

Christmas is supposed to be a happy time, so when happens to Angela's children when the psychiatrist wants to take Christmas away? Will Angela's brother, Uncle Nick, be able to stop this from happening?

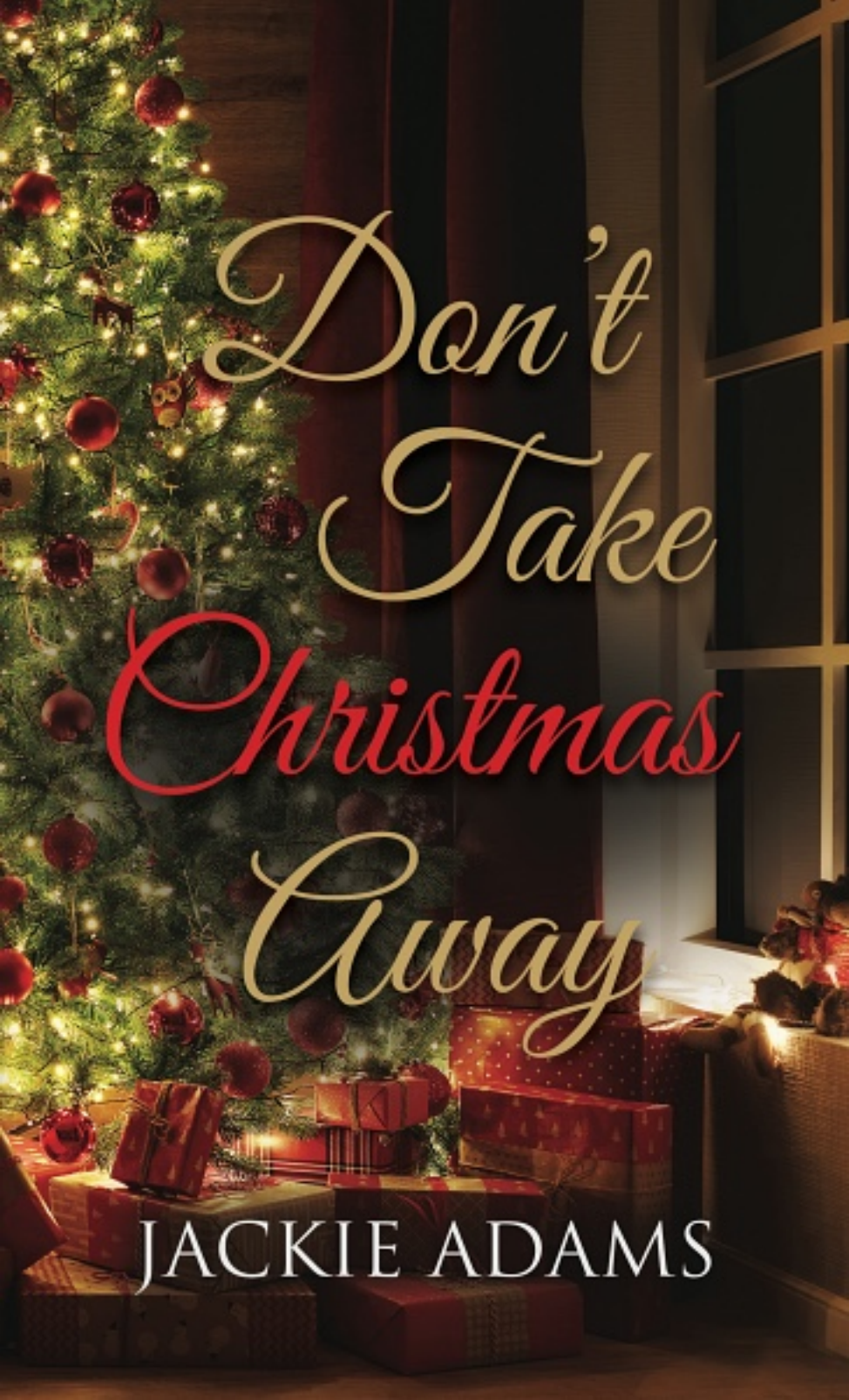
Don't Take Christmas Away

By Jackie Adams

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A festive Christmas scene featuring a large, decorated tree on the left, glowing with warm white lights and adorned with red and gold ornaments. At the base of the tree are several wrapped gifts in red and gold paper. To the right, a window looks out into the dark night, with a small decorative arrangement on the sill. The overall atmosphere is cozy and celebratory.

