

Do You See

What I See?

A Smoky Mountain Christmas
Book 1

DELIA LATHAM

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Do You See What I See?

**A Smoky Mountain Christmas
Book 1**

Delia Latham



About A Smoky Mountain Christmas



Claude Buchanan is turning 80. Ida Buchanan wants her husband to have an 80th birthday he'll never forget. His one request is for all of their children and grandchildren to be there for the party. They have four sons, and each one has a daughter—the heroines in each of the novellas. The cousins all share the last name of Buchanan.

All four young women left Gatlinburg, Tennessee in the last few years—for reasons specific to each—and moved to another area or state. For that reason, they don't want to return for the party. But because they love their grandparents, they do. Returning home forces each young woman to deal with what caused her to leave in the first place, and in each case, opens the door to true love.

The birthday party takes place in Granddaddy and Granny Buchanan's barn on Christmas Eve, and each of the four novellas end that same day, just prior to the party, which is featured in the epilogue accompanying the last book in the series.

Be sure to purchase all four books for the full Smoky Mountain Christmas experience. Happy reading!

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Do You See What I See?
by Delia Latham

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales, is entirely coincidental.

DO YOU SEE WHAT I SEE?
SERIES: A SMOKY MOUNTAIN CHRISTMAS
SERIES NUMBER: 1
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Unless noted, Scripture references are from the New International Version (NIV).
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Dedication

To my children.
May they all experience the magic of
true love, and never discount
the joy to be found in family.

Other books by this author:

Goldeneyes

Yesterday's Promise

Destiny's Dream

Kylie's Kiss

Gypsy's Game

Treehouse

Jewels for the Kingdom

Lexi's Heart

Love in the WINGS

Jingle Belle

At First Sight

Co-authored with Tanya Stowe:

A Cowboy Christmas

Lea's Gift

Love Comes Lately (A Pelican Book Group FREE read)

The following anthologies contain works by this author:

RED (A weekly devotional. [FREE through](#)

[PelicanBookGroup.com.](#))

31 Devotions for Writers

Sweet Freedom a la Mode

Praise for *Yesterday's Promise*

This is the kind of book to curl up with and continue reading all afternoon. I absolutely loved it. The characters, the writing—all beautifully done. Such an emotional tale tenderly told. Tell your friends, tell your family. They will want to read this book.

~Long and Short Reviews

I don't want to give too much away of this great story. Delia Latham crafted believable characters and situations where we can see God's glory shine by His keeping of His promises to us. If you want a great read for a hot summer day, this is a must read!

~Sherry Shae
Amazon Customer

Praise for *Destiny's Dream*

... A story with a nice blend of humor and romance and a neat little thread of intrigue. You won't want to miss this first installment in the Solomon's Gate Series. Latham knows how to weave a wonderful story and balance it with biblical truths to inspire and challenge the reader. *Destiny's Dream* belongs on every reader's bookshelf.

~ Sharlene MacLaren
Bestselling Author

Destiny's Dream guides readers on a journey from tears to smiles, from longing to fulfillment, and from white-knuckled suspense to happy sighs of contentment. An engaging tale with all the elements of a satisfying story.

~ Virginia Smith
Author of *Third Time's a Charm*

Destiny's Dream will leave readers looking over their shoulders to catch a glimpse of their own guardian angel's wings.

~ Bonnie Winters, author of *Daughter of Lot*
and *Daughter of Scarlet*

Praise for *Kylie's Kiss*

I highly recommend KYLIE's KISS to anyone who appreciates an author who knows how to create characters that you are assured to fall in love with; this book touched me in ways I never knew possible.

~Suzie Housley for
Romance Junkies

The book flows so smoothly that you can't wait to read the next chapter. Ms. Latham skillfully adds details, great character development and realistic dialogue that you feel you are right there with Kylie and Rick and all the wonderful characters. I highly recommend *Kylie's Kiss* and look forward to reading the next book in this series. Reading Ms. Latham's stories are a real treat!

~Joanne Troppello
Mustard Seed Network Marketing

Delia Latham has such a gift for crafting plots, and heroes and heroines that are as real as your next door neighbor, and deeply engaging. *Kylie's Kiss* is book 2 of the Solomon's Gate Series, and it touched my heart because it features struggles that anyone can relate to - punctuated by an exclamation point of faith that never fails to reach me as a reader.

~Marianne Evans
Bestselling Author

Praise for *Gypsy's Game*

...one of the best books I have ever read. I love the way Jal expresses his love to Gypsy, so like Christ loves us unconditionally. And I love the way the book does not waste a lot of space describing scenery or having characters go on long "thinking journeys". There is so much interaction and dialogue between Jal and Gypsy and the story is so beautiful that I never want it to end. The best of the three in the Solomon's Gate series.

