

CHRISTMAS

*hope*

a short novel



BRIAN T. WHITAKER

# **Christmas Hope**

## **A Short Novel**

**by Brian T. Whitaker**

This book is based on Brian T. Whitaker's original stage play: "Christmas Hope."  
[www.whitakerwritings.com](http://www.whitakerwritings.com)

**“Christmas Hope – A Short Novel”**  
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For more information about Brian T. Whitaker, visit Whitaker Writings on the web:  
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## Chapter 1

Tom Nelson had no idea how much his life was about to change.

The Nelson family lived in a nice neighborhood on the north side of the city. Tom had a well-paying but high-stress job that provided financial stability for the family. The Nelsons enjoyed many modern conveniences in their daily lives.

For eighteen wonderful years Tom had been married to his high-school sweetheart, Jackie. Although she was college-educated and incredibly bright, she preferred the freedom and flexibility of being a homemaker. When she could, she spent time volunteering around the community, especially at the women's shelter. But with her husband's long hours at work, most of Jackie's time was consumed by the needs of her home and her family. Jackie didn't mind this. More than anything, she thrived on being a good mother to their two children, Erin and John.

On a cold Thursday evening in December, Erin and John Nelson slouched on the living room sofa, watching their favorite prime-time television show. As she watched, fifteen-year-old Erin practiced her "mature look." She was at the age at which she valued fashionable clothes, perfect hair, and lots of make-up. She knew that if she could only master the "mature look," she could impress her friends with how grown-up she wanted to be but never felt she was.

Erin's twelve-year-old brother, John, was still too young to care very much about what people thought of him. He was content to play sports and impress his dad with his athleticism. When he wasn't at school or some kind of team practice, he wiled away the hours playing the latest video games.

As Erin and John stared passively at the television, they heard the hum of the automatic garage door, as their father parked his cherished sports car for the night. Seconds later, they heard the front door open and a familiar voice call out.

"Hey, kids!" Tom exclaimed with enthusiasm. He hoped they might be excited to see him too.

"Hey, Dad," Erin and John murmured without breaking their gaze from the television. "Mom, Dad's finally home," John shouted toward the TV, hoping his mother might hear him all the way in the next room.

Tom noticed the tone in John's voice as he said "finally." *Oh, great*, he thought as he hung his coat in the closet. *Thus begins another fun evening at the Nelson home.* Tom suspected the next few minutes might be a bit tense. Erin confirmed this as she announced, "Mom's ticked that you missed supper again, Dad."

John added dryly, "Not that it was worth being here for..." For the first time he broke his gaze from the TV and made a gagging gesture toward his sister, who giggled in agreement. They had not noticed that Jackie had entered the room, and immediately they felt their mother's glare. Not wanting to endure a scolding, they quickly turned off the TV and ran out of the room. They knew when it was safer to hide.

Jackie decided not to pursue the matter with the kids, and instead turned her attention to her husband. “Tom, I thought you were going to try to be home by suppertime tonight. You’ve missed supper so many nights lately, and last night you promised that tonight would be different.”

“I know, Jackie,” Tom replied as he collapsed into his favorite recliner. “I’m really sorry.” Jackie started to speak until Tom held up his hand to stop her, and he added, “AGAIN.” Jackie nodded in agreement and sat in her favorite rocking chair.

Tom continued, “I know, I know: I say ‘I’m sorry’ and ‘I’ll try harder’ a lot. When I say it, I truly mean it. Then when I’m at work and the deadlines are staring me down, I get wrapped up in my work and lose track of the time. You know the Peterson account is the firm’s biggest account. We’re doing a lot for them right now, and it’s taking a ton of work. Unfortunately, that means a ton of hours.” *That’s an understatement*, he thought wryly to himself. *I’m going to have to start sleeping at the office and scheduling meetings at 2:00 in the morning, just to meet the deadlines.*

Jackie’s hardened expression softened a bit as she settled back into her overstuffed rocker and hugged a decorative throw pillow. She loved her husband very much, and was proud of his many accomplishments at work. Tom was well respected in the community, having received a number of professional and philanthropic awards. “I know,” Jackie admitted. “I want you to do well in your job. I’m thankful you have such a good job. But I hate these weeks when you put in 60 or even 80 hours at work. I want you to be HOME, too.”

“And I want to be here,” Tom agreed. *Boy, I just wish I could make everyone happy at the same time*, he thought. *I love my wife, and I really want to be home with my family, but I have a hard time getting everything done at work.* They sat in silence for a few moments. They had had similar conversations so often that they didn’t have much more to say on the matter. They knew that if they wanted to enjoy a peaceful night, it was best to drop the issue for now.

Tom tried to turn their thoughts to something a bit more positive. “Hey, Christmas is in a couple weeks, and we have a lot to look forward to.” With a sparkle in his eye, he continued, “Then, of course, we have that big surprise planned for December 26.”

Immediately John and Erin burst into the room from their favorite eavesdropping spot in the adjacent dining room. “Surprise?” John asked. “When are you FINALLY going to tell us about the surprise? Come on, Dad, tell us! Please?”

“Yeah, stop torturing us,” Erin added. “It’s hard enough to wait for all the presents we get for Christmas. WHEN are you going to tell us about the big surprise for the day after?”

