

# Once Upon A Christmas

Michael Lee Ables Jr.

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ONCE UPON A CHRISTMAS

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Written by Michael Lee Ables Jr..





When Tiffany's boyfriend breaks up with her right before Christmas, she loses who she is. She becomes lost in her work becoming a whole different person. Join her as she races to save her job, and maybe she will find something greater along the way.

Tiffany dropped the box of Christmas decorations in the attic. She kicked the box and threw an afghan over it.

"Rot in hell." She said giving it another kick. She walked back down to the kitchen and made herself a cup of tea. She looked out the window at all the colored lights. Her neighbors had gone all out as they usually do. She looked at the card and letter laying on the counter. "How could he do this? Why now?" she asked herself. Her boyfriend of five years had sent her a card and letter. He had fallen in love with someone new while working out of town. She walked over and opened her door, looking at her Christmas tree on the curb. She slung her coffee at it and headed back inside, shivering.

The next six months went by slow. Thoughts of Steven still in her mind. She stood looking at the new outfit. She had kept herself busy with work and it's paid off. She was now office manager and the boss of her entire floor. She looked at the white pant suit, how it outlined her tight thighs. How the blouse showed off her perfect bosoms. She kissed at herself.

"Eat your heart out boys." She walked into her well-kept living room and picked up her keys and pocketbook turning to look at her newly decorated living room. "Perfect!" she said.



She walked into the office and watched as people scurried along as if she wouldn't notice them standing around and talking. She walked into her office.

"Sara, where's my coffee?" she yelled. A middle-aged woman ran in and handed it to her. She took a drink sitting it down. "Nice dress." She said turning so she couldn't see her grin. She took off her coat and hung it on the back of her chair. She looked at her assistant. She stood there in a cheap black dress that was low cut over the shoulders. Her hair a dark shade of brown and messy. Her large glasses hung almost on the tip of her nose. "What's my schedule like?" Sara sat down in the hard wooden chair and read through the day's events as Tiffany looked around at her office. She spotted a few envelopes on her desk and picked them up. The colors red and green with tiny embossed Christmas trees. "What did I ask you to do with these?" she asked. She walked over and tossed them in the garbage. "Who sends out Christmas cards in July?" she asked.

"Well, I've already filled ours out," Sara said trying not to make eye contact.

"Have you?" Tiffany asked. She sat down. "Go and order my lunch and make sure it's hot this time." Sara stood heading for the door. "And make sure in the future that you do as I ask." Sara didn't stop until she got to her desk. Tiffany smiled as she checked her e-mail. She opened one from her mom inviting her home for the holidays. "Not happening!" she sent back an e-mail saying she was sorry, but she had business meetings. Lunch came, and she watched as Sara unpacked the box.

"Does it look ok?" asked Sara. Tiffany nodded and motioned for her to leave.

"Go so I can eat in peace." She watched as the ragged woman left. "Too bad, she does what I ask." She ate her lunch and buzzed Sara. "Can you please come in?" she watched as Sara opened the door and tossed her the rest of her lunch in the garbage. "Was this from the same place?" she asked. "It was horrible, try better tomorrow. Now sit down, we need to go over my schedule." They sat going over the next week's meetings. "Cancel, the toy store for next Tuesday. I'm not listening to them going on for an hour about how many toys they sell during Christmas." Sara looked up. "Do you want to say something?" Sara shook her head.

"No, I'll cancel it." She made some notes.

"Now, from now until the first of the year I want everything having to do with the holidays canceled! No parties, meetings, ect.... Do I make myself clear?" Sara nodded. "Now go!" Sara turned and walked out.



"Is she being mean to you?" Sara looked up at one of her friends, Chelsy." Sara sat down and slammed her plan book.

"She's so mean!" she said. "I've got to call and cancel a meeting with the toy store for next week, because she doesn't want to listen to them talk about Christmas." Chelsy sat down. "You knew her before I started, was she always like this?" Chelsy shook her head.

"She was Ms. Christmas at one time. She wore colorful sweaters filled the office with decorations and even hosted several parties." Sara opened her plan book and picked up the phone, dialing the department store.

"What happened?" Sara held up her finger as the department store answered she canceled the meeting. She shook her head as she hung up. "That meeting could have been a major step forward for this company. Now, what changed to make her like this." Chelsy leaned in.

"She got dumped before Christmas! He found a younger woman and took her on the vacation they were supposed to go on." Chelsy giggled. "He sent her a Christmas card the day before they were to leave." Sara looked into Tiffany's office.

"Poor woman," Sara said.

"Yeah poor woman who puts you through hell because she needs to get laid." Chelsy stood. "I better get back to work before the demon woman comes." She smiled leaving.



Tiffany looked at her screen at the man she used to love. There standing next to him was his new wife. She took a deep breath and clicked the page off. She turned around looking out at the street below. The phone rang behind her. She turned to pick it up.

“Hello?” she asked.

“Tiffany, it’s Stan. Why was the toy store meeting canceled?” he asked. “This account could give your branch some much-needed revenue.” Tiffany took a deep breath.

“I don’t think they are the right account for us sir. They mostly sell toys.”

“Who cares what they sell, your division needs the account. Call them personally and set up a new meeting.” Before she could say anything there was a click and he hung up. She slammed down the phone.

“Sara, get in here.” She watched as Sara walked in.

“What can I do for you?” Tiffany stood, facing her.

“Henry just called, how did he find out I canceled the department store?” Sara shrugged.

“I sent in your schedule for next week.” Tiffany shook her head.

“Who asked you to do that?” Sara pulled up the e-mail on her tablet and handed it to her.

“Henry, himself” Sara said. Tiffany handed back the tablet.

“I want all e-mails he sends forwarded to me. You understand?” Sara nodded. “Go before I fire you and call to reschedule that meeting.” Sara turned and hurried out the room.



Sara stood next to Tiffany waiting for the meeting to start. She looked around at the holiday decorations.

“It’s November, I don’t see why they have all these Christmas decorations up.” Sara bit her lip as a tall slender woman came and stopped before them

“This way.” She said. They followed her into a room with a long table. A young man turned around to face them. He smiled, and Sara stopped in her tracks. He was so handsome. His blue suit showed his packed abs. His hair short and brown wasn’t slicked down like most CEO’s. It was messy in the style age.

