

# A Christmas *in* Shady Springs

Shady Springs Book Three

Sarah Anne Crouch



Scrivenings  
PRESS

Quench your thirst for story.

[www.ScriveningsPress.com](http://www.ScriveningsPress.com)

Copyright © 2025 by Sarah Anne Crouch

Published by Scrivenings Press LLC  
15 Lucky Lane  
Morrilton, Arkansas 72110  
<https://ScriveningsPress.com>

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, or recording— without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Paperback ISBN 978-1-64917-545-8

eBook ISBN 978-1-64917-546-5

Editors: Amy R. Anguish and Kathy McKinsey

Cover design by Sarah Anne Crouch and Linda Fulkerson

Scripture quotations are from the ESV Bible® (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

All characters are fictional, and any resemblance to real people, either factual or historical, is purely coincidental.

**NO AI TRAINING:** Without in any way limiting the author’s [and publisher’s] exclusive rights under copyright, any use of this publication to “train” generative artificial intelligence (AI) technologies to generate text is expressly prohibited. The author reserves all rights to license uses of this work for generative AI training and development of machine learning language models.

*To Anna and Jay, John and Mallory. Thank you for letting me be  
a (small) part of your weddings and a (bigger) part of your lives.  
I pray God blesses your marriages abundantly.*



---

## OCTOBER

Madeleine Mullins's perfect wedding would be like a fairy tale. She'd float down the aisle in a gorgeous white dress—beautiful but tasteful. Her hair would be done half up with curls cascading down her back. Guests would be surrounded by flowers, soft light, and soaring music. Closing her eyes, she could picture the affair down to the last detail.

But nothing she'd previously imagined or planned could have prepared her for her actual wedding.

"I finished the invitations. Come see." Madeleine tugged her fiancé's arm, pulling him into her aunt's kitchen.

She might never get over how nice A.J.'s arms felt under her fingers. Years of sports along with his current job as a track coach and church handyman led to a lean, muscular build. The smile he flashed her way wasn't so bad, either.

"Okay, okay. I'm coming."

Aunt Clara's kitchen was flooded with bright morning light, highlighting the box sitting out on the table. Lifting the first invitation, she held it up.

"What do you think?"

She'd spent every spare moment of the last week painting

each invitation by hand. A watercolor spray of flowers in burgundy and forest green circled the calligraphy swirling across the center. Their names—Madeleine Mullins and A.J. Young—danced in curled letters.

“It’s perfect.” A.J. grinned as he took the square of cardstock from her hands and held it up to the sunlight. His auburn hair glowed in the rays streaming through the kitchen windows, and his green eyes sparkled as he turned his gaze to her. “I can’t believe how great these turned out.”

He kissed her on the cheek, then handed back the card. “What do *you* think?”

“I love them.” Gazing at the creamy white paper, her smile matched his. She’d spent many long nights agonizing over the design of these wedding invitations. And all that work had paid off.

“This wedding is a reflection of us.” Madeleine lovingly placed the card back with the others. She lifted the lid over the top and slowly slid it down. “It’s the first day of our marriage. And I want everything to be perfect and beautiful.”

“But what happens when something goes wrong?”

Madeleine paused for a beat. “It won’t.” She stroked the lid of the invitations box. “We’re going to have the perfect wedding.”

A.J. took Madeleine’s hands and lifted them to his lips. He kissed the tips of her fingers before pulling her into his arms. “I want it to be perfect for you. But I worry about you.” He hugged her tight, his chin resting on her head. “I don’t want you to stress so much about every little detail.”

“I’m an artist. That’s what I do.” Madeleine’s arms circled A.J.’s waist. She deeply breathed in the smell of him. Even though it was only soap and laundry detergent, his unique scent always sent a thrill through her. Her heart rate slowed to a steady beat.

“Well, Madeleine Mullins, famous artist, you also agreed to

marry a poor school teacher and aspiring grad-student.” He pulled back to look at her face. “With only about two and a half months to plan the wedding.”

“Two months now.”

“Even worse.” He cupped her cheeks in his hands. “So please give yourself some grace. It’s all going to be okay. As long as we end up married at the end of that day, the rest is just icing on the cake.”

“I know it will be.” If each detail fell into place exactly right, they’d have a beautiful wedding signifying a beautiful marriage. The invitations were only the beginning.

After everything they’d been through together, Madeleine’s rocky faith journey, a broken engagement, and a rushed wedding, Madeleine *needed* their special day to be perfect.

“I’ll do everything I can to make that happen for you. I promise.” He stepped back. “And this weekend, that means meeting with Sam and Mr. Patterson about the plans for the ceremony.”

“I wish I could go with you.” Madeleine grimaced. Now that the invitations were complete, she had to address one hundred envelopes. But before that, she had an appointment with the florist and a phone call with the caterer.

“Divide and conquer.” A.J. gave her one last kiss before pulling his jacket from the hall coat rack and opening the front door. “I love you. Don’t worry.”

“I love you too.”

If he only knew how much work was still left to be done, he’d probably be as stressed as she was.