With a mischievous smile on her face, Jackie turned to Tom. “Maybe we should tell them. They will need to pack, you know.”

“Pack?” shrieked Erin and John in unison. “You HAVE to tell us now!” John added.

“Okay, I guess so,” Tom reluctantly agreed.

“Yesssss!” John exclaimed, pumping his fists in the air and plopping down on the sofa. Erin sat very properly next to him and tried to hide her own enthusiasm behind that well-rehearsed mask of maturity.

Tom started to speak, then shook his head and waved his hands in the air. “Nah, let’s just wait until Christmas day to tell you. You don’t really need to know before then.”

Erin and John jumped up from the couch in protest. “That’s SO not fair, Dad!” John shouted.

“Yeah,” Erin chimed in. Recovering her mask of maturity, she calmly suggested, “If I have to pack, I’ll need time to do it.”

Jackie smiled at Tom. “Let’s go ahead and tell them, honey.”

“Okay, okay,” Tom conceded with a playful grin. He paused a little too long, and Erin couldn’t hold back. “You know, Dad, I should call the police about this torture. There’s got to be some kind of law against it!” Her impish grin showed her father that she could tease just as well as he could. Tom smiled with fatherly pride.

“Okay, kids, you’ll need to sit down to hear this,” Tom prompted. Both kids poised themselves on the edge of the sofa. Tom continued, “You know how we like to celebrate Christmas with really special gifts. You know your mom and I didn’t have very much growing up, and we’ve done all we can to make sure you have a better life than we did. We especially love giving you big Christmas presents we know you’ll enjoy.”

“Like the new iPads last year,” Erin suggested.

“And the new skis and season tickets to the resort,” John added.

“Yeah, stuff like that,” Tom summarized with a smile. *Boy, I love giving gifts to my kids!* He continued, “Anyway, this year we have some fun gifts planned for you, but we also bought one big gift for the whole family.”

Tom paused for dramatic effect, and the kids leaned in expectantly. Tom abruptly changed his tone and shook his head. “You know, maybe we’ll wait and tell you next week.”

Erin and John had had enough. They jumped up from the sofa, pulled their father out of his chair, and tried to wrestle him into submission. Amid the playful giggles as they rolled around on the floor, Tom gave in. “Okay, okay! On December 26 we leave for a luxury Caribbean cruise!”

Erin and John froze in shock, then jumped up and down with joy. “A cruise!” Erin exclaimed, giving up every hint of her “mature” mask. “This is a dream come true!”

John gazed into the distance as he anticipated the experiences he would have: “Surfing, wakeboarding, snorkeling....”

Erin joined in the fantasy: “Sunbathing, shopping, guy-watching....”

Tom, Jackie, and John snapped back to reality and stared in unison at Erin. Erin mentally replayed her comments, blanched, and stammered, “Well, um, I mean....” She realized she could not recover from her verbal gaffe. “I’ll just be quiet now,” she said as she looked down and hoped everyone’s attention would quickly turn elsewhere.

John broke the awkward moment as he turned and headed toward his bedroom. “Wow, I’ve got to start packing!”

Erin quickly followed him out the room. “I’ve got to make a list of stuff I need to buy! I don’t have a thing to wear!”

As the kids bounded up the stairs, Tom and Jackie smiled at each other. Jackie rolled her eyes and chuckled. Tom shook his head and laughed. “This is going to be the best Christmas ever,” Tom exclaimed with pride.

## Chapter 2

On Friday afternoon, John and Erin were once again sitting on the sofa, playing a new video game they had just purchased the week before. Friday night was pizza night, and they eagerly anticipated their favorite meal. After the previous night's dinner disaster, pizza would be an especially welcome treat.

The kids were so engrossed in their game that they didn't notice the hum of the garage door. A few minutes later, the front door opened and Tom slowly walked in without saying a word.

Erin was the first to notice her father. Always known for stating the obvious, Erin exclaimed, "Whoa, Dad, you're home way before supper today."

"Yeah, Dad, you're never home this early, especially on a Friday," John added.

Jackie emerged from the kitchen, wiping her hands on a towel. "Tom, is that you?" She smiled warmly and gave her husband a big hug. "You're home for supper! I'm so happy to see you!"

Tom stood motionless and didn't return his wife's enthusiastic greeting. He just stared blankly at the far corner of the room. Jackie gradually noticed and stepped back. "Tom, what's wrong?" she asked with sudden worry.

Tom looked toward his wife without really looking into her eyes. "Jackie, can we talk?"

"Sure," Jackie stammered as her mind began racing. "Erin, John, can you please give your father and me a few moments alone?"

Erin and John knew better than to offer any protest. They quickly disappeared without saying a word. From the look on their dad's face, they didn't even want to eavesdrop on this conversation. Instead, they retreated to the safety of their bedrooms.

[END OF SAMPLE]

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## About Brian T. Whitaker

Read Brian's other e-book: [\*Christmas for the Family – A Short Novel\*](#)

Brian T. Whitaker is a pastor, musician, playwright, and author. He is happily married to Kristin and has three children. Brian reaches out on the Internet through Whitaker Writings: <http://www.whitakerwritings.com>.

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