“Hello, my name is Hank!” he said holding out his hand. Tiffany looked around.

“I thought Ben was meeting us.” Hank walked over and pulled out their chairs.

“Hank is my father and he has been ill. I will be conducting this meeting.” He walked over across from them and sat down opening a folder. “Your marketing division has high marks but what can you do for us?” Tiffany looked at Sara who stood and walked over to the tv. She plugged her tablet in.

“As you can see, we can do a lot for you.” She smiled as Sara changed the slide. They talked for more than an hour.

“I think I’ve seen all that I need to.” He stood and held out his hand. “Well be in touch.” And turned walking out. Sara unhooked her tablet and picked up her bag.

“Something isn’t right,” Tiffany said grabbing her purse. “That presentation should have knocked him off his feet. He’s wet behind the ears. He doesn’t know a good thing when he sees it.”

Back at the office Tiffany sat down and looked up at Sara.

“You must have missed something.” Sara shook her head.

“I didn’t miss anything, I double checked all the numbers myself over and over. My presentation was spot on.”

"Your presentation?" asked Stan who walked in and looked at Tiffany sitting behind her desk.

"I meant ours, sir." Tiffany smiled and stood up.

"That will be all Sara." She turned quickly and left. Stan sat down.

"You let your assistant do the presentation?" Tiffany nodded.

"Why not? I have more important things to do." Stan sat up.

"The partners aren't happy with this division and they are talking about shutting it down." Tiffany jerked.

"They can't do that." Stan stood up.

"They can and will if things don't change. I don't understand Tiffany when I promoted you, you were so headstrong. You didn't rely on assistants to get accounts. Look at this place, it's a month until Christmas and there are no decorations." Tiffany hissed.

"It's a waste of money, sir. The toy store was a fluke, I'll make it right." Stan turned and opened the door.

"You have until the beginning of the year." He left.

"Sara, get in here now!" she yelled. Sara walked in. "They are going to shut us down. We have to do something." Sara laid her tablet down on the desk.

"There was another presentation." She said opening the file. Tiffany picked it up. "It was more Christmas oriented. I didn't think you would have approved." Tiffany sat down.

"Your right, I don't approve but I think it's what we need. If the original material isn't accepted, then we will use this." She handed Sara back her tablet. "I'm sorry for the way I act sometimes, this time of year isn't easy for me." Sara turned to shut the door.

"If you ever want to talk, just call me." Sara went back to her desk. Tiffany sat looking at the phone. She didn't want this account. She didn't want to work with the toy store or the CEO. She walked over to her door and looked out at the office. Sara sat at her desk working, people rushed around. She turned around and sat back down picking up the phone.

"Mom." She said.

"Why hi darling. Is everything ok?" she asked.

"I don't know mom. Things are busy here. I'm thinking about coming for Christmas." Her mom let out a squeal.

"Oh, darling. You don't know how much I would love that." Tiffany rolled her eyes. She knew what it would be like. All the holiday stuff, but she needed to think.

"I'll make a reservation for in town." Her mom stopped her.

"NO, you will stay right here." Her mom said.

"Ok mom, I'll let you know later when I will arrive. Bye." She hung up. "Sara can you please come in here." she watched as her assistant slowly came in.

"Are you going to fire me? I can't afford to lose this job! My husband got laid off and this job is barely paying the bills." she said. Tiffany shook her head.

"Not today." Tiffany wrote her mom's address down on a sheet of paper and handed it to her. "I will be going to my mom's for Christmas. I need to clear my mind. Please make my travel arrangements." Sara turned to go and stopped.

"I didn't mean to eavesdrop, but I heard what Stan said." Tiffany walked around her and pushed the door shut.

"Have you told anyone?" Sara shook her head.

"I can't lose this job, I have two kids. We are on the verge of losing our house. I can barely pay the bills with Josh out of work." Tiffany turned around.

"Join the club, I might have to move back in with my mother." She turned and walked back to her desk. "Please make my reservations and e-mail me the details." Sara nodded and left. Tiffany turned around and looked out her massive windows. The streets below were already decorated for Christmas. All the shops had decorations. She cringed thinking about going to her mom's. She turned around and picked up the phone and dialed the toy store.

"How can I direct your call?" a woman asked.

"Hello, I need to talk to Hank. I was there earlier, and we gave a presentation and I would like to go over some of the details with him on the phone." There was a moment of quiet.

"Please hold." The woman said. Tiffany rolled her eyes as Christmas music blared. "I'm sorry, he's busy. He did say you would have his decision by the end of the day. Have a good day and Merry Christmas." Tiffany slammed the phone down. She stood and grabbed her coat and her bag, heading to Sara's desk.

"Bring your tablet and come on." Sara looked up and stood to grab her stuff.

"Where are we going?" Sara asked as they walked out of the building.

"Just follow me." She said. They walked down the street. Christmas music blared, and the lights shown in all the store's windows. They came to a small coffee house and they went inside. Tiffany walked up to the counter.

"Coffee, black please and whatever she wants." Sara gave her order and Tiffany picked up the number heading to the very back and sat down at a table. She pulled off her coat and pulled out her laptop.

"What are we doing?" Sara asked. Tiffany looked up and then looked around.

"This is the only place that doesn't put up Christmas stuff. I needed a place to think." She stopped typing as her laptop connected to the Wi-Fi. As her laptop connected, her e-mail beeped. "No!" she screamed. Everyone in the small shop turned and looked at them.

"What's wrong?" she turned her laptop around, so Sara could read the message.

"If we lose that account, we are all jobless." Sara pulled out her tablet.

"There's another option." She said. Tiffany took a deep breath and took her laptop back.

"Send it to me." Sara smiled and sent the presentation. Tiffany saved the file and started a new e-mail to Hank.



*Please look at the attached. We are committed to doing whatever it takes to satisfy. Please get in touch with me and allow us to show you what we have to offer. Tiffany.*



Tiffany shut her laptop and stuffed it back into her bag.

“There!” she said.

“That’s it? An email?” Tiffany took a drink of her coffee.

“What else can I do?” she asked. Sara leaned forward.

