

Featherboards & Fudge Galore

Chapter 1

“The snow’s coming down again.” Haris Brooks chimed as she bumbled her way into the front door of Majacka Wood Works & Country Creations. “Bet we’ve got four inches already.” She waltzed toward the back of the store leaving snow prints in her wake with her black Labrador, Pepper, prancing happily behind her.

“I just love it!” Jenna Jacobs, Haris’ best friend and business partner at Majacka, exclaimed with glee. “What perfect weather with the Christmas Festival going on.”

“The city has managed to keep the roads clear too.” Haris confirmed. “Which means the tourists will be able to enjoy the Christmas Festival with snow on the ground.”

“Listen.” Jenna said holding up a finger. “Hear it?”

Haris stopped as she was hanging her coat up and listened then smiled. “Sleigh bells.”

“Yep.” Jenna said as she hopped over to the front windows to look outside.

Abigail Wilson, the up and coming mayor of Brumble, Kentucky, had managed to get a stable owner from two towns over to set up a small stable and house four horses for the Christmas Festival. They provided carriage rides beginning each day at four o’clock until eight o’clock each evening. In the winter, it started getting dark outside around five o’clock, but the carriage rides only went up and down Main Street then stopped at Town Park so festival goers could enter the park to enjoy the activities. It was such a nice touch for the Festival, and the stable owner was having such success with the carriage rides that he had already started talking to Abigail about opening a Carriage House over the summer to be ready for next year’s holiday season.

“Here it comes!” Jenna said waving frantically to get Haris to come over to the window to see.

Haris ran over causing Pepper to bark excitedly from her reaction.

Main Street was all aglow with Christmas twinkle lights on the decorated streetlights, and with the falling snow, the ambiance was set for the carriage to come through with its first load of passengers for the day. The sleigh bells were just enough to announce its arrival but not loud enough to be annoying.

As the carriage moved slowly down the street, pulled by two beautiful, brown horses, you could see the smiles on the family’s faces. The two little children, one sitting beside each parent, were mesmerized as they looked around.

“I wonder what those kiddos are thinking?” Haris said sighing. “I bet everything just looks so magical to them. The horses, riding in the carriage, the Christmas trees in the windows, the sleigh bells and the snow.” She sighed again. “Wish I could remember what Christmas felt like when I was a child.” She looked at Jenna. “Do you?”

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“Probably not as they are experiencing it right now, but I remember the excitement of Christmas presents on Christmas morning and going to the Christmas Eve Service at church the night before. I remember finger foods and punch after church.”

“And don’t forget about baking Christmas cookies. I know you and your mom used to do that.”

Jenna smiled. “We did. Did I ever tell you about the time she let me take a big old spoonful of icing and plop it right in my mouth?”

Haris grinned. “While you were mixing it?”

“Yep.” Jenna said. “She didn’t say a word either. Usually, she would tell me not to eat too much icing because it would make me sick.”

“She let you that time?”

“Yep. I should have known something was up when I reached for the spoon and she didn’t say anything. I stuck that spoon in my mouth thinking I’d gotten away with something big.”

“And?” Haris asked eyeing her curiously.

“It was a spoonful of white Crisco.” Jenna shivered.

“Oh man!” Haris said cringing. “Bet that was a surprise.”

“Indeed, it was.” Jenna said as she walked back over to the counter. “Do you know how hard it is to get Crisco off your teeth? Oh, my goodness, I had slimy teeth for hours after that.”

“That’s so gross. Did you eat icing after that?”

“Not in the quantity I would have wanted to, and I always took a tiny bite instead of a spoonful just to make sure it was icing.”

Haris laughed. “Has Abigail been at the park all day?”

“She has. I called her a bit ago and told her I’d be out in about thirty minutes. Kate Wisner is helping out too.”

“I’m so glad.” Haris said. “Wonder when she takes her veterinary exam.”

“January, I think.” Jenna said as she reached for her coat. She pulled her toboggan onto her head then secured her gloves before sticking her arms inside her coat.

“I can hold down the store,” Haris said as she watched Jenna, “but tell one of them to come on over for a while so they can warm up.”

“I don’t think it’s that cold this year. Ginger’s propane heaters really do the trick in keeping us at a good temperature. That was so nice of her to let us use one.”

“It really was. She is doing well with her Christmas tree lot next door, but she is so excited about the builder’s breaking ground on her new building right after the holiday. It is going to be such fun having her live in town.” Haris said as she bumped Jenna’s shoulder with her own. “And, we are going to have so much fun being roommates again for a couple of months.”

Jenna laughed. She had agreed to allow Ginger to move into her apartment above one side of Majacka while Ginger’s building was being constructed. She and Haris had been roommates in college, so moving in with Haris was a great idea to help Ginger out.

