



SHADOWS
on a
MAINE
CHRISTMAS



AN ANTIQUE PRINT MYSTERY

by Lea Wait



BOOKS BY
LEA WAIT

IN THE MAGGIE SUMMER
“SHADOWS” ANTIQUE PRINT MYSTERY SERIES

Shadows at the Fair

Shadows on the Coast of Maine

Shadows on the Ivy

Shadows at the Spring Show

Shadows of a Down East Summer

Shadows on a Cape Cod Wedding

Shadows on a Maine Christmas

NOVELS FOR CHILDREN & YOUNG ADULTS

Stopping to Home

Seaward Born

Wintering Well

Finest Kind

Uncertain Glory

Shadows on a Maine Christmas

AN ANTIQUE PRINT MYSTERY

Lea Wait

2014 · PERSEVERANCE PRESS | JOHN DANIEL & COMPANY
PALO ALTO | MCKINLEYVILLE, CALIFORNIA

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A Perseverance Press Book
Published by John Daniel & Company
A division of Daniel & Daniel, Publishers, Inc.
Post Office Box 2790
McKinleyville, California 95519
www.danielpublishing.com/perseverance

Distributed by SCB Distributors (800) 729-6423

Book design by Eric Larson, Studio E Books, Santa Barbara, www.studio-e-books.com

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Wait, Lea.

Shadows on a Maine Christmas : an antique print mystery / by Lea Wait.

pages cm

ISBN 978-1-56474-547-7 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Man-woman relationships Fiction. 2. Murder—Investigation—Fiction.

3. Christmas stories. I. Title.

PS3623.A42S5348 2014

813'.6—dc23

2014008706

*To the many readers
who have become Maggie's friends and followers*

Shadows on a Maine Christmas

1 | **Poinsettia pulcherrima.** Plate XXXI from Volume I of *Les plantes à feuillage coloré*, written by English botanist Edward (E.J.) Lowe (1825–1900) assisted by W. Howard, and translated from the English by publisher K. Rothschild: Paris, 1867. Beautiful detailed color lithograph of a single poinsettia flower and two leaves. Based on Lowe's *Beautiful-Leaved Plants, being a Description of the Most Beautiful-Leaved Plants in Cultivation in this Country*, London: Groombridge, 1864. 7 x 10.5 inches. Price: \$60.

CHRISTMAS ON THE coast of Maine with the man she loved. It sounded like an ad for a 1940s romantic movie starring Cary Grant and Katharine Hepburn.

Maggie's students and colleagues who'd heard her holiday plans had immediately assumed engagement bells as well as Christmas bells were in the offing. She'd found herself fending off everything from knowing smiles to slightly off-color jokes to well-meaning high fives.

Three people volunteered to take Winslow, her cat, for the holidays. Neighbors had promised to watch her house, and even plow her driveway and shovel her sidewalk should Somerset County, New Jersey be blessed with a white Christmas. Some days even Maggie herself had felt she was getting into the spirit. Admittedly, a few bedtime glasses of sherry had also helped with late-night nerves.

And after all, she told herself on those sleepless nights, she loved Will. He said he loved her. And wasn't this the season for love to conquer all? (Or was that Valentine's Day?)

Okay. So they had a few issues to iron out.

She was set on adopting a child. In fact, last week she'd heard she was now officially on her agency's waiting list for "one girl or two sisters between the ages of five and nine." Not news she'd shared with Will. Not yet.

Because although he might love her, he'd been clear that fatherhood was not for him.

And then there was the little issue of geography. He'd moved to Maine to care for his ninety-two-year-old Aunt Nettie. Maggie lived in New Jersey.

So, yes, they had a few lifestyle issues to work through.

Maggie kept replaying the moment he'd asked her to marry him when they'd been on Cape Cod in October.

And even more vividly, the moment after that when she'd told him she was having her adoption home study done. The moment he'd backed off. Way off. As in, slamming the door and leaving, off.

Nothing—not even the death of her husband two years ago—had felt as awful. But of course, Michael's accidental death had also been the end of his philandering. Death had just made a dying relationship officially over. Her experience with Michael was one of the reasons it had taken so long for her to finally trust Will.

Trust him to love her. But whether their love could survive their both being independent individuals with separate dreams and responsibilities? That was still open to question.

