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Mathis' "Christmas charity" (book review)

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Book Reviews



Mathis, S.G. (2018). *Christmas charity*. Colorado Springs, CO: WordWorks. 119 pp. \$7.99. ISBN 9780578207797

In *Christmas Charity*, Susan is surprised at dinner when her parents announce they have arranged her marriage to Patrick O'Neill, a widower – who has a 9-year-old daughter, Lizzy – in less than a week. Neither Susan nor Lizzy are particularly excited about the match. Susan must prepare to leave her large family, her teaching job, and her country to begin a new life. While Susan adjusts soon enough to being a wife as she grows to love Patrick, she quickly discovers her biggest challenge in her marriage will be Patrick's daughter. Patrick feels guilty about correcting Lizzy's behavior when she has already suffered the loss of her mother, and Susan struggles to win Lizzy over. Susan's elderly neighbor, Mabel, advises Susan that the answer is charity. Easier said than done, Susan's attempts to show love to Lizzy fail as she tries to control her anger at the girl's behavior and hurtful words. It is only when Susan shows unselfish concern for Lizzy's well-being that their relationship begins to improve.

The author, Susan Mathis, gives credit to her great-grandparents for inspiring the story. Set in 1864 in Canada and New York, this novella offers a peek into the Irish immigrant experience, such as their Christmas traditions, and an arranged marriage. Though Patrick O'Neill does not seem to lack for money, Susan's family may feel the strain of raising and feeding so many children, as they seem to be intent on Susan marrying. The primary focus of the novella, however, is the relationships: between Susan and her immediate family, Susan and her husband and neighbor, and finally, Susan and Lizzy. Mathis realistically describes a child deeply in need of a mother, but who also rebels at her new stepmother. At the same time, Mathis powerfully describes a young woman who is trying to navigate complicated relationships with both a new husband and a new stepdaughter.

This novella is appropriate for libraries with historical fiction or seasonal collections. Readers of Janette Oke's *When Calls the Heart* and similar historical fiction series will appreciate the gentle romance and relationships in *Christmas Charity*.

Reviewer

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