*Don't
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Christmas
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JACKIE ADAMS

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Chapter 1

The children are huddled together snuggling in the corner of the living room in front of the wood-burning stove. Looking outside the window you could see the snow still coming down slow in large white flakes. The ground heavy with layers already. The children, each of the three of them, deep in their own dreams. Dancing gingerbread men, elves at the workshop, and even Santa with his Jello belly laughter. Underneath the Christmas tree, with its branches reflecting against the frosted window, are all sorts of presents wrapped for the children. Which is why they slept huddled in the living room! They hoped to see Santa sneaking in to eat his oatmeal cookies they baked just the night before. As Angela quietly takes bites of the cookies, she watches each of them sleeping in their blissful dreams. She thinks, Ho-ho-ho, my sweet children.

As they begin to stir, she tip-toes back to her bedroom. She is as quiet as a mouse as she wraps the comforter around her. Shortly after, she hears, “Mommy, Mommy, get up!” She opens one eye and pretends to rise for the first time today.

She stretches out her arms then tickles her youngest son, “Yes, handsome? What is it?”

He says with so much excitement, “Santa was here!!!”

Her other two children come running and jump on her bed. She ruffles her middle son’s hair while pulling her eldest, the daughter, against her. “I suppose it must be Christmas Day then!”

Her youngest son pulls at her arm, “Come on, mom. We want to open our gifts.”

The three children go running into the living room with her eldest son dragging her behind by the arms. “Okay, okay. I’m coming.” She laughs as she watches them look through the name tags on the presents. As they sort them, she pours herself a cup of coffee she made earlier. She walks back into the living room, pokes at the logs in the wood burner, then takes a seat Indian style on the couch.

This is her children’s first Christmas without their dad, Avery, whom they lost in a tragic car accident. His death was sudden, but the kids mourning, slow. The kids have struggled, but her oldest daughter struggles the most. She was Daddy’s little girl. Maybe Angela’s expecting too much. They are in the first year of grief. She wishes the school was more patient, but she guesses grades don’t stop for anyone.

Angela tells her children, “No opening your presents until your Uncle Nick gets here!”

Her older son says, "Ahh, mom. Geez, when's he gonna get here already?"

She picks up the cordless phone and dials Nick's cellphone number.

He says, "Hello?"

"Nick? I thought you'd be here by now."

"I'm on my way, Angie. I'm sorry, it's the traffic. Tell the kids I have surprises for them."

She hangs up the telephone and gets up to walk back to the kitchen as she says, "He's almost here, kids." She grabs the cookie tray, "Have a cookie while you wait. Do you want some milk?"

Thirty minutes later, there's a knock at the door. Good timing, because the kids were becoming restless. Maybe it was the sugar, maybe it was the presents. "Come in," she yells as she takes the cookie tray back in the kitchen and grabs Nick a cup of coffee. As he walks in, she hands it to him. "I'd give you a hug, but the hot coffee was enough to stop the thought."

He sets the coffee and oversized bag down and says, "Sis, there's no getting out of it." He bundles her in his arms. He whispers, "I love you."

Her youngest son asks, "Can we open them now, mom, please???"

She tells them, "Go on then, open them," as she and Nick take a seat on the sofa.

There's wrapping paper flying through the air. She catches a few tattered pieces and gets up to go to the kitchen. Nick pulls her back down by the arm and says, "I'll get a bag. You stay here and watch the kids open their gifts."

Angela nods her head and loses herself to seeing their excitement. The ooo'ing and aaa'ing. Each of them completely happy with the toys they received. Her oldest with an app gift card for fifty dollars. She's so excited she says, "Mom, can I go to my room now? Please?"

Angela runs her hand through the back of Dory's long blonde hair, "Not yet, sweetheart. You have to open Uncle Nick's surprise. He went to the kitchen to get me a bag. He'll be back any second."

Dory sits back down. As Angela waits, she thinks about what Dory has been through. She sighs as she again thinks about Dory being Daddy's little girl. Dory is ten years old; Levy is eight years old, and Seth is six years old. Angela was married to Avery twelve years ago. All three of the children were planned and well thought out. Avery and Angela thought they would grow old together. Never did it cross their minds that she'd ever become a widow at such a young age.

Nick comes back in and hands her the trash bag. "You only needed one, right?"

“Yes, one is plenty.” She stands up and starts putting the wrappings in the bag as Nick hands out his gifts to the children. He says, “Come over here, Angie. I have a present for you, too.” He pulls out a small, wrapped box.

She puts the bag down with the last wrapping tucked inside it. She walks over to Nick, and he hands it to her. He says, “I sure hope you like it.”

She puts the other hand on her heart and says, “I’d love anything from you.”

