even if you aren't fat anymore. And I loved that Steve showed Chandler that he can be a great parent even though Chandler thought he wouldn't be. Loved these two guys and the way they connected so well especially after Chandler's continuing bad luck had Steve helping him over and over again.

Definitely something I'll be re-reading because it was such a sweet, cute story especially the ending. Definitely recommended.

Nathan Burgoine says

Edit: A re-listen now it's snowing, and this time, I snagged on a line I hadn't noticed before. There's a part where the smaller of the two men is about to top the other and the line is something like, "He loved being [the big man]'s boy, but he also wanted to be his man."

So, there's a lot to unpack in that throw-away line, but I'm going to be brief: there is nothing more (or less) "manly" or "masculine" about a position. Nothing. And I'm annoyed I bumped into it again in a story I'd previously enjoyed—the couple weren't doing any role-playing, by which I mean there was no hint of daddy/son stuff to make the line feel more kink/role related, though the age difference is there. It was a sour note. Anyway. Being a bottom doesn't make you the "boy" any more than being the top makes you the "man." That sort of stuff is the bread and butter of misogyny and homophobia, and it kinda needs to vanish.

I'm not sure I'll keep this story in my holiday rotation now, and I'm bummed about that, since I really did enjoy the larger narrative. Maybe I can just skip the chapter.

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I listened to this one as an audiobook as part of the packaged deal *His For The Holidays* and it was my favourite of the bunch. The short version is pretty much covered by the blurb, but it did a few other things well that I liked: the "new parent" angle of the fellow who has custody of his niece for her first Christmas without her parents (who died recently) was pretty solid. I liked that he was completely "I can't do this, especially not by myself, what the hell!" about the whole thing, and I liked that when he bumped into former-Santa who offered help, his first instinct was more of a "I have to be careful" than a "whatever help I can get is good." The balance was there at first. I mean, that tips pretty quickly (because it's a romance novella set at Christmas) but at least there was lip service.

There was also a kind-of/sort-of chosen family vibe, even though the vast majority of the cast was made up of relatives of the former-Santa. It was more their willingness to fold the sudden parent and his niece into the flock than anything else, but those are the kinds of Christmas stories that warm my heart the most. And, it might have been the audiobook performer, but the little girl never came off obnoxious in any one direction or other, which is rare for kid characters in romance novellas.