~Klennbenn
Amazon Customer

Romance with a difference as the first comes love, then comes marriage is turned on its head. There is nothing not to like about this book. The pages turn by themselves as the story unfold in glorious technicolour. Seriously, technicolour. This one pulls you in and leaves you wanting more.

~Clare Revell
Author of the Monday's Child series

Psalm 119:18 (NIV)—Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.

*Matthew 13:13— This is why I speak to them in parables:
“Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.*

Chapter 1



“I do not. Want. To go.”

Laramie Buchanan forced the words through clenched teeth. They emerged somewhere between a hiss and a growl.

Her friend Sydney Traynor studied a soap display, clearly bent on making it better than perfect. Business partners and roommates, the young women were also lifelong friends and shared a relationship as close as sisters.

Sydney spoke over her shoulder, her critical gaze still fixed on the gorgeous grouping of scented bath products. “Why are you so upset about this trip, Lari? It’s your Granddaddy’s eightieth birthday—that’s a big deal. And you haven’t been home in three years. What’s the problem?”

As if you don’t know. Laramie drew in a lungful of air and tried to calm her screaming nerves. *If I react like this just thinking about Evan, what would I do if I ran into him back home?*

“I’m not upset.” She placed a fisted hand in the small of her back and stretched backward. “I just don’t want to go.”

Slamming the lid down on a case of Christmas Coconut candles, Laramie took half a minute to appreciate the whiff of sweet coconut with a crisp hint of peppermint that wafted upward with the displaced air. She dragged strapping tape across the top, snapped it off on the serrated edge of the dispenser and turned to look at her friend.

Syd turned from admiring her handiwork—stunning, as always—to raise one disbelieving eyebrow. “Who do you think you’re foolin’, girlfriend?” She treated Laramie to a saucy little Syd-style head jive, and shook a long brown finger under her nose. “I know you! You can’t tell me you don’t miss your Mama.” She swung back to the display, which Laramie doubted could be improved upon, and kept talking. “And your Daddy. And those sweet grandparents of yours too. You ask me, it’s *time* you get your little white hiney back home for a visit.”

Laramie laughed out loud. Her skin did tend toward the porcelain side of white, while Syd’s resembled smooth caramel silk. Her own blue eyes were in complete contrast to her friend’s chocolate brown ones, her curves not quite as full as the other girl’s. But Syd was right—they knew each other well, and couldn’t have been closer if they’d been born to the same parents.

“Fine, then go with me.”

“Did I say I wouldn’t?”

At last satisfied with her display, Sydney picked up the purchase order Laramie was working on. She grabbed another packing crate and started checking off items as she tucked them inside. “My folks are off to Hawaii for Christmas this year, and if you’re going somewhere, then I’m coming too. So just tell them we’ll be there for Granddaddy’s birthday. And Christmas, of course!” She grinned, and perfect white teeth shone like pearls against naturally rosy lips.

Laramie laughed. “Well, yeah, since Granddaddy’s birthday is Christmas Eve.”

“And isn’t it nice that he won’t be the only one opening presents?”

They giggled like schoolgirls, and a comfortable silence fell as the two women worked hard and fast.

Christmas orders had begun to arrive by the boxful. This meant good things for their soap-and-candle company, but it kept the two of them hopping.

They had opened WaxScents three years earlier when Laramie, heartbroken and crushed by betrayal, ran away from painful memories, leaving behind her home and family near Gatlinburg.

The Traynors had moved from there to the Dyersburg area—on the opposite end of the state—eight months before Laramie joined them. After her arrival, the girls got themselves a cute little apartment and a couple of unfulfilling nine-to-five jobs. One evening, tired and disillusioned with their boring lives, they cooked up a plan to make good use of the skills they’d learned back in Gatlinburg. The concept for WaxScents was born, and Syd’s parents believed in it enough to provide financing.

Evan Lassiter still lived in Gatlinburg, which meant Laramie did not. She couldn’t bring herself to face the man who had turned her life upside down on the day they were supposed to say, “I do.”

Her hands continued to wrap and pack candles and soap, but her mind wandered back to that awful moment of truth. Thank God Syd had been with her!

As her maid of honor, Syd would have been one of only two guests at the ceremony. Laramie had never met Evan’s brother and best man, who would have been the sole remaining witness to their nuptials. Having just finished a second term in the Navy, Ethan had been scheduled to arrive the morning of the wedding.