“Let’s go back to the toy store. Let’s wait until he sees us.” Tiffany sat back.

“This job means a lot to you?” Sara nodded.

“We won’t make it if I lose this job,” Sara said as her eyes teared up. “Josh my husband had a good job. We usually give the kids a good Christmas.” Sara looked away and wiped away her tears. “This year we’ll be lucky to have a nice dinner.” Tiffany stood up.

“Then what are you waiting for?” she asked. “Let’s go!”



Tiffany and Sara stopped at Henry’s receptionist desk.

“I’m here to see Henry.” The woman looked up.

“I’m sorry, but that’s not possible.” Tiffany glared down at the woman.

“Do you know who I am?” she asked. The woman nodded.

"Yes, but it doesn't matter. He's not here and won't be back until after the first of the year." Tiffany shook her head.

"That won't work. I need to talk to him." The woman shook her head.

"I'm sorry, come back after the holidays." Tiffany started to speak again, but Sara took her arm.

"We better go." She said looking up at several guards watching them.

"Yes, and like I said. Come back next year." Tiffany looked over at the woman.

"It will be too late." She said turning and leaving. Sara followed Tiffany back to the office. Tiffany sat down and looked up at Sara.

"Not a word about this division closing." Sara shook her head. "Well go on until the final word comes. I'm not giving up." Sara nodded and left. Tiffany opened her laptop and searched for, toy store. She read interview after interview and made notes. She sat back looking at his picture. Her mind went back to her hometown. She smiled remembering him from school. "We've met before Henry." She smiled getting up and opening her door. "Are my reservations confirmed?" she asked Sara who nodded.

"Sending them to you now." She said. Tiffany walked back to her desk and sat down and looked at his picture.

"He won't know what hit him." She said.



Tiffany stepped off the plane and headed outside where her mom stood smiling.

"Hi, mom." She said. Her mom wrapped her in a hug.

"Hi, baby." She said letting go and opening the back to the SUV. The two of them got into the SUV. Neither talked much as they headed down the windy road to home.

"Is dad coming?" her mom shook her head.

"No, he's busy. New baby and all." Her mom said. Tiffany shook her head. "It's ok, I've moved on to." Tiffany smiled.

"You have a boyfriend?" she asked. Her mom just winked.

"Maybe, you would know if you came home more." Tiffany watched as the small town came into view. Christmas decorations lined the side flower boxes, lights strung across the roadways. Storefronts with blinking lights and decorations.

"Home," Tiffany said. "I want to stop at the thrift shop." Her mom looked at her and at her clothes.

"Why look at you, those designer clothes?" she turned looking at her mom.

"I'm going to be here through Christmas. I don't want to go prancing around in my good clothes." Her mom rolled her eyes.

"Sounds like you." Tiffany smiled. That wasn't the reason, Henry was here, and she had a plan. Tiffany and her mom sifted through the thrift shop. Tiffany grabbed some jeans and some casual blouses along with some sweaters and a coat. She looked at the boots and shoes and grabbed a couple pair.

"That should do it." She paid, and they lugged all the stuff to the car and they were soon off. They pulled up to a two-story house. Tiffany got out and looked around. The hedges were cut, the house looked great. The windows were nice and shiny. They grabbed some of the bags and headed for the house. Tiffany stopped relishing how beautiful the house was. "I've almost forgotten how beautiful it was." She said as her mom let her bags drop.

"Come on, let's get the rest." Tiffany and her mom carried all the things to her room. "I'll let you unpack, you know where the washer and dryer are." Tiffany nodded as her mom left. She unpacked her suit case first and carried the second-hand clothes down the hall to the washroom. She looked at the two machines. "Don't tell me you've forgotten how to use them?" Tiffany turned to look at her mom.

"Of course not." Her mom smiled and went back downstairs. She stuffed the washer and started the cycle heading downstairs. The house was so amazing. The living room was huge. There was already an empty spot in the corner for the Christmas tree. Her mom came in and held out a cup to her.

"It's nice to have you home." She looked at her mom and then around. She walked over to the mantel and looked at the pictures of her grandparents.

"It's nice to be home." She turned around. "Do you know the Johnsons?" she asked. Her mom sat down.

"There's only one set of Johnsons in town and they live in the big house outside of town. I think they own a business or something. Why do you ask." Tiffany sat down.

"Just wondering, are they in the toy business?" her mom nodded.

"I think so, they own a chain of stores." Tiffany sat back looking around again.

"I love this room." She said looking at the blue painted walls. Pictures adorned it in patches. Some of her mom and dad.

"I hear the Johnson son is a looker." She looked at her mom.

"Is he?" she said taking a sip of her tea. "I don't know where I'd find the time for a lover." She said. Her mom stood.

"Who said anything about a lover? Aren't you lonely in the city all by yourself? Wouldn't it be nice to have someone to watch tv with or go out to dinner?" her mom asked before leaving. Tiffany took another drink of her tea and headed back to her room. She put the washed clothes in the dryer and started another load washing and sat down on her bed, opening her laptop. She sent Sara an e-mail seeing how things were in the office and closed it. She laid back taking a deep breath. This plan had to work.



Tiffany woke up and headed downstairs.

“You’re awake!” her mom said as she sat down at the table. “Why don’t you go and change and we’ll go out shopping. I need to pick up a few things for dinner.” Tiffany stood up. “I finished your laundry, it’s all folded on top of the dryer.” She smiled at her mom and headed upstairs. Tiffany stood back looking at herself in the mirror. The jeans fitted her perfectly, and her blouse hung just enough.

“Look at that.” Her mom said standing in the doorway. “Reminds me of when you were growing up.” Tiffany grabbed her coat.

“There’s something you should know.” Her mom watched as she put on her coat.

“What’s that?” her mom asked.

“I’m thinking about moving back next year.” Her mom squealed and hugged her.

“Oh baby, that would be great.” Her mom let go.



Tiffany pushed the cart as her mom put in item after item. She stopped looking up.

“I think that’s Henry Johnson.” Her mom said. Tiffany looked at the young handsome man. It was hard to recognize him dressed the way he was.

“Are you sure?” asked Tiffany.