“Slumber parties every night.” Jenna said as she grabbed a basket of items to take out to their tent in Town Park. There were so many vendors this year for the Christmas Festival that the park was full of tents, each boasting a commodity to sell. This was one of their busiest seasons and all of the businesses in Brumble had a huge boost in their sales because of the Festival.

Brumble, Kentucky’s Christmas Festival had grown to be one of the biggest events in the state. Local artisans would spend months stocking up on their goods to be ready for it and tourists loved it. Majacka’s tent mainly focused on items that Haris and Jenna made such as Haris’ woodwork and Jenna’s hair scrunchies and soft-made items. Even though Majacka worked with many of the

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local artisans to sell their products in the store, during the Christmas Festival, most of the artisans would set up their own tent to display and sell their items in Town Park.

“On second thought, why you don’t ask Abigail and Kate to come on over and you and I will work the tent tonight.”

“Yeah?” Jenna asked.

“Sure. I love being able to see everyone and they have worked almost nonstop every afternoon for the past three days. The store is slower. They’d probably like the break. Once they get here, I’ll come on over.”

“Sounds like a plan.” Jenna said walking toward the door. “See you in a few.”

Haris opened the door for Jenna then stepped outside onto the sidewalk to look around. The snow was coming down heavily now and she looked up into the sky to feel it on her face. Like a child, she opened her mouth and tried to catch snowflakes letting them stick on her eyelashes. She shivered from the cold air as she hadn’t put her coat on and stepped back a little bit to feel the heat from the store. Pepper sat attentively inside the door watching her. He seemed pretty content inside in the warmth and didn’t try to come out onto the sidewalk.

“It’s beautiful, isn’t it, Pepper?” Haris said as she hugged her hands to her arms. “I just love this time of the year.” Pepper whined. “Don’t worry. I’ll put you upstairs in the apartment before I go to the park. It’s cold. You know, we should get you a sweater.” As if he understood, Pepper lowered his ears then turned around and walked back toward his bed in the office. “It would be cute.” Haris yelled after him. “Or not.” She said laughing.

She tucked her hands into her jean pockets and leaned against the doorframe of the store to watch Main Street. If a customer came by, she would welcome them inside, but most people were in the park enjoying food and festivities as well as the camaraderie with joyful festival goers.

She glanced across the street at the lot next to the bakery. The Fudge Shoppe owners had placed an enormous wooden sign on their property announcing the opening of their store, which was scheduled for April 1st, if not sooner. Haris had met the owners briefly.

They were a middle-aged couple, probably in their late fifties. They had two daughters, but both still lived in Virginia where they had moved from, at least for right now. One of the daughters had taken a job in Texas and would be moving soon. The other liked Virginia but was wanting to move closer to the coast with her husband and family. Jacob Charles and Elizabeth Charles, The Fudge Shoppe owners, were thrilled to be moving to Brumble.

Jacob Charles actually had roots already established in the area. The Charles family were descendants of Israel Walker Thomas, one of the founding fathers of Brumble, Kentucky. Of course, this was over five generations ago. Mr. Charles had explained his ancestry a little bit when she first met him but, much to her dismay, his wife had told him to save it for later because she needed his help setting up their tent. He really enjoyed history and Haris was tickled at his disappointment when his wife interrupted their conversation. She’d made a mental note to remind him to finish his story later when they had time.

A Fudge Shoppe across the street and an Ice Cream Parlor next door. Haris thought to herself. *That is going to be so lovely . . . and fattening.* The bakery was bad enough. Now, they were surrounded by sweetness. *Ah the horror of it all.* She smiled deviously.

“Hi, Haris.” Brad Wisner called as he waved from the Christmas Tree lot next door.

“Hello!” She said happily and watched him carry a Christmas tree around back to load it on a customer’s car. Brad worked for Ginger Duff, the owner of the Christmas tree farm in Brumble. He was a horticulturalist and had taken over managing the farm so Ginger could move into town and open her Ice Cream Parlor. He was the reason Ginger was staying in Jenna’s apartment. Brad,

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and his sister Kate, were living in the farmhouse on the tree farm and Brad was loving every minute of overseeing those Christmas trees.

With a little encouraging, Ginger and Brad had managed to have their customers pull around to the back alley behind the lot for their Christmas tree to be loaded onto their vehicle. Main Street was getting too crowded with the Christmas Festival and they wanted to keep everyone safe.

Brad and Kate were good people. Kate was studying for the final state examination to become a licensed veterinarian then she was going to open a veterinary clinic in Brumble. They'd never had a vet in Brumble before and the town residents were excited about it. Kate was still trying to decide on the location. There was only one empty building left on Main Street, but it was on the other end of town. She couldn't decide if she liked it down there or wanted to lease part of one of the buildings the Town Council had decided to build next to The Fudge Shoppe.

