

CHRISTMAS

for the

family

a short novel



BRIAN T. WHITAKER

Christmas for the Family

A Short Novel

By Brian T. Whitaker

This book is based on Brian T. Whitaker's original stage play: "Christmas for the Family."
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For more information about Brian T. Whitaker, visit Whitaker Writings on the web:
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Chapter 1

Wild rock music emanated from Megan's basement-level bedroom as she put the finishing touches on her heavy gothic makeup. Even up the stairs in the living room her music competed with the calm Christmas music Sarah was enjoying. Still, Sarah barely noticed her fifteen-year-old's intrusion of sound as she flitted about the room, making sure everything looked just right.

This Christmas Eve will be perfect, thought Sarah, beaming with joy and the anticipation of the family celebrations to come. She was already dressed in her finest Christmas outfit, covered with an apron to ensure it would remain crisp and clean. She straightened the Christmas quilt on the sofa and meticulously adjusted the figurines in the manger scene. Looking to the tree, she noticed an ornament that had fallen off. She quickly retrieved it and lovingly replaced it on its proper branch, instinctively looking around with hopes that nobody else had noticed the wayward decoration.

She surveyed the room with satisfaction. Daring to take a minute to rest, Sarah sat in her favorite chair, wiping her brow and smoothing her hair ever so gently.

The wild rock music abruptly stopped, and Megan emerged from the basement wearing her usual gothic fashions. Sarah hated this new look Megan had begun wearing over the past six months, but today she was willing to overlook the attire so the family could enjoy a peaceful evening together.

Megan ignored her mother as she walked briskly through the living room toward the door.

"Where are you going, young lady?" Sarah demanded as she stood to her feet.

Megan didn't even try to hide her annoyance. She spun around and faced her mother defiantly with her hands on her hips. "I'm just going to hang out with my friends!"

"But Megan, it's Christmas Eve," Sarah pleaded. "You know we have plans. Your dad is coming home early, your brother's getting back from college tonight, and your sister should be home any minute. This is supposed to be a special FAMILY night."

"Family night?" Megan challenged with a snort. "You mean, like, where we all play Monopoly and pretend we're having fun? You've gotta be kidding me."

"What kind of attitude is that?"

"Who cares? I'm outta here." Megan turned, flung the door open, and stormed outside.

Sarah raced after her and caught the door just before it slammed shut. "Be back for dinner in two hours," she called through the doorway.

"Yeah, whatever!" Megan almost sneered as she trudged through the snow to the curb. Brittany would arrive any minute to pick her up, and she could not wait to escape with one of the few people who really understood and accepted her.

Sarah closed the door and leaned against it. She took a deep breath and recomposed herself. Realizing how quiet the house seemed, she turned the stereo up so she could hear Bing Crosby sing, “White Christmas.” She turned her attention toward straightening the Christmas decorations a little more, though they did not need it. Somehow, she felt better as she worked with the decorations because for those brief moments she felt she had some measure of control.

Suddenly the back door in the kitchen flung open. Tom rushed in, tossed his keys on the counter, and headed toward the sink. He grabbed a cloth, pulled back the lapel of his well-pressed suit coat, and tried to wash a large coffee stain off his sparkling white dress shirt. Seeing that this wasn’t working, he took his coat off and placed it on the back of a kitchen chair. He started pulling off his tie and unbuttoning his shirt as he rushed toward the stairway to the upstairs bedrooms. He paused when his eyes met Sarah’s.

“Tom, you’re home early!” Sarah exclaimed with delight. She ran over to hug and kiss her husband. “What a nice surprise for Christmas Eve!”

Tom gave Sarah a quick kiss in return, but the look on his face was not happy. He stammered, “Um...well...I’m actually just here to change my shirt. I’m sorry, honey, but I had five employees call in sick, so now I have to stay until the store closes at midnight.”

Sarah stepped back, feeling as if someone had punched her in the stomach. “Tom, how could you?” she blurted. She didn’t mean to scold, but she couldn’t hide her growing disappointment. “I’ve been working on a special dinner all day...all week, in fact!”

