

A Curiously Cool Christmas

By

Heather Graham

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Everything is going so well...

The Krewe of Hunters have enjoyed a wonderful office party and Jackson Crow and Angela are getting ready to head home to spend Christmas Eve with their children with hot cocoa, Christmas lights and music . . .

But it's not to be so easy.

A spirit from the past desperately stops them in the parking lot.

People have been kidnapped! They're being held in a basement and God alone knows what their kidnapper intends to do.

On Christmas Eve!

Well, since they are being led by a ghost, it's rather hard to alert the local authorities.

And Christmas Eve or no . . .

One of the kidnapped victims is an elderly man who had been living on the streets. Others were runaway, or those who had desperately trying to survive by whatever means they might.

Some are young and must be terrified!

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But sometimes, the magic of the season does exist; they'll just need to pull a Christmas miracle out of a hat . . .

But they discover that it is Christmas. And miracles in strange disguises just might appear on a wintry Christmas Eve.

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“Angela!”

Jackson Crow cried out his wife’s name with alarm.

Angela smiled, hoping her expression reassured him. She had almost slipped in the snow but had saved herself from a fall when she’d caught herself by catching hold on the hood of the car with the flats of her hand.

“It’s good, I mean, I’m good!” she said quickly. “Hey, everyone *wants* a white Christmas, right?” she asked her husband. “It’s pretty white! Remember, ‘I’m dreaming of a *white* Christmas!’” she sang softly.

They were just leaving the unit’s Christmas party, and it had just turned dark on Christmas Eve. It wasn’t snowing now, but the last few days had seen a flurry of white; and in places, ice crystals remained on the ground.

The not so great part of a white Christmas—ice on the ground in places and you couldn't see!

He shook his head, looking upward, but he smiled as well. "It's not going to be such a great Christmas if I'm rushing you into a hospital for hip surgery," he told her.

"But I'm fine and the party was great!" she told him. "And this part is amazing. It's been fairly quiet across the country and even as far as the European division goes! Maybe the world's criminals are even in the holiday spirit! And now we going home to have Christmas Eve with our kids. I didn't fall! I'm fine! The forces of good are aligning!"

"If only!" A voice said with wearied tension.

The third voice startled her, and Angela quickly turned.

She and Jackson had been working together for years, discovering during their first investigation as the "Krewe of Hunters" in New Orleans that they were excellent partners.

In many ways. They were truly an "old married couple" now, with almost thirteen years together with the Krewe—and almost as many as a married couple. Both working in the same unit the way they did wasn't normally accepted in the bureau, but nothing about the Krewe was what one usually accepted as "normal."

As in the fact she immediately knew the man who had so suddenly come upon them and spoken was not among the living.

Rather a "remaining soul." More commonly known as a ghost.

In life, he had apparently made it into his eighties before passing. He had thin silver hair matching his mustache and beard. He had stood at about six feet and even in old age, he stood tall and trim.

And dignified, she thought.

“Sir—” she began.

“You do see me. Good. Please! I’m begging you! It’s Christmas Eve, and they’re young and must be terrified, and please! You must help them!”

Jackson stepped into the conversation.

“Sir, I’m sorry. We haven’t received any information on missing children—”

“No, you may not know yet. Local police have gotten reports, but they’re just not that concerned. Because *he* started with the homeless, the poor people on the streets, runaways . . . but just because a teenager has run away from home once doesn’t mean that it’s a bad or horrible person.”

“No, of course not,” Jackson murmured.

“And I’m afraid because, well, who deserves whatever it is he intends to do with them!” the ghost said with quiet misery. Quickly adding, “I’m sorry, I’m sorry! Captain Joshua Shoal, United States Navy, retired. And well, yeah, dead of course. But that doesn’t make me useless in a situation like this!”

“Sir, of course not!” Angela assured him. “I’m Angela Hawkins Crow and this is my husband, Jackson, and we’re with—”

“I know who you are and what you do,” he assured them. “A friend mentioned you to me, a fellow soul still wandering. And he assured me that if anyone could do anything it’s you. So, I beg you—”

“Can you tell us a bit more?” Angela interrupted gently.

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“I know where they are!” the ghost told them. “He took them, he promised them food, cots, someone to care . . . I followed them.”

“We can call more of the team—” Jackson began.

“No, no! Please, please come *now*, come quickly! I don’t know what he intends!” the ghost of Joshua Shoal told them.

“All right, okay,” Jackson said soothingly. He looked at Angela, seeking her agreement.

She nodded quickly. They’d be fine. Mary Tiger was at their house with their kids, and she’d be spending the night with them anyway.

