

Christine Lavin & The Mistletones

"Polkadot Pancakes"

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Once upon a time there were two brothers, Ian and Noah. Ian is the big brother, Noah is the little brother. They are as different as brothers can be: Ian is quiet, Noah is noisy. Ian sleeps on the top bunk, Noah sleeps on the bottom bunk. Ian likes to think hard before he decides to do something, Noah does something, then thinks about it later. You get the idea: these are two very different brothers. But there is one thing they agree upon: they both LOVE chocolate chip pancakes. One happy Sunday morning while eating them Ian said to Noah, "Look! The chocolate chips look like polkadots!" and Noah said, "Ian, these aren't chocolate chip pancakes. These are polkadot pancakes!" Both brothers laughed and laughed, and just like that, the name stuck.

Ian and Noah's mom and dad only make polkadot pancakes on special occasions because they say "Chocolate polkadots are NOT one of the major nutritional food groups. Pancakes aren't either." They want Ian and Noah to grow up to be big and strong, so most mornings they make very sensible breakfasts for the two boys: boring stuff like oatmeal (which they hate the most), or fresh fruit, scrambled eggs and twenty-seven grain toast. But every once in a while they lighten up and make pancakes.

Sometimes Grandma comes to visit, but to be honest, she gets a little too creative with her pancakes. No one will ever forget the time she whipped up a batch of brussel sprout turnip pancakes, or the bleak morning she made pineapple cheese lobster pancakes or that red letter day when she invented leftover liver pancakes with squid ketchup syrup. The less said about that right now the better, 'cause that's a story for another time.

Let's just make it clear that for Ian and Noah NOTHING tops their all-time favorite, polkadot pancakes.

It was late one night in December, just a week before

Christmas, moonlight was glistening on the gently falling snow, Ian was in the top bunk, thinking, as he usually is, and Noah was in the bottom bunk, and he was also thinking. And you know what? They were both thinking the same thing! Ian leaned over the railing of the top bunk and said, "Noah, are you thinking what I'm thinking?" and I don't even have to tell you the answer, because you already know. "Yes, I am!" exclaimed Noah. "I think we should have polkadot pancakes on Christmas morning! And I think WE should make them!"

"That's exactly what I was thinking!" said Ian. "Let's surprise Mom and Dad! We'll do it ourselves!" "Yeah, cool!" said Noah. Then Noah fell asleep, but Ian stayed awake because he realized that he didn't know how to make polkadot pancakes, and he was pretty sure that his little brother Noah didn't, either. How could they surprise their mom and dad if they didn't know how to make them??? This was a problem. Just before he fell asleep Ian said out loud, "I sure wish there was a way for us to do this."

It's a little known fact that when you are in that in-between state, not exactly awake, not exactly asleep, if it's close to Christmas, snow is falling AND the moon is shining on that new fallen snow, if you make a wish with all these details in place, there is a good chance someone out there is going to hear your wish and help it to come true. I bet you didn't know that. Neither did Ian.

The next afternoon when Ian and Noah had come home after school, there was a strange package waiting in the mailbox with Ian's name on it. I say 'strange' because for one thing, there was no postage on the package, it was wrapped in glowing paper, yes, paper that lit up all by itself! Luckily, nobody noticed this odd package except for Ian, so he took it up to his room, closed the door, climbed up to the top bunk and carefully unwrapped it.

It was the most beautiful Christmas tree ornament he had ever seen -- it was bright red, and shiny, but floating, soft and slightly squishy in the box, like a giant soap bubble attached to a slender golden loop of thread. He picked it up by this golden loop, and when he did, it made a popping sound [pop pop pop pop] and a tiny sparkly angel flew out of the red bubble. "What is your Christmas wish?" the tiny sparkly angel asked Ian.

Ian's eyes practically popped out of his head! What in tarnation is this??? How did this happen?? He forgot what he said the night before about making polkadot pancakes. What should he do now? He sat there thinking and thinking, and decided to ask his little brother Noah for help.

"Noah!" he yelled really loud. "What?" Noah yelled back from downstairs. "Come here, Noah! Come here!"

Noah could tell something BIG was going on, so even though he was busy drawing an action picture of his cousin Will in California and his cousins D'Arcy and Brady in Illinois and his cousins Eamonn and Shea who live in Virginia as members of Olypmic luge team, he dropped his crayons, ran up the stairs really fast, pushed the bedroom door open quickly.

