

An O'Brien Family Christmas (A Chesapeake Shores Novel)

By Sherryl Woods

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But the O'Brien family has other ideas, and they conspire to get Laila to join them on a Dublin holiday. It's a great time to get away from it all, but Laila has reservations about the trip. Matthew's bound to be there, and she's far from immune. What if she can't resist temptation?

Meanwhile, the O'Briens are in an uproar over matriarch Nell's unexpected romance with an old flame. Will she follow her heart, despite the risks? And will Laila discover that some risks are actually once-in-a-lifetime opportunities?

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Editorial Review

Review
"Woods always thrills with her wonderful characters, witty dialogue and warm and loving family interactions and this O'Brien family saga is no exception. Fans of this author will laugh at the crazy antics of the combined O'Brien and Riley families and fall in love as her latest couple tries to overcome their personal obstacles with the help of their families and a little Christmas magic." - RT Book Reviews

"Sherryl Woods writes emotionally satisfying novels about family, friendship and home. Truly feel-great reads!"
-#1 New York Times bestselling author Debbie Macomber

"Sherryl Woods gives her characters depth, intensity, and the right amount of humor."

-RT Book Reviews

"Infused with the warmth and magic of the season, Woods's fourth addition to her popular, small-town series once again unites the unruly, outspoken, endearing O'Brien clan in a touching, triumphant tale of forgiveness and love reclaimed."

-Library Journal on A Chesapeake Shores Christmas

"A sweet read perfect to enjoy again and again."

-RT Book Reviews on A Chesapeake Shores Christmas

"Warm, complex, and satisfying."

-Library Journal on Harbor Lights

"Timely in terms of plot and deeply emotional, the third Chesapeake Shores book is quite absorbing. The characters are handled well and have real chemistry-as well as a way with one-liners."

- RT Book Reviews on Harbor Lights

"Sparks fly in a lively tale that is overflowing with family conflict and warmth and the possibility of rekindled love."

-Library Journal on Flowers on Main

"Woods . . . is noted for appealing character-driven stories that are often infused with the flavor and fragrance of the South."
-Library Journal

About the Author

With her roots firmly planted in the South, Sherryl Woods has written many of her more than 100 books in that distinctive setting, whether in her home state of Virginia, her adopted state, Florida, or her much-adored South Carolina. Sherryl is best known for her ability to creating endearing small town communities and families. She is the New York Times and USA Today bestselling author of over 75 romances for Silhouette Desire and Special Edition.

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She'd lost the job of a lifetime because of a man!

Every time Laila Riley allowed herself to think back—how hard she'd worked to gain her father's trust, how desperately she'd wanted to prove herself capable of running the bank he'd established years ago in Chesapeake Shores, only to throw it all away for what had to have been the most ridiculous fling of all times—it made her a little crazy. She was not the kind of woman who did anything because of a man. She wasn't impetuous or flighty. She was better than that, more sure of herself, more independent.

She allowed herself a sigh. Surely she must have been out of her mind to think that she and much younger playboy Matthew O'Brien could possibly have a respectable future. That had to explain her uncharacteristic behavior.

But because she'd taken leave of her senses, here she was, back in a tiny office, doing the sort of accounting work that bored her to tears. None of the hoped-for jobs at other area banks had materialized. Her credentials were impeccable. Everyone had agreed on that. But in the current economy, no one was hiring at her level. If that changed, she'd be the first person they called. *Blah-blah-blah.* She'd seen the encouraging words for what they were—so many empty promises.

Within weeks of quitting her job in a huff at the family owned community bank, she'd started berating herself for her foolishness and resenting Matthew for his role in it. If only he hadn't been so blasted irresistible, she'd thought accusingly. So determined to win her heart. She'd been caught up in the romance of his pursuit.

Even as she was blaming him for all that charm and sex appeal, she was forced to admit that Matthew himself had been totally supportive in the aftermath of her impulsive decision to leave her father's bank. He'd even found—or created, she suspected—an accounting opening for her at his uncle Mick's architectural firm, but she didn't want his handouts. She no longer wanted anything from him, in fact, except to be left alone.

Correction: she wanted sex, but that was out of the question. Lust, combined with loneliness and envy for all the happily married couples around her, was exactly what had gotten her in trouble in the first place.