“Oops!” Emerging from her bitter reverie to realize the order was for holly and hyacinth, Laramie snagged the bayberry scented soap she’d wrapped and tucked into the box. She had to

get her mind on what she was doing, but having started down Memory Lane, it was difficult to turn off the flood of reminiscence that threatened to drown her.

“OK. That’s it.” Sydney stood up straight, grabbed Laramie by the arm, and headed for the door. “Talk time, girlfriend.”

“We cannot leave!” Laramie tried without much success to pull loose from her friend’s grasp. “We still have two more orders to fill, and UPS will be here soon.”

Sydney didn’t even slow down. “We have all day to pack these orders, Laramie Buchanan. We’ll get ’em done. If they don’t go out today, they’ll go tomorrow, and I’m pretty sure the world won’t end if it comes to that.”

She gave Laramie a firm shove out the door ahead of her, then turned to lock up. “Ice cream, that’s what we need. And a nice little chat about things you don’t like to talk about.”

Laramie climbed into the passenger side of her friend’s pride and joy. Syd had awarded herself with the little sports car when WaxScents brought them a hefty profit their second year in business, and she treated the vehicle like a pampered child.

“Whoa! No need to slam that door, girl. It shuts just fine and dandy without all that brutality.” Sydney started the engine and glowered at Laramie, who bit back a grin. “Watch yourself with my baby.”

“Yes, ma’am.” Laramie quipped, and then rested her head on the bright purple headrest. “Oh, Syd, I don’t know. I do miss my family—so much! But I’m not ready to see Evan.”

“Well, then don’t see him.”

“You know better than that. He moves in the same circles the Buchanans do, and there’s no way on earth I’ll get by without running into him somewhere.”

“Well, maybe you need to run into him. You ask me, it’s about time you give that man a hefty piece of your mind, after what he did to you.”

A smile tugged at one corner of Laramie's lips. "I'd rather hear *you* give him what-for. You're so good at it!" She tapped on her temple and raised a brow. "And I need to keep what little of my mind I still have."

Sydney's hair, straightened and lengthened with extensions, swung around her face when she nodded her head. Hard. "Well, then let me at him! Mr. Evan Lassiter won't know what hit him after this sistah gets finished with his white hide." She screeched around a corner, and Laramie bit her lip and took a firm hold on the armrest. The other girl's voice grew ever more strident, and as it increased in volume, so did her "baby" in speed. "I cannot believe that man! Takin' some little playthang into *your* bridal boudoir—on *your* weddin' day? *Somebody* oughta tell that no-good philanderer a thing or two."

She whipped into a parking space at the local ice cream parlor and jerked her keys out of the ignition before turning to pin Laramie under a heated glare. "And if you won't do it, I'll be more than happy to handle it *myself*."

They walked inside and ordered, then found a table in a quiet corner. Laramie glanced around the mostly empty room, glad they'd come during a lull. Certain times of day, this place buzzed with activity. She knew Sydney. Having worked herself into a fit of righteous indignation, she wouldn't back off the conversation they'd begun just because they had an audience. Laramie could only be grateful they didn't.

Reaching across the table, the other girl gave Laramie's hand a squeeze. Her dark brown gaze held a whole heart full of love. "You can't let Evan keep you away from your family forever. He's not worth it, and it's making you miserable."

"I know you're right. I just don't know if I can—" She broke off as a teenaged boy placed their orders on the table.

When he walked away, Syd took her hand again and said a quick prayer of thanks. That little ritual was nothing new to Laramie...her family had always prayed before meals. But today

the quiet mumble of her friend's voice seemed specifically geared to rake her nerves. Why should she give thanks to a God who allow such pain into her life?

"Dig in, girlfriend." Her brief grace said and done, Sydney dipped her spoon into a scoop of chocolate mint ice cream.

Laramie slid a bite of white chocolate cherry into her mouth. "Mmmm, this is too good to not be a sin!"

Sydney moaned. "Mmm-mmm-mmm. You got that right!" She opened her eyes and gazed straight into Laramie's. "You haven't talked to Evan once since...that day, have you?"

"And I don't plan to start now." She used her napkin to dab at the corner of her mouth. "What could he possibly say to explain what we saw?"

"Well, I'd sure like to hear him try." Her friend shook her head. "Oh, honey...you were so excited on the drive up to the resort. And that cabin you all rented was just adorable!" She heaved a sigh. "I don't know, maybe things worked out for the best. Your folks would've been mighty upset if you'd cheated them out of being at your wedding."