“I’m sorry, honey, but I have to impress the district manager with my sales this year. I can’t let the company down.” Tom’s tone was half apologetic, half dismissive.

Before Sarah could respond, Tom’s cell phone rang. He held up his hand to delay Sarah’s inevitable lecture. Without looking at the display, Tom said, “I should get this – it’s probably the store.”

Sarah backed down as Tom said, “Hello?...Oh, hi!...Not gonna make it?...Are you sure?...Okay, see you on the 29th. Bye.”

Tom put his phone back in his pocket and turned hastily to go up the stairs.

“Who was that, Tom?” asked Sarah.

“Oh, that was Ryan.”

“What?!” Sarah shrieked. “You didn’t let him talk to his mother?”

“Well, he just called quickly to tell us that he’s not coming home tonight.” Though he said this matter-of-factly, Tom winced a little at the sound of the words, but turned one more time toward the steps.

Aghast, Sarah exclaimed, “What?! Why not?!”

Tom had already stayed at the house longer than he had planned, and he knew his store was full of last-minute shoppers with crises that only the manager could solve. He couldn’t afford to think about this right now. He tried to form as simple an explanation as he could: “Ryan’s friend Nick found a great package deal at a ski resort, and they’re heading out right now. Ryan said he’d come home on the 29th.”

Sarah was flabbergasted. “You mean, Ryan’s not even going to be here for Christmas day?!”

Tom felt annoyed with this emotional display, and felt even more pressure to change his shirt and return to work as quickly as possible. “Sarah, he’s spending some time with his friends. He’ll be here in a few days. What’s the big deal?” He knew better, but he really didn’t care at the moment.

“Tom, how could he...how could YOU not care about all I have planned for tonight and tomorrow? This is CHRISTMAS! This is supposed to be a special FAMILY time. And now you’re working until who-knows-when, Ryan’s not coming home, and I don’t even know where Megan went or when she’ll be back.”

As these words hung in the air, the front door opened and Megan stormed into the living room. She angrily said “Bye” into her phone and slammed the door shut.

“Well, Mom, I’m home. I wanted to spend time with Brittany, but her dad won’t let her go because of their...” she dramatically gestured quotation marks, “‘FAMILY PLANS.’ Now I’m stuck here.” She glared at Sarah. “I hope you’re happy!”

Without waiting for a response, Megan huffed out of the room and down the stairs, slamming her bedroom door to proclaim her annoyance. She turned her music up loud enough to keep others from wanting to bother her.

From the living room, Tom and Sarah just stared at the doorway to the basement with dumbfounded expressions on their faces.

Sarah waved her arms in the air in utter surrender. “Well, that just makes this night perfect, doesn’t it?” She rolled her eyes, sighed loudly, and went into the kitchen to continue preparing the meal just in case someone might want to eat it.

Tom shrugged his shoulders, feeling thankful the conversation was over. He hastened upstairs to finally change his shirt.

Chapter 2

Sarah chopped the vegetables in the kitchen with an intensity that revealed her frustration. Her hair was no longer perfectly styled, and her makeup was streaked with tears.

This has to be the most awful Christmas Eve ever, she thought to herself. *No, wait, that was last year.*

Tom walked back into the kitchen, tucking in his fresh white shirt. He noticed Sarah's agitated motions and disheveled appearance. As he passed her, he leaned over for a quick good-bye kiss. Sarah didn't respond or even acknowledge him as she continued her work.

"Sarah, what's wrong?" Tom asked, hoping the answer would be brief.

Without looking up, Sarah replied, "Nothing."

Tom continued to watch Sarah almost violently cutting the carrots. As he tied his necktie, he tentatively ventured, "You look...upset."

Sarah looked at Tom with a deliberate glare that conveyed her anger and disappointment. "You noticed?" she challenged.

[END OF SAMPLE]

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About Brian T. Whitaker

Read Brian's other e-book: [*Christmas Hope – 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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