Her right hand, which was clenched on the steering wheel, still wore the R-E-G-A-R-D ring Will had given her. It was their private token of friendship; a Victorian ring with stones spelling out the sentiment they'd felt when they were two antique dealers (she specialized in prints; he in kitchen and fireplace wares) getting to know each other. The Ruby, Emerald, Garnet, Amethyst, Ruby, and Diamond still glittered, despite today's low December clouds.

She'd offered the ring back to him in October. Her heart raced remembering that moment. What if he'd taken it? What if he'd driven back to Maine and they'd never seen each other again?

He'd refused the ring. But she'd almost had to beg for another chance. Promised she'd never keep a major secret, like her adoption plans, from him again. Promised she wouldn't put crazy distractions like trying to solve murders ahead of being with him.

Now it was two months later. No murders had presented themselves, thank goodness, but she hadn't given up her dream of opening her home and heart to a child who needed her.

This visit, this Maine Christmas, would be their test. Was their relationship going to work?

Could she give up her desire to be a parent? Or could Will find it in his heart to love a child?

No; this wasn't going to be a simple, romantic Christmas in Maine. But she was on her way.

2

Home For The Holidays. Wood engraving from January 2, 1869 *Harper's Weekly*; Illustrator: JW. (Full name unknown.) Black-and-white illustration of wooden suburban railway station ("Valley Station") platform filled with elegantly dressed people of all ages greeting each other; stacks of trunks and carpetbags are waiting to be picked up. Train in distance pulling away from station. 15.5 x 11 inches. Price: \$55.

YEARS AGO, when Maggie had first started her antique print business, she'd named it "Shadows." That's what old prints had always seemed to her: shadows; reflections; treasured pictures that gave today's viewers a window to the past. A glimpse, perhaps, of the people and places they'd come from.

Tonight, as Maggie first saw Waymouth, Maine in Christmas attire, it seemed as though the classic holiday scenes in her print inventory had come to life.

Despite its being close to midnight, the little town on the Madoc River was bright with holiday lights. The Congregational church overlooking Main Street was illuminated, and cascading lights on the Christmas tree on the Green were reflected by the snow below it. Pine trees strung with tiny white lights tied to the bases of street lamps leading down toward the river made the simple drive into town magical. Windows and doors of homes on both sides of the street were decorated with wreaths, many illuminated with welcoming candles or lights.

Disney couldn't have planned it better if he'd designed this town for the Magic Kingdom. The perfect New England village. Although everyone knew the Magic Kingdom's perfection was a façade. Not everyone behind those doors was following a script with a happy ending built in.

Maggie turned left on a side street, toward where Will would be waiting.

She pulled into the driveway in back of Aunt Nettie's familiar small sedan, and hardly had time to remove her keys before Will was outside her van door.

"Where have you been? I expected you two hours ago. I wanted to call or text, but I didn't want you answering while you were driving if the weather or the traffic—"

And then she was in his arms, his soft beard against her cheek, and the end of the sentence didn't matter.

At least for a minute or two. Then reality set in. "It's freezing cold and snowing!" Maggie said, shivering despite his arms around her.

Will laughed. "It's actually below freezing—about five degrees. And of course it's snowing. You're in Maine, in December. Where're your bag and your coat? We'll get you in the house. Don't worry. We're fully equipped for the modern world. We even have central heating."

Central heating? She hadn't considered the possibility they wouldn't have it. What other possibilities about this week hadn't she thought of?

"How about hot chocolate?" Maggie shivered, as she pointed out her duffel bag and her coat, and balanced six large tins of Christmas cookies in her arms.

"Chocolate's possible. I know my lady. I've even got the Maine solution to all things winter—Allen's Coffee Brandy," said Will, as he hustled Maggie up the steps to the porch.

Maggie wrinkled her nose. "No coffee. Even in brandy. Hot chocolate, please. Maybe with cognac?"

"You didn't think to wear boots?" Will stared at her sneakered feet.

"They're in the van," she said. She focused on getting to the front door before she froze to death. "I'll find them tomorrow."

"Good," said Will, close behind her. "I was afraid I might have to totally outfit you."

The kitchen was as welcoming as it had been in summer, and almost as warm.