“Pop in and tell me where I’m going,” Jackson told the ghost, indicating the backseat of the car.

There was no need to open the door for him.

They headed out.

The Krewe offices were in Northern Virginia, a high traffic area for politicians, others concerned with government in D.C., stores and restaurants ready to serve all those working in whatever capacity, and more.

But on the fringes of their area were great vast swatches of forest areas interspersed with farmhouses, ranches, national and state preserves, old battlefields and more.

“Okay,” Jackson said, glancing back at the ghost through the rearview mirror, “what happened, how do you know what happened, and how did you manage to get from where we’re going to where you found us?”

For the first time in their albeit quick acquaintance, the spirit of Joshua Shoal smiled.

“Ever hear of a hitch-hiking ghost?” he asked them. He leaned forward, arms folded, his elbows on the edge of the front bucket seats as he inched up between Angela and Jackson. “I knew about you. A friend of mine at the cemetery knew about you from some help you’d given a friend of his a few years back. Anyway . . .”

He paused for a minute.

“I have a teenaged great-granddaughter. She’s basically a good kid, but she went out in a huff when her mother disapproved of the newest love of her life—the kid’s on too many drugs. Anyway, Heidi figured that out when he dragged her to some party. She left the party, but she didn’t know where she was . . . she ran into Arnie Seagull and . . . he brought her back with him. Not to a police station. To a house and then down into the basement. And there was an old man there, a boy, another couple of teenaged girls . . . and when I saw the basement, I knew! I knew I had to get to you and that you had to get there and save them!” He paused and said quickly, “There, take the turnoff there. It’s a small town in Loudoun Country not far from the Appalachian Trail, a cool fun brewery with a hiking trail around it and maybe a thousand or so residents!” he said.

“And they walked from wherever they were—”

“Told you. Heidi was at a party in a little town right off US1. And they didn’t walk that far. But the town is small, still less than twenty miles to D.C., but you know traffic . . . they were already out here. Oh, and Heidi’s home is in the far southern area of Alexandria, so she didn’t go that far, if she could get out . . .”

His voice trailed again.

“Joshua,” Angela said. “You said that a man named Arnie Seagull took Heidi. Did you know him? How did you know the man’s identity?”

Joshua sighed. “Once upon a time, he was the best man, the most amazing man in the world. Yeah, I knew him. He was a petty officer in the Navy, years ago. I grew very old—and passed away—and Arnie grew old and . . . and he had a car accident, they put him on Oxy, and I guess he never managed to get off the need for . . . for something. Went a little crazy, went into rehab . . . and then I heard about a few bodies found near the area.”

Angela glanced at Jackson.

They were aware that the body of a young woman had been found in a bog near Alexandria, but an autopsy had suggested that she’d died by her own hand of an overdose. Then again, maybe she’d been helped.

“They don’t know—” she began.

“Right,” the ghost interrupted. “They don’t know that she didn’t just overdose on her own. I can’t figure out why she’d be running around that area . . . and I saw Arnie in a pub, and I heard people talking . . . the girl had been in the pub before she’d disappeared. And Arnie had been there.”

“That’s one incident that’s circumstantial,” Jackson reminded him.

“Why drag all those people down to his basement?” Joshua demanded. “I mean . . . I don’t know. But Heidi has had her problems as a teen, seeing a guy who has been brought in on drugs a few times, suspended from class . . . it’s amazing the kid hasn’t been

suspended yet! And there's Arnie who had all his problems, possibly befriended every dealer in the area and beyond . . .”

“Still, do you know that—”

“He has a bunch of people in his basement!” Joshua exclaimed. “What do you think he intends to do with them, especially since a woman was found drugged out dead and in a bog near the bar where he liked to hang out?”

Angela glanced at Jackson.

It was a strange story.

And it was Christmas Eve. Dreams of peace and love and miracles.

But they were both committed to using their abilities to see and talk to the dead in the best possible way.

And this ghost wanted help.

“Down there, see, just down the street. Kind of a stretch of trees, then a lawn, and that house, kind of weather-beaten, overgrown grass . . . that's it. We've got to get in and then down to the basement!” Joshua said.

Angela arched a brow to Jackson.

They didn't have a search warrant.

Legally, they had no standing. They could only hope the man would answer the door, and they could finagle an excuse to get in the house.

“Oh, come on! You can tell the lawyers you heard someone screaming, and you had to get in!” Joshua said.

“Pardon?” Angela murmured, turning to look at him.