"Look!" said Ian, holding the magical Christmas tree ornament with the tiny sparkly angel dancing in the air around it.

"Holy smokes!" said Noah. "What is it?"

Ian suddenly remembered. "I said something last night about how I wish we could make mom and dad polkadot pancakes, and I guess somebody heard me and sent help!"

"What is your Christmas wish?" the tiny sparkly angel asked again.

Ian was going to ask the angel if she could teach them how to make polkadot pancakes, but because he was taking his time, thinking about just exactly how to make this wish, Noah blurted out this wish before Ian had a chance:

"I wish that every time we sit down to eat, no matter what is put in front of us, it will be polkadot pancakes!"

"Your wish is granted!" the tiny sparkly angel said as she flew back into the magical ornament. They heard more popping sounds [pop pop pop pop], then the ornament slowly floated up toward the ceiling, then disappeared! [Pop!]

"Noah! What did you do?? That's our wish?" cried Ian.

"Ian! Think how delicious everything will be! We love

polkadot pancakes. This'll be great!"

Ian wasn't so sure, but then he wasn't so sure of what had just happened. The magical ornament was gone. Even the glowing wrapping paper had vanished. Maybe it was all a dream.

But it wasn't! That night their mom and dad warned them that dinner wasn't going to be their favorite: it was mushroom and cilantro quiche, marinated artichoke hearts, and stuffed prunes for dessert, a very healthy meal. But Ian and Noah ate every scrap of food and told their parents it was the yummiest dinner ever!

The next morning Grandma came by, in a creative mood, and made tunafish yogurt peanutbutter pancakes -- Ian and Noah ate every last bit, telling her it was the best breakfast ever!

Grandma made the boys crystalized ginger tofu pudding pops to take to school for lunch, and when they came home later that afternoon they told her it was the best lunch ever! Grandma was so happy -- finally her grandsons were enjoying her creations. She had dreams of someday entering a cooking contest, winning, and with the prize money opening her own restaurant, but that's a story for another time.

At dinner that evening, while everyone thought the boys were gobbling down eggplant, zucchini and moussaka casserole, little did they know the boys were chowing down on polkadot pancakes.

That night as they were getting ready to fall asleep, Noah was in a talkative mood. "Isn't this great, Ian?" he whispered from the bottom bunk. "Polkadot pancakes at every meal!"

Ian didn't answer. Ian wasn't so sure this was so great, because the truth was, Ian was worried he would eventually get tired of eating polkadot pancakes at every meal. Oh right now, it was pretty cool, but as I said, Ian is a serious thinker, and he couldn't stop thinking about what would happen after a few days of nothing but polkadot pancakes at every meal.

The next day was Christmas Eve. Grandma was busy rehearsing with her choir, so didn't come by that day. Dad made breakfast of squash blossom omelettes, Mom made flounder frittatas for lunch, and dinner was

venison goulash, spinach and sauerkraut dumplings, but why do I even mention this? You know what Ian and Noah ate: polkadot pancakes. And what Ian worried about, was starting to happen: both Ian and Noah looked at each other, both thinking the same thing: though we never thought we would ever think this, we are getting tired of eating nothing but polkadot pancakes. Oh no, what do we do now?

"I have a surprise for you boys tomorrow," their Mom said. "On Christmas morning we are going to have . . . polkadot pancakes!"

Ian looked at Noah. Noah looked at Ian. "Do we have to?" the two boys said together, at the exact same time.

Their Mom and Dad looked at them quizzically. "But it's your favorite! Are you boys sick?"

"No, Mom," said Ian. "No, Dad," said Noah.

"Then polkadot pancakes it will be! Now, go to bed, boys. Tomorrow is Christmas Day!"

The two brothers slowly walked up the stairs to their bedroom, put on their warm flannel pajamas, brushed their teeth, said their prayers, and climbed into their beds. The snow outside was gently falling. The moon was shining. They were both very quiet. Noah spoke first.

"Ian, I never thought I would say this, but I don't want to eat polkadot pancakes for the rest of my life."

"Neither do I. I wish there was a way out of this."

It's a little known fact that if you make a wish to reverse another wish while snow is falling on Christmas Eve and the moon is shining on that snow, and you are in that in-between state not quite asleep, not quite awake, there is a good chance that someone will hear you and help. First they heard popping sounds. Pop pop pop pop pop.