“Why yes, I see him around here a lot.” Her mom said. Tiffany watched as he disappeared down an aisle. Her mom wondered off, Tiffany pushed the cart towards the aisle. He was stopped looking at

some boxes. She went down his aisle and stopped close to him. He turned looking at her and pulled his cart out of the way and turned back around. He put a box back on the shelf.

“That one’s the best.” She said pointing to a green box. He looked her up and down.

“Thanks.” He grabbed the box and put it into his buggy. “Do I know you?” he asked. She shook her head.

“I work in the city. My mom is Charlotte and lives over on Stanton street. I’m Margaret.” He held out his hand.

“Nice to meet you. You come home for the holidays?” he asked. She nodded. “Me too, I love it here. If I had a choice I’d never go back to the city.” He said.

“Do you work in the city?” she asked. He nodded.

“We own a small toy store chain.” He smiled.

“That’s probably awesome.” He shrugged his shoulders.

“It has its moments. Our advertising is out of date and we haven’t had any luck finding someone who fits Johnson’s toys.”

“Henry!” came a woman’s voice. She walked up and looked into the cart. She looked at Tiffany. “Who’s this?” she asked.

“Mom, this is Margaret.” The woman held out her hand. “This is my mother, Pam.” Tiffany shook her hand.

“I think that’s everything.” Henry nodded and looked at Tiffany.

“It was nice meeting you.” She smiled as he turned and left with his mom.

“What’s going?” asked her mom as she turned around. “Margaret? You hate your middle name.” She smiled at her mom.

“I’ll tell you all about it when we get home.”

Tiffany helped her mom put away the groceries.

“Now tell me what you’re up to.” Tiffany sat down.

“I made a mistake.” She started. “I was supposed to make an ad for this toy store and I let my personal feelings get in the way and now, we’re

all going to lose our jobs." Her mom made them a cup of tea. Tiffany took her and took a sip.

"Is that why you came home?" Tiffany shook her head.

"I didn't know until yesterday he lived here. Actually, I remember him from school." She took a sip of her tea.

"So, the clothes have something to do with this?" Tiffany smiled.

"It worked, he doesn't recognize me." Her mom shook her head.

"Why not just talk to him? Tell him you made a mistake and that you want to make it right." Tiffany shook her head.

"I tried, so I'm going to try something different. I'm going to get to know him, and then before the holidays are over, I'll make my move." Her mom stood and shook her head.

"He won't like being lied to." Tiffany stood and handed her mom the cup.

"I don't have anything to lose."



Tiffany waited for her mom.

"Come on mom, the festival has already started." Her mom walked down the stairs.

"Don't rush me! Who knows who will be there." Tiffany rolled her eyes. "Why are you in a hurry anyway? You hate Christmas." Tiffany pulled on her coat.

"You got that right, and when I get Henry to sign with us, I'll be on top again. Next year it will be Hawaii." Her mom put her coat on.

"I think you should just tell him and then talk to him. When you lie, things never end well." Tiffany opened the door.

"I know what I'm doing." The two got out at the festival.

"I'm going to find Ben." Her mom said and left. Tiffany cringed looking around. People wore funny toboggans, and colorful scarfs. Everything was covered in Christmas lights.

"Hi!" she turned to see Henry standing there.

"Hi!" she said smiling.

"You look so familiar." He said turning around and buying two cups of hot cocoa.

"Thank you." She said taking a sip. "So good." He smiled.

"Can I join you?" he asked. She smiled.

"Of course." She stood beside him as they walked over to the first booth.

"You want one?" Henry asked pointing at some stuffed bears. Tiffany shrugged.

"You think you can get one?" he grinned and paid for three balls. He threw it missing. Tiffany laughed as he threw the next one and missed again. He took a deep breath and locked eyes with her and threw his last ball knocking over the cups. He turned to hand the stuffed bear to her. "Thank you." He turned and started to walk off. She rushed up beside him. "What's wrong?" she asked. He stopped pulling her to the side and pressed his lips to hers. He backed off waiting for her to say something.

"What was that for?" she asked. He reached out and took her hand and continued to walk.

"I've never met anyone like you." She stopped pulling him to a stop.

"You just met me." He smiled shaking his head.

"I don't think so, I don't know where just yet, but I know we've met before." She smiled.

"Maybe, I was one of your many past lovers." He looked confused.

"Many?" he asked pulling her forward.

"I'm sure you're a major player. I mean, rich and good looking." He shook his head.

"There's no time. When I'm in the city its all about work." He looked over at her. "What about you? I'm sure the men are knocking down the door." She shook her head.

"Not many see me as someone they could love. I immerse myself in work, people keep their distance." He giggled.

"Then, we're not much different. We both too busy for love." She stopped. "What's wrong?" he asked. She held up their hands. "So? I enjoy your company. People are stupid to think your not lovable. I mean look at you. You're not trying to be someone you're not." She quickly let go of his hand and turned walking off.

"What's wrong?" her mom asked as she walked up with a tall man. "Tiffany, this is Ben." Tiffany smiled.

"Mom, I need to go home." Her mom let go of Ben's hand.

"Is everything ok?" she shook her head.

"Please mom, will you take me home?" Sara turned around looking at Ben and pulled her keys from her pocket.

"Here, take my car." Tiffany smiled and turned heading towards the cars.

"Hey." She stopped recognizing Henry's voice.

"Please, I don't feel well. I just want to go home." He watched as she got inside the car and speeded off. Tiffany let herself fall onto her bed. She looked up at the ceiling. "What are you doing?" she asked herself, sitting up. She pulled out her laptop and checked her e-mail. She slammed it shut, still no news.



The next morning, Tiffany got up and started to pack her things. She picked up her bag and headed downstairs.

"What's this?" her mom asked. Tiffany sat down her bags.

"Can you take me to the airport?" she asked. Her mom shook her head.

"Not until I know what's going on." Her mom handed her a cup of tea. They walked into the living room and sat down.

"I thought I could be my old self and get to know him and save our jobs." She took a sip of her tea.

"You like him?" her mom asked. Tiffany looked out the window.

"Maybe." She said. Her mom sat down next to her.

"Does this liking him have anything to do with work?" she shook her head.

"It started out that way, but he seems so nice." Her mom stood.