“What? You don’t think that I might know exactly what you’re thinking? I may not have been any kind of special agent, but I made my way up the ranks in the United States Navy! I know about the military—and I know about civilian law, too.”

Jackson laughed softly.

Angela arched a brow to him.

“Ah, come on. Anyone who watches TV knows something about the law!” he said.

“You can do it; you can get in there!” Joshua said.

“Right. And if we can’t, you can, and you can hop on back up and out and tell us just what is going on down there. And if anyone is in serious distress, we will just break in,”

Jackson assured him.

Break in, Angela thought dryly.

“You must get in before they’re in serious distress!” Joshua said. “Before someone is dead!”

“Joshua, please, we’ll do everything we can do, everything we need to do,” Jackson told him firmly.

He pulled the car off the road by the small, wooded area that flanked the road just before they came to the overgrown lawn surrounding the house.

The place appeared to be entirely quiet.

A very pale light emanated from the house, as if one light might be on in the kitchen or in a hallway.

Angela gave herself a mental knock on the head; she should have been looking up information on the address long ago.

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She glanced at Jackson and said quickly, “Give me a sec!”

He knew what she was doing. And he was probably giving himself a mental knock on the head as well—this was what they did! And they were good at it, and research on their possible suspects and situation had become a specialty with her.

She keyed in what she needed.

“Who owns the place?” Joshua demanded from the backseat.

“It does belong to Arnie—or an Arnold Seagull,” Angela said. “One more second. Okay. He inherited the home from his father about a decade ago, and it’s left in trust for a son who now resides in Pennsylvania. He pays his taxes, and he’s on a pension from the armed forces and collects social security as well. He’s far from rich but brings in enough to pay his taxes, his electric bill, so it appears—but maybe not enough for lawn maintenance. Anyway, it is his house, so—”

“So, what are we waiting for now?” Joshua demanded.

“Just checking . . . he, uh, finished a stint at a veteran’s addiction rehab about three months ago. Apparently, he’s been clean since—” Angela began.

“Oh, like hell!” Joshua exclaimed. “If you’re clean, you don’t abduct people!”

“Okay, okay, but people do go clean. And stay clean,” Jackson reminded him.

“Please!” Joshua begged.

“Okay, okay, we’re going in!” Jackson said.

For brief seconds, Angela’s mind raced. The party had been so wonderful! People she worked with, people she loved. Those in the Krewe had a tendency to form great relationships; they understood one another as others couldn’t.

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A beautiful party . . .

And the drive there had shown them beautiful Christmas lights, Santa riding across the sky in lights, and trees with beautiful stars gleaming atop them.

And they should have been home then, playing Christmas carols, teasing the kids about Santa Claus and wrapping last minutes gifts! Church in the morning with more beautiful music and . . .

Maybe they could help someone. And maybe, that was what the season was really all about!

They exited the car. "I'm going down," Joshua told them.

"Of course you are," Angela said. "And report to us—"

"Oh, you bet!"

Angela and Jackson headed to the front door. He tapped strongly on it, glancing at Angela.

Nothing.

She saw that there was a tiny "bell" button, and she pushed it.

They waited.

Nothing.

They looked at one another.

"Well, we can say that we heard a scream," Angela said. "Joshua knows that the people are down in the basement."

Jackson winced and nodded. "I got the door," he said.

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He stepped back, ready to ram a shoulder against it. But something bothered Angela about the house.

“Wait!” she said, trying the door.

The bolt wasn’t locked.

Neither was the knob.

She arched a brow to Jackson, and he shook his head, a small smile on his lips.

“Well, go figure,” he said. “I should have done that first.”

She grinned. “No, it’s cool. I did.”

He groaned, giving her a glance that meant they were to draw their weapons then and to be ready.

She backed off; he entered first.

The parlor was empty and dark, a slim light that did seem to be coming from the kitchen doing little but create shadows.

Jackson gave her a nod; he was heading upstairs.

She moved through the parlor to a dining room and on into the kitchen.

Nothing.

She headed to the other side of the house finding a library and an entertainment room. Not a modern one. No large-screen TV sat in the room, rather there was a table with chairs around it and a stack of board games including a chess board and checkers.

In fact, she realized, the whole house reeked of time gone by. Not in a bad way . . .

But rather, one that seemed sad. The place wasn’t filthy at all.

Just . . . old.

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She returned to the living room.

Jackson came on down the stairs.

“He did say basement,” Jackson told Angela.

“Let’s do it; stairs down are to the side of the kitchen,” she told him.

There ghost hadn’t reappeared. But there wasn’t much reason to worry.

He was a ghost.

No one down there was threatening him or holding him.

