

# Modern Magi

A CHRISTMAS  
NOVEL

CAROL LYNN  
PEARSON

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*The*  
*Modern Magi*  
*a christmas novel*



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## Chapter One

*Annabelle Perkins* was on the mailing list of Tour the World Travel Agency, located downtown. She had asked to have her name taken off most of the other lists she had been on—Time/Life record collections, Fireside Theatre, even *Guideposts*, and the little catalogs that offered address stickers and key-chain flashlights. She was a serious saver and didn't want to be tempted to spend money on frills. But she kept her name on the mailing list of Tour the World because that's what she was saving up for: a trip to the Holy Land.

There's not much to tell about Annabelle, not much to know, really. She was a very average woman, fifty-seven years old, who grew up and went to school in Cincinnati. Her only brother had died in Vietnam. Her father had owned a restaurant, and her mother had taught school. But in the last five years, first her father, then her mother had passed away. Since Annabelle had never married or had children, after her parents died, she was very much alone.

There were two things Annabelle inherited that she counted as her most prized possessions. The first was a glove that her father claimed once belonged to Theodore Roosevelt. The story was that President Roosevelt had been in Cincinnati and had eaten at her father's restaurant. When he left, there was a glove under his chair, and her father had decided to keep the glove and send President Roosevelt a contribution of twenty dollars for his next campaign fund, reasoning that twenty dollars would buy *two* pairs of gloves.

"Yes sir," he would say to guests at the restaurant about the glove that was framed with a picture of the president, "that glove was on the hand of Teddy Roosevelt himself, who, by the way, said our black-bean soup was the best he'd ever tasted. Could we start you with a bowl of that for your lunch?"

The other prized possession was even more prized, for it belonged to Jesus. It was a small bronze lamb, lying down with its sweet little nose resting on its right foot and its eyes looking up at you mournfully.

“Do you know why this little lamb is so sad?” Annabelle remembered her mother asking when she was little. It became a favorite question that would begin a favorite story: “Because all of his friends went to Bethlehem to see the baby Jesus, but he got lost and ended up in the hill country and missed everything. *But . . .*,”—and here her mother always paused for effect and snuggled Annabelle down into the blankets—“*someday* this little lamb is going to go to Bethlehem, did you know that? And this little lamb is going to be a gift for the baby Jesus. Have I told you about the baby Jesus?”

Of course she had, dozens of times, but Annabelle always looked at her with wide eyes and said, “Tell me.”

And her mother would tell Annabelle once again about the baby Jesus, whether it was Christmastime or not. But, of course, she told it more often and more fervently just before Christmas—told of the little baby come to teach the world how to love, how to forgive, how to become like he was, like God. And every time she told the story she stroked the little bronze lamb and said, “This little lamb is going to go to Bethlehem one day, for this little lamb is going to be our gift to the Christ child, just as the wise men gave gold and frankincense and myrrh. This little lamb—you think it’s bronze, don’t you? But it’s really gold, as gold as the gold of the Magi. And because Jesus sees how things really are instead of just how they look, he will know this is gold and very valuable. Just as he looks at us and knows how really wonderful we are even though we look ordinary. And when we give this gift to Jesus, we’re going to hear him say, ‘Thank you.’ You can hear Jesus talk, you know. If you listen hard, you can hear him. Sometimes I hear Jesus talking in my mind, telling me things.”

So that was how Annabelle knew that the lamb belonged to Jesus. And because of the way her mother’s voice sounded whenever she talked about Jesus, Annabelle knew that her mother loved him very much, and even more, she knew that he loved them very much and that the gifts he had given them could never be repaid.

Annabelle especially liked to hear her mother talk about how Jesus saw people the way they really were, instead of how they looked. She knew that when Jesus looked at her, he saw a perfect person, not someone who had a heart problem, someone who had had rheumatic fever as a child, which led to endocarditis that had affected her mitral valves and left her with a systolic murmur, which meant that she

had to be more careful than most people and not overdo it. Jesus didn't care about any of that. He knew that the real Annabelle and her heart were perfect.

She never quite knew how much was pretend about her mother saying that they would take the lamb to Jesus one day. But after her mother died, Annabelle was going through the family things, and her hands were suddenly holding the little bronze-but-gold lamb. She heard herself saying out loud, "This little lamb *is* going to go to Bethlehem, and *I* am going to take it there. It will be my gift to the Christ child. From me and from my mother, who loved him so much and never got to go."

And then Annabelle sat down, breathless and frightened, and drank some lemonade. She was not accustomed to doing remarkable things. In the sixth grade, she had gotten the Citizen of the Month award. That was special. In high school, she had sung in the choir and had gotten a certificate of excellence, but everyone in the choir got one—so it wasn't special. And one time, she had marched in an antiwar demonstration. Well, she was just crossing the street when they came along, and she got swept up in it; and thinking about her brother in Vietnam, she walked with them for three blocks and felt herself very brave and remarkable. But—going out of the country to the Holy Land? Actually going to Bethlehem? She found the little bronze lamb, and he looked at her with his mournful eyes. . . .

Annabelle breathed deeply, got up, and opened the telephone directory.

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