Ending their misguided relationship within weeks of quitting her job had been her only choice. If she'd also packed up and left Chesapeake Shores, it would have been the ultimate trifecta, a complete upending of her life.

But, no, she didn't quite have the will to cut the ties to the town she loved and her infuriating family. So she was stuck here, alone and miserable and working for half a dozen pitiful clients who barely kept her in the Rocky Road ice cream that lately she craved by the gallon.

"Sulking, I see," Jess O'Brien Lincoln said, braving Laila's dark mood by stepping into the office uninvited.

She looked around, took in the drab beige walls that needed paint, the tiny window with no view and the seriously scarred desk, shook her head, then sat on a chair that had seen better days. Not even the bright posters Laila had framed could save this place, and they both knew it.

"I am not sulking," Laila protested. "I'm working."

"Yes, I can see all the work piled up on your desk," Jess noted, her tone wry.

"It's on the computer," Laila informed her. "Haven't you heard? Financial records are computerized these days."

Jess tried to settle more comfortably onto the cramped office's one guest chair, gave up and shrugged. "So I hear. Not my forte."

Laila gave her friend a wary look. "Why are you here? I hope it's not on your cousin's behalf. I've told Matthew—"

Jess cut her off. "Matthew didn't send me."

Despite the convincing tone, Laila wasn't reassured. O'Briens were a sneaky lot. "Then what brings you by?"

"I can't stop in to check on a friend?"

"You could, but lately you've been so caught up in the extended honeymoon phase of your marriage that you barely leave the inn."

"Not true. I go out all the time. Will and I are not joined at the hip. He does his thing. I do mine," she declared with a nonchalance that didn't fool either of them. Once Jess had accepted her feelings for Will were real and his for her, she'd been a little gaga ever since.

"If you say so." Maybe it just seemed to Laila that everyone in Chesapeake Shores was traveling in contented pairs these days. "Okay, let's say I believe this is a purely casual visit. What's up with you? Is everything running smoothly at the inn?"

Jess's expression brightened. "We're packed, as a matter of fact. Connor gave me this idea a while back about offering specials for small business conferences, and now that the golf course has opened nearby, that's working out really well during the week. Even better, weekends are booked all the way through the holidays with tourists. The word seems to be out that the inn is a great spot for a romantic getaway. It helped that we had a huge spread in a regional travel magazine showcasing how beautiful it is here at Christmas."

Laila was genuinely impressed. "That's terrific. You should be proud of yourself, Jess. Making a success of the inn is a fantastic accomplishment."

Jess grinned. "Quite a change from my teenage screwups, huh? And that brings me to one of the things I wanted to discuss with you."

"Uh-oh, here it comes," Laila murmured, regarding her accusingly. "I knew this wasn't just some spur-of-the-moment visit."

"Okay, I'll admit it. I am on a mission," Jess confessed. "Two, as a matter of fact. One from Abby and me, and one from Susie. Neither one has a thing to do with Matthew, I promise."

Laila wasn't entirely placated. They were all O'Briens, after all, a family that was notoriously tight-knit. These days, she didn't trust a single one of them, not even her sister-in-law Abby, much less the clever friend seated across from her with the cat-that-swallowed-the-canary glint in her eyes. As for Susie, she was Matthew's sister, so her motives were suspect on more levels than Laila could possibly count.

"Okay, try me," she said grudgingly. "What do you and Abby want? And why didn't Abby call me herself?"

"She did. Several times, in fact. Apparently you haven't been returning her calls, or your brother's, or those of anyone else with the name Riley. Or O'Brien, come to think of it. Connie says she hasn't spoken to you in ages, and even though I'm a Lincoln now, you've pretty much been ignoring me, as well." She gave Laila a chiding look. "Thus the personal visit."

"I've been busy," Laila claimed defensively.

"Yeah, right," Jess replied, clearly not buying it. She waved off the subject. "We'll leave a discussion of the way you've been neglecting your friends for another time. This morning I want to talk to you about taking on the accounting duties at the inn."

Laila regarded her with deepening suspicion. Jess had started The Inn at Eagle Point, gotten herself into financial hot water even before the doors opened, and needed her older sister to bail her out. Abby, the family's financial whiz, had maintained a fierce oversight of the inn's accounting procedures and expenditures ever since. She'd put her own hand-chosen man in charge of keeping tabs on things. Jess had chafed at the strict oversight, but even she knew it had been a necessity.