Seth says, “Uncle Nick! Uncle Nick!” And holds up a gift for him from under the tree. “We got you one, too.” He hands the wrapped surprise to Nick.

Nick says, “You open yours first, kids. Then I’ll open mine.”

The kids rip through theirs and each is happy with what Nick picked out for them. “Mommy, Mommy!!!” Seth holds up a fire engine.

Levy holds up his Ninja Turtles and says, “I like mine better, Seth, and I better not catch you with them, either.”

Dory smiles shyly looking at her unicorn ring and says, “Thanks Uncle Nick.”

The kids run up to him giving him a hug. The two boys go to their shared room, and Dory takes herself to hers. Probably already downloading apps on her computer. Angela picks up the bag when Nick takes it

from her. He says, "I'll tell you what. You freshen our cups with some hot coffee, and I'll run the trash down. How's that sound?"

"That sounds good, thanks, Nick." She walks into the kitchen with both of their cups. She thinks to herself, I'm doing pretty well. I'm not crying, which is nice for a change. Maybe it's the children who are so happy, maybe it's Nick being here for me. All I know is I feel happy for the first time since losing Avery.

Nick comes back into the kitchen and takes a cup from her. "Thanks, sis." He gulps a drink much too fast. "Whoa, that's hot."

Angela can't help but laugh. "I thought some of it was going to come out of your nose."

He wipes his mouth, "And it almost did!" He holds his stomach as he lets out a hearty laugh.

Seth comes in with his Army troopers and fire engine. He sits on the kitchen floor rolling around his fire truck he now has placed an Army trooper in. He says, "Fast boys. Jump in. There's a fire."

Angela looks over at Nick who is watching Seth. He looks back at Angela and says, "We did good. They're having a great Christmas."

"Yes." She bends down to gain eye contact with Seth. "Go to your room and play with your toys in there, son. I need to talk to Uncle Nick."

“Awww, Mom.” He picks up his big fire truck and his troopers and makes his way back to the bedroom where Levy is happily playing with his Ninja Turtles.

Nick leans against the island. “How are you holding up without Avery?”

Angela traces the rim of her coffee cup, “I guess as well as can be expected.”

He asks, “And the kids?”

She stares at her coffee cup, “That’s a whole other subject.” She sighs, “Dory is doing terribly with it. Her teacher called complaining that her grades have dropped a lot. She doesn’t participate in groups as she had before. Levy is fighting with kids in class. Seth seems to be the only one pushing through.” She shakes her head. “I’ve tried rationalizing with both Dory and Levy. I don’t seem to be getting anywhere with them.” She looks to the floor, “I just hate that we’re going through this.”

Nick hugs her and says, “I know you do, Angie. But you’re getting through this the best you know how. Hang in there. You’re a wonderful mom. Stay strong for the kids.” He lets her go and asks, “Are you still bringing them to me in the mornings before you start work?”

She feels panic overcome her, “It’s hard to believe I’m going to be waitressing again. I’m so old now. It’s been years.”

Nick rubs her back, “Slow down. You’re going to be just fine. I know you barely make it on the pension Avery left you. The extra money will help you live more comfortably. It’s good you can do that. Not many have the luxury. It really takes two people living together if not more.”

She pours herself some more coffee. Maybe three cups are pushing her limit, but it is Christmas Day. “I know. I don’t mind working. It’s not that at all. It’s just been years, since I’ve worked. I hope I’m not the only old one there.”

Nick shrugs, “Look at it this way! Nobody under the age of eighteen will be working. They have school during the day. You’re going to be fine, Angie. You wait and see. Waitressing is probably like riding a bike. Once you know, you know.”

She repeats, “Once I know, I know.” Then smiles at Nick. “I like that. I’m going to start using this saying from now on.”

Levy comes in rolling his eyes. “Mom, Seth took my Raphael.”

She puts her hand on top of Levy’s head, “Who?”

“My Ninja turtle. He keeps making him the bad guy in his pretend play. He won’t give it back.”

As she walks down the hall, she yells, “Seth... give your brother back his turtle.” She makes her way inside the doorframe.

Seth says, "But mom, he makes a good monster."

She raises her eyebrow, "Seth, I said give it back to Levy. That's his Christmas present. You have your own."

Seth is lying on his belly with his Army trooper inside the fire truck rolling it with one hand, while his other hand holds onto Raphael. "But you say to share."

"Yes, sharing is good, but not so soon. Now give your brother back his ninja turtle. No arguing today, it's Christmas."

Seth throws the turtle across the room, "There, have it."

"Seth, that's no way to treat your brother's things. How would you like it if he took one of your Christmas toys and threw it?"

Seth hangs his head low then looks up with his big eyes, "I wouldn't like it at all."