"Then call him, have coffee and come clean." She watched her mom disappear into the kitchen. Tiffany went back to her room and sat her bags on the bed and picked up her phone and dialed his number.

"Hello?" came a man's voice.

"Henry?" she said, it's Margaret. "Do you want to meet for coffee and talk?" she asked. There was a moment of silence.

"Sure, when?" he asked.

"Tomorrow around noon? We can get something to eat." She heard him sigh.

"Ok, it's a date send me your address and I'll pick you up. Until then." He said hanging up. She laid back tossing her phone to the side and headed downstairs.

"Well?" her mom asked.

"We have a date for tomorrow at noon." Her mom smiled opening a box and pulling out a handmade ornament, she turned around.

"Do you remember this?" Tiffany stood and took the ornament.

"Grandma gave me this." Her mom nodded. "Right before I moved to the city. I can't believe I missed the funeral." Her mom hugged her.

"It's alright baby." Her mom said.

"I should have been there. We were so close at one time." Her mom smiled.

“And she knew how much you loved her and that you had important things to do.” Tiffany put the ornament down.

“Is it worth it mom? I work all the time, there’s no time for a personal life. Heck, I’m here to save my job.” Her mom shook her head.

“No, you’re here to set things right. Just think about all those who work for you. That’s why you’re here.” Tiffany took her mom’s hands.

“Not the only reason.” She said smiling hugging her mom.



Tiffany listened as her mom and Ben laugh.

“Tiffany!” her mom yelled. She rolled her eyes as she heard footsteps coming up the stairs. She looked down at her laptop as her door swung open.

“Are you coming down?” She shook her head.

“Trying to get some work done.” Her mom sat down.

“You’re worried?” she said. Tiffany didn’t look up. “Come on, we’re going to town to pick out our tree.” Her mom stood up. “You used to love picking out the tree.”

“That was before my boyfriend dumped me and went on our vacation with his new girlfriend.” Her mom walked over and grabbed her coat and tossed it, covering her laptop.

“That’s why you need to go with us, get some Christmas spirit. We leave in fifteen minutes.” She walked to the door and stopped. “Don’t make me come back up here.” Tiffany shut her laptop and grabbed her coat pulling it ongoing downstairs. She looked at the man standing next to her mom and cringed looking at the bright flashing Christmas sweater. “Great now that we’re all here, let’s go.”



Tiffany stood to the side and watched her mom and Ben. She could see how they touched and laughed at one another. She looked over and saw the most beautiful tree. She walked around it, looking at its perfect branches.

“Mom.” She said. Her mom walked beside her.

“Amazing!” she said hugging her daughter. They stood back and watched as the lot men tied it to the top of their SUV. Her mom took her hand. “It’s just beautiful.” She said moving away.

“Hi.” She turned to look at Hank. “Did you get the best one?” Tiffany turned around as Ben started the car.

“I have to go.” She said. As she moved away, Hank grabbed her by the arm.

“What did I do?” he asked. “Was it the kiss?” she turned to look at him.

“I just need time to think.” She pulled away and climbed into the car. At the house, she stood beside her mom and watched as Ben carried the tree to the house.

“What did he want?” her mom asked. Tiffany shook her head.

“I think he wanted to talk about the kiss.” Her mom looked her way.

“You still going to lunch tomorrow.” She nodded.

“I feel I have to make this right. I have to come clean.” Her mom hugged her.

“That’s my girl, now come on. Let’s help Ben set up the tree and well decorate it tomorrow.”

Tiffany threw the towel to the side as she pulled on her night clothes. She sat down picking up her phone.

“I’m sorry I pulled away. I just can’t get that kiss out of my head. We need to talk. See you tomorrow.” She sent the text and covered up.



Tiffany tossed the next morning covering up her head as her phone rang. She sat up and answered.

“This had better be good.” She yelled.

“Ma’am, it’s Sara. The toy store has called. I’m sending you the information now.” Tiffany pushed back the blankets.

“Are they giving us a meeting?” she asked.

“Yes, but we only have a half an hour, tomorrow.” There was a pause.

“I’m going to need you to work with me. I’ll get a flight back as soon as I can.” She hung up the phone and pulled on some clothes. She stuck her laptop into her bag and picked up her phone and booked her flight. She grabbed her coat and bag and headed downstairs.

“Good morning, honey.” Her mom said looking at her bags. “What’s going on?” Tiffany poured herself a cup of coffee.

“I have to go back to the city. I have a chance to save our jobs.” Her mom pulled out a chair and sat down.

“What’s going to happen when he recognizes you?” Tiffany shrugged.

“Maybe he won’t, he doesn’t know now.” She stood. “I’ll be back as soon as I can.” And left getting into the waiting taxi. She pulled out her phone and sent Hank a text, apologizing for not being able to meet today. She hit send, as the taxi carried her away knowing she’d be seeing him at their meeting.



Tiffany strode into the empty office. She looked at Sara sitting at her desk.

“Are you ready?” she asked as she opened her office door and went in. Sara followed her.

“I printed everything you sent me and made the slideshow.” Tiffany sat down.

“I’m going to need you to work the rest of the week and possibly the weekend.” Sara sat down.

“I can’t work the weekend, it’s my vacation and we’re headed to my parents for Christmas.” Tiffany stood up.

“If you can’t work, I’ll find someone who can.” Sara stood.

“That’s fine, I hope your meeting goes well.” Tiffany watched as she picked up her coat and bag and left.

“Who needs her. I can do this myself.”

Tiffany sat in the restaurant waiting when Hank walked her way and sat down.

“Thank you for giving us this opportunity.” Hank waved at a waiter and ordered a drink.

“That assistant of yours is pretty convincing.” He said as the waiter came back with his drink.

“Sara?” she asked. He nodded.

“She’s been e-mailing the office non-stop for the last week.” Tiffany pulled out her laptop.

“You don’t have to do that. I’ve already seen it, and it’s amazing.” He held out his hand. “I’ve decided to go with your advertising firm for next year.” She smiled shaking his hand. He stopped looking at her curiously. “You look so familiar.” He said standing up and pulling on his coat. “I’ll e-mail you the details and we’ll meet after the first of the year.” She nodded. He started to walk away and turned back around. “Margaret?” he said. She grimaced. “You followed me to my hometown to get this account. I should have recognized you.” He shook his head. “I don’t think us working together would be a good idea.” He turned and walked away. Tiffany sat down and lowered her head onto the table.