"What happened to the accountant Abby brought on board?" Laila asked.

"He was okay, but it was time for a change," Jess responded blithely. "We need someone full-time, or close to full-time, anyway. Abby agrees."

Laila stiffened. "So, this change was your idea? Jess, I don't need your charity. I have clients."

"How many?" Jess asked bluntly.

"Enough."

"I doubt it. Something tells me your dispute with your father over Matthew affected more than your position at the bank. Your old clients have been slow to return, thanks to all the gossip. Am I right?"

Laila ignored the question. Jess clearly didn't expect an answer. She thought she had the situation pegged and, sadly, she was right.

Jess shook her head, her expression indignant. "I swear some people in this town are living in the Dark Ages!"

"Exactly as my father predicted," Laila admitted ruefully.

"For an idiot, he has way too much influence," Jess countered.

"Well, he was right about one thing," Laila said. "Apparently nobody trusts their money with someone who displays poor judgment in their personal life." She waved her hand dismissively. "Look, that's all water under the bridge. I've been networking like crazy the past couple of months. Everything will work out. You don't need to worry about me or make up jobs for me."

"But you're not so overburdened with work that you can't take on the inn, are you?" Jess persisted. "Tell the truth."

Laila sighed. "No."

"Then you're officially hired as of today. You can stay here in this charming space, if you choose to, or you can move into the nice, spacious office I have ready for you at the inn."

Laila wasn't quite ready to cave in. "What am I supposed to do, ditch the clients who dared to take a chance on me?"

"Of course not. You can continue handling as many private clients as you'd like to. I have no problem with them coming to the inn to meet with you." She gave Laila an encouraging grin. "There are windows, Laila. Big windows with a view of the bay. And that huge piece of expensive modern art that hung on your office wall at the bank? The one there's not even room for in here? There's a perfect spot for that, too."

"Now you're just taunting me," Laila said, imagining it. Currently that prized picture was gathering dust in a storage locker.

"All you have to do is say yes, and the office is yours, along with the job," Jess confirmed.

Laila's pride, which had taken a beating lately, kicked in. She started to refuse, just on principle, then chided herself for allowing emotion to overrule logic. She needed more work, especially if she was to keep herself sane. It had nothing to do with the income. She'd been frugal with her paychecks over the years. She could weather these lean times, at least if she limited her ice cream intake. No, it was too many empty hours weighing on her. She needed to fill them.

Lately she was spending way too much time thinking about Matthew, wondering if she'd made a mistake in cutting him out of her life once and for all. Those were the kinds of weak, mostly sex-driven thoughts that could prove dangerous.

Biting back the desire to refuse, she forced herself to nod, forced a gracious note into her voice. "Thank you."

Jess grinned at her, clearly understanding how difficult it had been for Laila to acquiesce. "You do know that working with me is no piece of cake, right? You won't be thanking me a few weeks from now. You'll be earning every penny of the generous salary Abby thinks we should pay you."

"I learned how to deal with you years ago, when you were nothing more than an annoying little brat," Laila countered. "I'll survive." Her gaze narrowed. "Maybe before I give you a final answer, though, you should tell me about Susie's mission."

"No big deal," Jess claimed casually. "One thing has nothing to do with the other. She just wants to be sure you're coming to Ireland with us for Christmas."

When Laila opened her mouth to say such a trip was impossible, Jess held up her hand. "Before you refuse, think about this. Abby, Trace and your nieces will be going. All of your friends will be there—me, Susie, Connie, Shanna, Bree and Heather. If you refuse to come, you'll be spending the holidays back here all alone with only your parents for company. Do you really want to endure an entire holiday season of their lectures about your many recent mistakes?"

Laila could envision the dreary situation Jess was describing all too clearly. She'd thought about it a hundred times since learning of the O'Briens' plan to take their grandmother back to Ireland for Christmas.

Laila had always dreamed of visiting Ireland. Anyone living around the O'Briens had heard enough tales about Dublin and the countryside to make it sound idyllic. She loved the O'Briens—one of them a little too much, as a matter of fact. The temptation to say yes was nearly overwhelming, which was why she'd spent the last month studying brochures for holiday cruises and Christmas tours of Savannah and Charleston—anything to avoid giving in and going on a trip that had emotional disaster written all over it.