Angela leans against the door frame, "Exactly." She stands there watching the boys start playing with their own toys now. After they seem content, she makes her way past Dory's room. She knocks on her door.

Dory yells, "Come in."

Angela sits on the edge of her bed, "Did you have a good Christmas?"

Dory spins around in her desk chair, "A great one, mom! Thanks!" She goes on and on about some apps she downloaded on her PC. All too confusing for

Angela. She must have spent fifteen minutes talking about them. Once she turns back around and goes quiet...

Angela tells her, "I better get back in there with Uncle Nick. He probably wonders where I've gone off to." She kisses the back of Dory's head.

Angela goes into the kitchen and asks Nick, "Would you like a cookie?" She holds up the tray full of them.

Nick holds his belly, "No, no. I've had my fill thanks to mom last night. I don't want to see another cookie for a whole year." He hands Angela the small box again. "We forgot to open our presents."

"Oh, I hope you don't think I could care less. I just get so busy with the kids." She holds the box up under the light. "I guess there's no peeking."

He laughs, "You don't have to peek. Just open it."

She feels embarrassed opening a gift, especially in front of him. She does it, anyway. It's a small white box. She can tell it's going to be jewelry. She opens the top of it and pulls out a long chain that holds a gold heart.

He tells her, "Go ahead, open up the heart."

"I'm no plastic surgeon." She smiles as he laughs. She opens the heart and there inside on one side is a photo of Avery and on the other side is a photo of their three kids. "Wow!"

He asks, "Do you like it?"

She wipes away some tears, “I love it, and I love you.” She gives him a hug. “Such a thoughtful, heartfelt gift.”

She sees he put the gift that she and the children picked out for him on the counter. His is jewelry too. She guesses it would be considered that anyway. She points to it. “Are you going to open up your gift now?”

He picks it up, shakes it, and unwraps it. He opens the case and pulls out a pocket watch. “This is too beautiful. What did I do to deserve something this nice. What are all these dials for?”

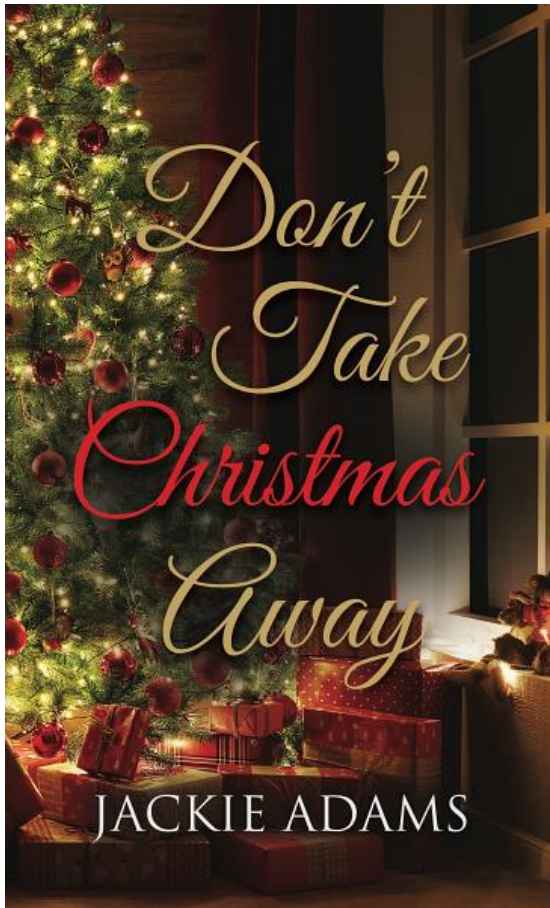
She tells him, “I don't know. There's a note. Maybe dad explained what they are for.”

He holds it up eyeing it. He reads the note out loud it says, “Enjoy the watch. It is very special. It's been handed down from generation to generation from my great grandfather.” He finishes reading the note, “You won't miss out on anything that's for sure.” The watch sparkles as he puts it back in the case. It sparkles so brightly that he has to blink his eyes. He puts the box on the table looks over at Dory as she is walking by and asks her if she got everything she wanted for Christmas.

Dory starts to cry uncontrollably and starts screaming, “All I wanted was my dad, and he's gone.” She runs back into her bedroom.

As the day goes by, they are all out and about with their friends. Their friends are all happy, and the people

in the town are all happy, but the three children who lost their dad are not enjoying Christmas afternoon. They keep comparing their Christmas with the Christmas of their friends and the people in the town. The children all meet at home later, and they are all sad. It's not the same day without Dad. They all say they wish the day were over.



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