“What an idiot.” She said. The waiter walked over.

"Are you ok?" he asked. She looked up at him taking Hank's drink from the tray and drank it down. She stood gathering her things.

"I'm fine." She headed back to her office and sat down. She picked up her phone and called her mom.

"Honey is that you? How did it go?" she asked.

"Mom, I blew it for everyone. He gave us the account and then recognized me." She started to cry.

"It will be ok baby. Come home, Ben and I will wait until you get back to decorate the tree."

"Mom, I think I'm just going to stay here. I need to start looking for another job."

"Don't be crazy, come home where you belong."

"Ok, I'll be back as soon as I can."



Tiffany walked up to her mom's house. The door swung open and her mom and Ben walked out. Her mom grabbed her hugging her.

"It will be ok." The three of them walked inside. "Take off your coat, we will decorate the tree." She took off her coat and sat down, as her mom and Ben started to wrap the tree in lights. "Start unpacking the ornaments." Her mom said smiling. Tiffany pulled a box her way and opened it. She stared down and pulled out the first. "Do you remember that one?" her mom asked sitting down on the arm of the chair.

"I do," Tiffany said. "I made it middle school." Her mom nodded, taking it. She walked over and hung it in front. She turned back around, and Tiffany handed her the next and next. An hour later the tree was decorated. Her mom hugged up with Ben.

"It's beautiful." Her mom said. She reached out and took Tiffany's hand. "It means so much to have you home." Tiffany smiled.

"I'm tired, I think I'll get a shower and go to bed." Her mom watched as she disappeared upstairs.



Hank took a drink of his tea as his mom cooked.

"I thought you really liked her." His mom asked.

"Mom, she was playing me to get our account." She turned around.

"Are you sure?" he nodded.

"She didn't even tell me her real name." His mom dried off her hands and sat down.

"Honey, she was trying to fix things. I know you really liked her. I saw how you two were holding hands at the festival." He took a sip of his tea.

"She was dishonest, mom. I can't be with someone like that." He rinsed out his cup and headed to his room. He pulled out his phone.

"Why didn't you tell me who you were?" he hit the send button and laid back.



Tiffany walked into her room and sat down as her phone beeped. She pulled it out looking at the message.

"I'm sorry, I didn't know we were both from the same hometown until the grocery store. I didn't want you to think I was here because of the account so I gave you my middle name. I'm so sorry." She hit send and grabbed some night clothes and headed for the shower.



Hank looked down at the message. He stretched out and looked up at the ceiling. Was she playing him to get their account? He closed his eyes remembering the kiss they shared. The smell of her hair, the look in her eyes. He took a deep breath remembering her tearing away from him and running away.

“Why did you run away at the festival after I kissed you?” he hit send.



Tiffany picked up her phone and read the message.

“When you kissed me, I realized what a fraud I was. That you didn’t know the real me. You saw the woman I used to be. You saw what I wanted you to see, not the real me. The me that works all the time and the one that got my whole office fired! I didn’t mean to lead you on, and I understand your choice not to give us the account. I hope you have a wonderful life and enjoy your Christmas.” She re-read the message and hit send. She laid back as tears filled her eyes.

The next morning Tiffany got up and showered. She sat down getting dressed when her phone rang.

“Hi, Stan.” She said.

“How’s your vacation?” he asked. She pulled on her shoes.

“Fine so far.”

“Well, that’s good. I’m calling to tell you Hank called me and we have the account. I’ve scheduled a Christmas party the day after tomorrow. Everything is already planned, and I need my branch CEO here.” She took a deep breath.

“When did he call?” she asked.

"I had the voicemail this morning." He said.

"Why did he call you instead of me."

"I don't know, but he loved your work. Now tell me you'll come back for the party." She took another deep breath.

"Ok, I'll be there. This means we won't be shut down?"

"That's right, this account will keep this division in the good for several years. I've got another call. I'll see you in a few days." He hung up. Tiffany walked downstairs. Her mom smiled handing her a cup of coffee.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"Hank called Henry and gave us the account." Her mom squealed and hugged her.

"Why aren't you happy?" she looked at her mom.

"He didn't call me." She said sitting down her cup. "Henry has set up a Christmas party for the office. I need to head back home." Her mom shook her head.

"You just got back, why didn't he say anything before you came home?" Tiffany shook her head again.

"We didn't have the account or the money." She turned to go up the stairs.

"You're coming back for Christmas?" she stopped and turned around.

"I'll be back." She said.



Tiffany walked into the office the day before. She stopped looking at all the decorations.

"It's something, isn't it?" Stan came walking her way.

"It's something." She said. He handed her a glass of wine, but she walked off.

"You should be proud of yourself. You did it." He said. She walked away leaving him standing.

"I didn't do anything." She said turning around. "It was Sara who kept sending him ads." He smiled walking over and holding out the wine.

"Well, we will thank her at the party." She shook her head.

"You don't understand. I had nothing to do with the presentations. I canceled the meeting." He took a drink of his wine.

"So, she did this on her own, without your help or permission?" she nodded.

"Well, first well thank her and then fire her." Tiffany turned her head.

"She deserves more, she saved all of our jobs."

"Then give her raise, give her a promotion. Anything that you want." Tiffany looked up.

"I fired her." He laughed.

"Then what are you worried about?" he held out the glass to her again. She reached out taking it.

"She will be here tomorrow, well make it right." Stan held up his glass.

"Tomorrow then."



Tiffany stood with Stan greeting everyone as they entered. He looked over at her.

"Is she here yet?" she shook her head.

"What if she doesn't come? I did fire her." He shrugged.

"Let's get through today. We will thank her later."

Tiffany watched as people walked around the food table. Some looking her way. Stan walked up to her, handing her a pile of envelopes. She looked at them confused.

“Christmas bonuses.” He said smiling. They walked around handing them out. She looked at the name on the last one. It was Sara’s. She walked over to Chelsey.

“Do you know where Sara is?” Chelsey looked at her.