Abigail had worked with the Town Council to help Brumble start growing and she was doing an amazing job. Within a week, she had gotten them to agree to build two more buildings next to The Fudge Shoppe. One would be a smaller building but would extend from Main Street all the way back to the alley road that ran behind shops on that side of Main Street. They were going to be adding on to all of the buildings on the back side so they would have additional businesses opening up on that road. They had already changed the name of that road to Second Street. The plans were to begin additions onto the existing buildings on this side of Second Street then, afterward, begin constructing more buildings on the other side of Second Street.

The corner lot, two buildings down from The Fudge Shoppe, was going to be a bookstore or a library. It was a perfect location for that as people would be able to sit and read in the area that faced Town Park. Such a peaceful setting.

It was the building between The Fudge Shoppe and the bookstore that Kate had her eye on. She was hoping to lease one side of both the downstairs, for the vet clinic, and the upstairs, for an apartment for herself so she could live in town. She was simply waiting to see how long it was going to take for the building to be constructed. The Town Council had architectural plans already so they were considering starting to build at the same time The Fudge Shoppe and the Ice Cream Parlor broke ground to make use of the contractors who would be here already. It was a great plan and if that was the case, the building would be ready for Kate by the end of March, which would give her time to order everything she needed for set up since it often took a few months for orders like that to arrive.

Haris really hoped Kate did select that building. The rent would probably be higher than the older building on the other end of town, but Kate was already becoming a good friend to them. She was only in her twenties and would ask for advice from them and sincerely wanted guidance to help her be successful. She was just cute and kind hearted. Ginger had made the comment that she loved Brad and Ginger so much because they were like the children she'd never had. That was just Brumble though. Family looking after family. That's why Haris loved it here, although, sometimes, families could have their issues in this town.

She waved as she saw Abigail and Kate walking toward her from the other side of Main Street. They looked cold.

“You two okay?” Haris asked as she stepped inside the door to allow them to come inside to warm up.

“It’s not bad when you’re sitting by the propane heater.” Abigail said trotting over to the office so she could take off her coat. “But, when you step away from it, it gets cold quick. What is it thirty degrees now?”

“Right at it.” Kate said as she too hung up her coat.

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Haris looked toward the door. Maybe she should have stayed in the store. She got cold so quickly. She hoped she wouldn't stand so close to the propane heater that she caught on fire.

"How are the fire pits working out?" Haris asked.

"Fine. No one has gotten hurt and I think the tourists really appreciate the warmth. Plus, they just make everything so rustic and homey." Abigail said smiling.

"Thanks for letting us come in for a while." Kate said.

"Of course." Haris said pulling her toboggan on. "You've got the store until seven."

"Seriously?" Kate said rubbing her arms with her hands. "We can close up?"

Haris laughed. "I think you've spent quite a bit of time in the cold. Jenna and I can handle it. We aren't opening until one tomorrow since it's Sunday so enjoy sleeping in."

Abigail leaned heavily against the counter. "That's right. It is Sunday tomorrow. Not that I'm not enjoying the festival, but I could use a day to sleep in."

"Only seven more days to go." Kate joked.

"Right. Seven." Abigail said.

"Things are really nice this year, Abigail." Haris said. "You've done an incredible job helping with this."

"Thanks. It's amazing to see the growth. Just got to maintain our historic ambiance with the growth. Don't want to lose that, but I'm so excited with everything that's going on."

"It's amazing." Haris said as she zipped her coat up to her chin. "But, not surprising. This is a great town. It just needed a good leader to take it to the next step."

"Thanks." Abigail said smiling as she watched Haris wrap a thick scarf around her neck. With her snow boots, wool gloves and toboggan, thick coat and now scarf, Haris looked like she was ready to participate in the Iditarod Dog Sled Race in Alaska.

"What?" Haris said through the scarf covering her mouth.

"I don't mind going to the tent." Abigail said knowing how cold Haris got outside.

"Nope. I'm good." Haris said calling for Pepper so she could put him in her apartment. "As long as I'm bundled and we have that heater, all will be well." She waddled toward the stairs, put Pepper in her apartment then came back down to see Abigail and Kate still smiling at her outfit. "I'll be fine. Really."

"If you need one us, just text. Either of us would be happy to switch with you. Remember, the booths stay open an hour later than the stores. That's quite a while for you to be outside."

Haris huffed. "I know but I've got to do my share too. How far away is the Briar Patch Coffee & Cocoa tent?"

"You're in luck." Kate said. "It's three tents away from ours but on your way to Majacka. You can stop by there as you go. Luke is still there working."

Haris looked down knowing she forgot to get money out of her backpack before putting her gloves on.

"Here." Abigail said stuffing a \$5 bill in Haris' coat pocket. "Get you and Jenna a cocoa. You're going to need it."

Haris smiled. "Thank you! I was wondering how I was going to get that out of my wallet with my gloves on."

Abigail walked around the counter toward a customer who had just walked in. "I figured as much. See you tomorrow."

"Tomorrow." Haris said pointing to the ceiling with her finger then walking toward the door into the tundra that awaited her.