Then they saw the beautiful bright red shiny Christmas tree ornament floating down from the ceiling. Ian reached out from the top bunk and pulled on the golden loop of thread. The tiny sparkly angel popped out and said, "What is your Christmas Eve wish?"

"Now, Noah, don't say anything yet!" whispered Ian.
"We have to think first."

"Ian, what if we wish to cancel out the first wish AND add an extra wish on top of it, like a microscope for you and a luge sled for me?"

"Noah, something tells me that's not a good idea. How about we just wish that everything was just like it was before the first wish?" said Ian.

"OK," said Noah. "We wish that everything was just like it was before that first polkadot pancake wish."

"Your wish is granted!" said the tiny sparkly angel, as she flew back into the ornament. It floated up to the ceiling, then disappeared. [Pop!]

"Good night, Noah!"

"Good night, Ian!"

The next morning when they woke up, the boys ran downstairs and saw the living room was filled with Christmas presents. Was a microscope and a luge sled among the gifts? No. What were you thinking? This is not that kind of materialistic story.

Mom and Dad were in the kitchen, busy getting all the ingredients, flour, baking powder, sugar, salt, eggs, milk, butter, and chocolate chips for . . . yup, polkadot pancakes. Ian and Noah ran in and said, "No! Not polkadot pancakes! We can't take it!"

"What?" said their Mom.

"Why not?" said their Dad.

Just then the doorbell rang -- it was Grandma, and she was holding a very beautifully wrapped package -- it was in glowing paper, that lit up all by itself.

"Merry Christmas!" she said as she walked in. "Wait til you see what I have for your Christmas tree!"

She unwrapped the package and held out a beautiful bright red shiny ornament on a golden loop of thread. "Someone left this on my doorstep just now, and I know it's just perfect for your tree."

She hung the ornament on a branch near the top and

said, "Now who's ready for breakfast? I got the most wonderful idea on my way over here to make you all a big batch of oatmeal with . . . bananas and blueberries. How does that sound?"

Ian and Noah jumped up and down. "Yay Grandma!" they shouted.

And they told her later that it was the most delicious breakfast ever! And this time they really meant it. They were so happy it wasn't polkadot pancakes.

"You know what my New Year's Resolution is?" Grandma said to the boys. "You boys have been so enthusiastic about all my recent kitchen experiments, that it's decided -- I'm going to enter a cooking contest with my latest creation -- asparagus and lima bean muffins. How would you like me to make them for your lunch today, boys?"

Ian looked at Noah. Noah looked at Ian. Asparagus and lima bean muffins, they thought. Then they ran back into the living room, looked at the beautiful shiny bright red ornament near the top of the tree. But they couldn't reach it, and it didn't matter, anyway. The moonlight wasn't shining. Snow wasn't falling. There were no wishes today, and they weren't even sure it was the same magical ornament.

From that day on, Ian and Noah made a pact that they would be tough, they would be strong, and they would try to eat all kinds of new foods -- and they found some of them surprisingly good.

But not the asparagus and lima bean muffins. I mean, come on. And Grandma didn't win the cooking contest. But on her way home from the cooking contest she bumped into two people who were having a big argument right there on the sidewalk, she got in the middle of it, settled the dispute, and lo and behold, a TV crew passing by that was shooting an installment of "World's Wackiest Police Problems" saw Grandma in action, and signed her up instantly for her own TV show, "Judge Grandma!" now carried on TV networks all over the world!

On yesterday's episode Judge Grandma settled a dispute between a handsome older gentleman who owned a restaurant and his young chef who quit without giving any notice. Judge Grandma said, "I've got the answer! I'll come and cook at your restaurant!"

In no time at all the tables were empty, the restaurant went bankrupt, and that nice handsome older gentleman lost all his money.

Nooo! That's not what happened, I'm kidding you. Judge Grandma looked that chef in the eye and said "Young man, you go back to work for two weeks and give him a chance to find a replacement for you!" and the chef said, "OK!" He was happy, and the restaurant owner was so happy that after the taping of the TV show, he invited Grandma out to dinner.

"Hmmm, what's this? Polkadot pancakes? That looks so good, by golly, that's what I'll order!"

"Me, too," said Grandma.

And that's when they knew they were falling in love.

But that's a story for another time.

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