“Probably home, since you fired her. In the house, they lost because of you.” She turned to walk away but Tiffany grabbed her by the arm.

“What do you mean?” Chelsy pulled out her phone.

“She sent me this Friday.” Tiffany looked at the Notice of repo taped to a door. “Instead of decorating their tree, they are packing to move to a shelter.” Chelsey shook her head. “She worked hard for you, she did everything you asked, and this is how you repay her.” Chelsey turned and pushed her way through the crowd.

Tiffany went to her office and pulled up Sara’s employee records as tears streamed down her face. She wrote down the address and stood as Stan walked in. Tiffany grabbed her coat.

“Where do you think you’re going.” She held out Sara’s bonus. “She’ll come to get it sooner or later.” Tiffany shook her head.

“You don’t understand, they are losing their house because of me.” He shook his head.

“No, they are losing their house because they didn’t pay their bills. Now take that coat off and come back to the party.” She shook her head passing him. “If you leave you’re done.” She stopped, turning around.

“I’ll be back Monday to get my things.” She turned and walked out. In the lobby she pulled out her cell phone she talked to the bank and got the needed information. She had two days to pull this off.

Tiffany woke the next morning in her apartment. She sat up sending Chelsey a text message and took a shower. She looked at her phone while getting dressed.

“Why should I help you?” Chelsey had asked.

“Please help me make a wrong right. Please! I quit my job to help her.” She pulled on her shoes and waited for the next message.

"Ok, I'll meet you for coffee. I'm not promising I'll help." Tiffany grinned and finished dressing. She made a pot of coffee and sat down.

"Hank, thank you for giving us the account. I want you to know that I've quit. Thank you for believing in us. I need your help. Please call me."

She hit send and grabbed her coat. Tiffany sat in the banks waiting rooms.

"Tiffany?" a man said walking up and holding out his hand. "Please come with me." The man listened and shook his head. "They are six months behind on their payment. We have no option but to foreclose." Tiffany sat back in her chair.

"How much do they owe?" she asked. The man pushed some buttons.

"Almost eight thousand dollars." He said. Tiffany stood up.

"This isn't over." She said.

Tiffany met with Chelsey. She walked in and sat down.

"You have fifteen minutes," Chelsey said.

"First, you should know that I quit. I've already gone to the bank, they won't give an extension. They owe almost eight thousand dollars." Tiffany said smiling at a woman who sat down a cup of coffee.

"What's your plan?" asked Chesley.

"I don't know, we need help," Tiffany said. Chelsey leaned forward.

"Why now? You were so mean to her." Tiffany sat back.

"Things have changed." Chelsey looked her over. Her hair was pulled back in a ponytail. She wore jeans and a blouse.

"I can see that." She said. "Are you doing this to make yourself feel better?" Tiffany leaned in close.

"No, I'm doing it because Sara deserves it and no one deserves to lose their home." She took a drink. "Especially because of me." Chelsey stood up and bent down writing her number on a napkin.

"I'll do what I can." She said handing Tiffany the number. "What can I do?" Tiffany added the number to her phone.

"We can start by trying to raise the money to pay off their mortgage. I'm willing to donate \$2000 of my own money." Chelsey looked at her.

"That's...." she stopped. "What's changed?" Tiffany stood and put on her coat.

"I messed up and I want to fix it," stated Tiffany.

"I will call everyone at work and see if they can help." Tiffany nodded.

"Good, and I have a few other things I will be working on." Chelsey turned and left. Tiffany looked down as her phone vibrated.

"Sorry, you quit your job. Anything I can do?" she smiled at Hanks message. She explained things to him and hit send. She asked him if he could help.



Tiffany sat in her apartment looking down at job classifieds. She took a deep breath and sent a couple e-mails and leaned back looking at her phone. Still no reply from Hank. She took a deep breath and stood up walking into her living room. She looked around at the bare apartment when the doorbell rang. She walked over and looked through the peephole and slowly opened the door.

"Hank." She said. "Come on in." she stepped to the side as he entered. He stopped turning around.

"No tree?" she shook her head. "Get dressed, well go and get one." She shut the door.

"Why, Christmas is in two days." She walked over and sat down. Hank sat down in a chair.

"Why do you hate Christmas?" she took a deep breath.

"It's personal." She stood up when his hand caught her arm.

"Please, help me understand what made you hard. What happened?" she let him pull her back to the couch.

"My boyfriend dumped me on Christmas. We were supposed to leave on vacation. He found someone younger and took her instead." Hank shook his head.

"I'm sorry, but everyone isn't like that jerk." He caressed her face and leaned in kissing her. "Please come with me to get a tree." She stood up.

"Let me take a bath and get dressed." He shook his head.

"You look beautiful the way you are." She looked down at her sweatpants and shirt.

"I can't go out like this. Look at yourself." He did and looked back at her.

"This is who I like, the messy, little town you. Not the snooty corporate you." She smiled and left. He paced back and forth as she came back with her coat and pulled it on.

They walked hand in hand down to the door where a limo waited.

"Were going tree shopping in this?" he nodded.

"Why not?" he asked smiling as his driver opened the door.

"Jim, take us to a tree lot." The driver nodded, and they were soon driving away.



Hank and Tiffany walked around the tree lot. He stopped looking up.

"This is it." He said. Tiffany looked up at the almost eight-foot tree.

"It's big." She said. He smiled.

"That's the point." He paid, and driver tied it on top of the car. Inside the car, he took her hand.

"We need to make a quick stop at my office and then I'll take you home." Tiffany followed him through the halls and he stopped opening a door. "Make yourself at home, I'm going to change." He opened a door and shut it behind him. A few minutes later he came out wearing a pair of jeans and a pull-on shirt. He sat down pulling on his shoes.

"Now that's much better. Now tell me what's going on with your assistant. Tiffany explained again what was going on. "Wow, what a mess," he said. He stood looking out the windows. He turned around. "Why the change of heart? You gave up a good job," he asked. She looked down at her hands and looked up at him.

"I remembered who I was before. The girl who worked for what she had. The girl who loved Christmas more than anything. Then I met you, and when you kissed me that night at the festival...and helping my mom decorate her tree..." she trailed off.