"I can't," she said, proud of herself for choking out the words.

Jess actually seemed a little startled by her flat refusal. "Of course you can."

"Have you forgotten that the reason I am in this tiny little office rather than my great big impressive one at the bank is going to be in Ireland with the rest of you?"

"Matthew? Well, of course, he'll be there, but it's not about you and Matthew. It's about Gram. It's about Susie and Mack finally being able to celebrate their marriage and Susie beating cancer. Focus on all that. Hang out with the rest of us. You'll hardly have to set eyes on Matthew if you don't want to."

That, of course, was the problem. She *wanted* to set eyes on Matthew. She wanted to throw herself into his arms, drag him into the biggest, softest feather bed around and have her wicked way with him. The man was like an addiction, one she hadn't been able to kick no matter how hard she'd tried.

"Jess, you have no idea how badly I want to go with you, but I just can't. The timing is all wrong."

Her friend regarded her with a knowing expression filled with sympathy. "Because you're still in love with him, aren't you?"

"Absolutely not," Laila said emphatically. "What Matthew and I had, it had nothing to do with love."

A grin spread across Jess's face. "Who are you trying to convince, my friend? Me or yourself?"

"You, of course," Laila insisted. "I know how I feel."

"You know how you *want* to feel," Jess corrected. "But it's not working out so well for you, is it? You haven't gotten him out of your system. Not even close."

Laila wanted to deny it, but Jess was right. Since she couldn't utter an outright lie, she said, "Look, I agreed to work for the inn. Take your one victory and go."

Jess dutifully stood up, started for the door, then turned back. "You know he's miserable, don't you?" she said softly, the parting shot coming as she hesitated in the doorway. "I know my cousin has his faults. Heaven knows, he has a history of being a huge flirt, a player, whatever you want to call it, but it was different with you, Laila. It really was. And having both of you miserable when it doesn't need to be that way doesn't make a lot of sense to me."

"It's the way it has to be," Laila reiterated, unmoved. "We never should have gotten involved in the first place. The whole relationship was crazy, like some kind of fantasy. Matthew's years younger than I am. It never would have lasted. I was just a temporary infatuation for him. If I hadn't broken it off, eventually he would have. It was better this way."

"Says who?"

"I say it," Laila told her, holding her friend's gaze with a steady look.

Jess clearly didn't believe her. And Laila was having a hard time convincing herself. She knew, though, that she had to. It was the only way she'd ever be able to move on with her life.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jim Moffett:

Here thing why this kind of An O'Brien Family Christmas (A Chesapeake Shores Novel) are different and reputable to be yours. First of all reading a book is good nevertheless it depends in the content than it which is the content is as delicious as food or not. An O'Brien Family Christmas (A Chesapeake Shores Novel) giving you information deeper as different ways, you can find any reserve out there but there is no publication that similar with An O'Brien Family Christmas (A Chesapeake Shores Novel). It gives you thrill reading journey, its open up your own personal eyes about the thing this happened in the world which is maybe can be happened around you. You can easily bring everywhere like in playground, café, or even in your technique home by train. If you are having difficulties in bringing the published book maybe the form of An O'Brien Family Christmas (A Chesapeake Shores Novel) in e-book can be your option.

Courtney Cook:

Playing with family in a park, coming to see the water world or hanging out with close friends is thing that usually you might have done when you have spare time, and then why you don't try point that really opposite from that. One activity that make you not experiencing tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you already been ride on and with addition associated with. Even you love An O'Brien Family Christmas (A Chesapeake Shores Novel), you are able to enjoy both. It is very good combination right, you still want to miss it? What kind of hangout type is it? Oh can occur its mind hangout guys. What? Still don't buy it, oh come on its known as reading friends.

David Manning:

Is it an individual who having spare time and then spend it whole day by means of watching television programs or just lying on the bed? Do you need something new? This An O'Brien Family Christmas (A Chesapeake Shores Novel) can be the reply, oh how comes? A fresh book you know. You are consequently out of date, spending your free time by reading in this new era is common not a geek activity. So what these publications have than the others?

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