Laramie shrugged. "We'll never know, will we? Evan and I wanted to avoid all the hoopla that goes along with most weddings. We wanted to enjoy it and have it be about *us*, not about making the society page of the *Smoky Mountain Sentinel*." She made a wry face. "At least, that's what I wanted. Apparently Evan didn't want a wedding at all."

"Well, it's his loss." Sydney laid her spoon down and stopped eating for a moment. She did that often, and swore it was how she managed to stay slim and still eat anything she wanted. "We were giggling like a couple of silly kids when we got there and climbed that little hill to your cabin. What was it called? Angel's Cloud, or something like that. Those cabins had the sweetest names."

"Angel's Rest," Laramie supplied, then clamped her mouth shut, having no desire to take part in Syd's trip into that part of

their past.

“Well, they didn’t look like angels, Evan and his little sidepiece.” Sydney shuddered. “If not for that braying laughter of hers, we might have walked right in on them.”

Lari couldn’t imagine why the other girl was pulling out these painful memories. “Look, Syd, I don’t—”

“You had the key in your hand, all set to open that door, when we heard them in there.”

Laramie swallowed hard. “Yeah, we both ducked down under the window like a couple of thieves.”

Sydney laughed a little, but the sound lacked any real amusement. “Weird, how that happened, isn’t it? And convenient that they’d left the blinds up a couple inches.”

Laramie’s throat felt as dry and prickly as a high-desert cactus. “Just enough for us to see them all tangled up in each other.” She pushed her ice cream away. When she spoke again, she heard something in her voice she didn’t like—something hard and bitter. “Did he plan on marrying me, right there in that room, that night? And then taking me to that same bed?” She shuddered.

Sydney pushed her own half-eaten treat aside and took both of Laramie’s hands. “Judging from what we saw that day, God kept you from making a bad mistake. I wouldn’t have believed Evan capable of such deception—but we *saw* it with our own eyes. You’re better off alone than married to a man like that.”

“I know.” She pulled in a lungful of air and huffed it back out, her eyes closed as she shook her head. “Oh, Syd, I’ve never been so crushed. If you hadn’t been there....”

“Well, I was there. Like I said, God had your back that day, girlfriend.”

“Thank you for bringing me home with you and taking care of me while I didn’t want to live.” Laramie swiped at her damp eyes.

“What’choo talkin’ ’bout, girlfriend?” Her friend’s exaggerated speech pattern made Laramie smile through the tears that burned her eyes. “We take care of each other.”

Syd stood, talking while she piled dirty bowls and silverware onto a tray. “We’re a team, you and me. Look at us, makin’ pretty little soaps and candles that sell like nobody’s business. We’re *family*, and family sticks together.”

Laramie laughed, shoving aside the sadness their conversation had awakened in her. Syd was right. Marrying a man who couldn’t even be faithful on his wedding day would have ruined her life. He certainly wouldn’t have been true to her after the wedding.

Her friend had something else right, too. Laramie missed her family. She longed to feel Mama’s soft arms around her, and Daddy’s gentle tugs on her hair when she snuggled onto his lap—a habit she’d never outgrow. She yearned to hug her Granddaddy, with that gruff exterior that fooled nobody; and to watch Granny bustle around her kitchen, laying out a spread that could feed every hungry man in three counties.

And McKenna. Her little sister—a late, unexpected gift in her parents’ lives—had been eleven when Laramie left Gatlinburg. She’d be fourteen now, a young lady. No doubt she was looking at boys, might even have her eyes on one special guy she dreamed of knowing better. Laramie had missed watching that happen. Missed giving Keni advice and teaching her things big sisters are supposed to teach.

And for what? A man who wasn’t worth it.

Having shared her heart, Sydney drove at a more sedate pace on the way back to WaxScents. She maneuvered the busy streets in silence, knowing without being told that enough had been said.

When Laramie pulled out her cell phone and started punching numbers, Sydney’s satisfied smile spoke volumes.

“Mama? It’s Laramie.”

“Lari! I didn’t expect you to call back so soon.”

She swallowed an unexpected lump and cleared her throat. “I know. I—I wanted to hear your voice.”

Her mother made an odd little sound and Laramie could almost see her dabbing at her eyes with a corner of some brightly colored apron. “It’s good to hear yours too, dear.”

“I’ve been thinking. You can tell Granddaddy I’ll be there for his birthday.” She reached across the seat and took Syd’s hand as her friend parked in front of WaxScents. “Syd’s coming with me.”

**Thank you for reading this
complimentary first chapter.**

**If you liked it, use the following
links to purchase, and read the rest
of Lari’s story.**

[Amazon](#)...[CreateSpace](#)