"What?" he asked. Tears streamed down her face.

"I realized the woman who fired Sara wasn't the real me. It wasn't the person I wanted to be." He walked over and sat down on his desk and wiped away her tears.

"All of that from a kiss and a tree?" she nodded.

"I remembered the way you looked at me at our meeting and then the way you treated me when you didn't know who I was." He caressed her face and kissed her softly.

"You're not like other girls." He said standing, grabbing his coat. "I will help you with Sara." He said. She smiled standing up. "If you agree to work for me." He said. She looked at him confused.

"Doing what?" he smiled.

"What you do best. You will run our new in-house advertising department and I'll hire Sara as your assistant." She shook her head.

"We can't use the material Sara sent you." He zipped up his coat.

"I have faith in you and know you'll come up with something better. Now come on, I'm in the mood to decorate that tree."

Tiffany opened the door to her attic and looked down at the afghan covering the box she had thrown over her Christmas decorations.

"Did you find the decorations?" Hank asked behind her. She stepped to the side and pointed. He walked in and pulled away the blanket. He picked up the box and they headed back downstairs. He pulled out the stand and set up the tree. "Magnificent." He said standing back. Tiffany

sat down on the floor and opened the box, with Hank next to her. "It's ok." He said. "I'm here with you." She slowly opened the box. She stood unraveling the lights. They spent the next hour decorating. They stood back. "Go ahead and plug in the lights." She did and stepped back beside him. "What do you think?" he asked. She looked over at him.

"Thank you!" she said. He met her eyes.

"For what?" she smiled pressing her lips to his.

"Forgiving Christmas back to me." She kissed him again.

"You hungry?" he asked. She nodded sitting down on the couch. "You like Chinese?" she nodded. He pulled out his cell phone and ordered. He sat down next to her.



Tiffany stretched out on the couch. She sat up looking around. She looked over at the coat rack and Hanks missing coat and then at the tree. She took a deep breath and stood up, she walked over to the kitchen looking at the pot of coffee and a note.

"Had some errands to run. Be back soon." She smiled going to her room. She stepped out of the shower and headed back to the living room when the doorbell rang. She opened the door.

"Hi!" Hank said smiling. He held up a bag. "Breakfast." He said. He set the bag down on the counter and pulled out an envelope out of his coat and handed it to her.

"What's this?" he smiled as she opened it.

"Sara's deed, you paid it off?" he nodded. She wrapped her arms around him.

"Thank you." She said.

"We're not done, I have a crew at the store getting gifts for their children and some shopping in nearby stores. I have a kitchen cooking din-

ner for them.” She pressed her lips to his. He smiled taking a bite of the croissant roll.

“I need to call and tell Chelsey.” He shook his head and pulled out another envelope. She opened it looking at a check.

“Everyone in your office raised that.” He said. “That should be more than enough to keep them in the green until she starts her new job next year.” Tiffany pulled him close.

“Why me?” she asked. He smiled leaning in and whispering in her ear.

“Because you’re not like others. You have a big heart.” He said. “Now, if you want to change well go and deliver the good news to Sara and her family.” Tiffany kissed him and ran off. She quickly changed and headed back to the living room. “I’ve got a plane on standby to take us home.” She nodded sitting down and pulling on her shoes. She stood taking a deep breath.

Tiffany walked up to Sara’s house holding Hanks’ hand. With shaking hands, she reached out and rang the doorbell. A small boy opened the door.

“Can I help you?” he asked. She smiled.

“Is your mommy home?” she asked.

“No!” Sara said walking up behind him, pushing the door shut.

“Please, Sara I need to talk to you.” She opened the door a little.

“What could you have to say? Do you see this?” she asked pointing at the notice on the door. Hank reached out and tore the notice down and tore it up. “That’s on you.” She said. Tiffany held out her hand.

“Please, let us talk to you and your husband, please.” Sara opened the door.

“You have five minutes she said. They walked in looking at the stacked boxes. A man soon joined her and two small children huddled up to them. Hank handed Tiffany the deed.

"I'm sorry for the way I treated you and I'm sorry for firing you." She held out the deed. Sara held it out looking at it. She looked over at her husband as tears filled her eyes.

"Is this for real?" she asked looking back at Tiffany and Hank.

"Why would you do this?"

"Hank paid off the note, the house is yours."

"Free and clear," Hank said.

"But why?" Tiffany's eyes filled with tears.

"It's all my fault." She said. Sara pulled her in and hugged her.

"There's more," Hank said turning, opening the door. Two men came in carrying a Christmas tree and four others carrying all the food. "Merry Christmas!" Hank said. Sara rushed him, hugging him tightly. The two small kids joined her. Sara backed off.

"We will pay it all back." Hank shook his head.

"No, it's my gift to you. I do have one request." She wiped away her tears. "You come to work for me next year and work with Tiffany on my store's ads." Sara looked back at her husband. "And we should be able to find something for you too." The man held out his hand.

"That would be great." He said with tears in his own eyes. More people came in piling up Christmas presents. Hank pulled out the check and gave it to them.

"That's from your old office, Chelsey and your colleagues." Hank turned to Tiffany. "Well, we should be going," Hank said to Tiffany. He turned back to Sara. "These men will help you unpack and help with the tree." He handed her a card. "I'll be I touch. My assistant over there will get you anything else you might need until you can get that check to the bank. They all hugged again and Tiffany and Hank went back to the car. He smiled reaching over and wiping away Tiffany's tears.

"How do you feel about Christmas now?" he asked. She pushed forward, pressing her lips to his.

"This is the best Christmas ever!" she said kissing him.



Sometimes, Christmas doesn't feel like Christmas. We lose our way. Be it the loss of a loved one, bills that you can't pay, drug abuse, a fight with a loved one, or depression. We as adults close off our hearts and fail to see the magic of the holiday. Open your heart, look around at your loved ones. Money, material things mean nothing without the love of family!!! Cherish the ones that are here, and what you have. Because in the end, that's all that matters. Merry Christmas!



Also by Michael Lee Ables Jr.

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## About the Author

**Michael grew up in the hills of West Virginia. A graduate of Lewis County High School, and WV Business college. Writing became a favorite past time.**

**He loves spending time with his animals, and his family.**

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