Jackson nodded to Angela. He would head down first; she’d be at his back. They had their weapons at the ready.

And there, she didn’t hesitate.

But her mind raced with misery again. Christmas Eve! She loved the peace and beauty and caring that should spread throughout the season. She loved the bright, multi-colored lights and Christmas carols and pageants and the hope the season should have been able to bring to all mankind . . .

And she feared what they might find in the basement!

Then she reminded herself they always did everything they could to help. And that meant she needed faith, because faith was a beautiful thing, too.

They moved on down the stairs.

Slowly, carefully.

And just as Joshua said, there were people there.

An elderly man leaned against the wall. A little boy was hugging a teddy bear.

Three girls who appeared to be high school or college aged.

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And there, in the center of the basement was Joshua, appearing to be confused.

Because in the corner of the room, there was a Christmas tree. It was decorated, and there were packages beneath it.

Whatever had been happening . . .

The elderly man didn't appear to be concerned, just tired.

The little boy suddenly smiled at something one of the girls had said.

There were water bottles by all the "prisoners."

And a few candy wrappers.

Suddenly, one of the young women let out a bloodcurdling scream.

Well, at the very least, they did hear a scream! It was all right that they had entered, exigent circumstances!

Except, Angela quickly realized, the girl had screamed because she had seen Jackson and Angela!

"It's all right, it's all right," Angela said quickly.

"We're law enforcement!" Jackson told them. "We're here to save you."

"Save us?"

The elderly man looked at them quizzically. "Um . . . we don't need to be saved!"

"But you were brought here, forced here—" Angela said.

"No!"

One of the young women stood up, her expression distressed. "No, Arnie is letting us stay here! My mother . . ." She paused, taking a deep breath. "She threw me out of the

house last week. It was my fault. I was . . . well, I was doing a lot that I shouldn't have been doing. And Arnie was . . .”

Another of the girls stood up, a pretty blonde.

“Arnie was helping her get clean. We were all helping her,” she said.

Angela didn't think; she looked over at the spirit of Captain Joshua Shoal.

But he appeared to be more confused than she could possibly be herself.

The blonde introduced herself.

“My name is Heidi Shoal. And I was at a party with . . . well, a guy I shouldn't have been with. And I was all messed up and ran out into the street. And then Arnie found me, but I was a mess, so he brought me here. He doesn't have a cell phone, so he was headed out to go to a neighbor's house or somewhere so that he could borrow a phone and call my folks and let them know where I am!”

The last of the girls or young women stood. “I wish I could give you a story like that. Parents killed in a car accident, three different foster homes . . . and I was, um,” she paused, glancing over at the little boy with the teddy bear, “Working. On the streets, so to say.”

“And the little boy is who?” Angela asked.

“He doesn't speak English, and he just wandered in here. Arnie was going to ask my parents for help,” Heidi said. “We think we're going to need to call the police and get help for him. We're not sure, but he seems to be an immigrant, and he doesn't know where his parents are. It was bizarre! We were bringing the Christmas tree down and he just walked in

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and he ran over and hugged Heidi,” the girl who identified herself as a street-walker told them. “Arnie is getting help. That’s why he’s not here.”

“But why are you all huddled down here in the basement?” Jackson asked.

“We’re just waiting for Arnie to get back! The tree fits best down here, and you might not have noticed, but there’s a ping-pong table behind it. We were going to celebrate while we hoped someone would come to rescue the little boy and my parents came,” Heidi explained.

The spirit of Joshua Shoal fell to his knees, letting out a soft sob.

“He was helping them! He was just trying to help them!”

“I have no place to be. At night now,” the elderly man said, “I can have a shower! And he lets me sleep in a bed! A real bed!”

It was wrong, of course, all wrong.

They’d thought the worst.

Someone had been trying to do his best.

“Okay!” Angela said. “Heidi, we have phones, we’re going to reach your parents and try to explain what happened.”

“They may not want me; they’re going to be furious!” Heidi said.

“No,” Joshua’s spirit whispered softly.

“Let me put some calls through,” Jackson said.

“You’ll all be okay!” Angela promised.

Arnie Seagull had gone out of his way to help the down and out at Christmas.

Surely the Krewe could do the same. But she needed to find Arnie, to explain who they were, and then they could all get started on figuring out what was best. Maybe Arnie wanted the company of the elderly man.

Maybe the drug-addict, who now seemed to be clean—which, of course, didn't mean she wouldn't continue to fight if she really wanted to stay that way—might be welcomed back by those who had possibly thrown her out because they were desperate, nothing had been working.

And the little boy . . .

She hurried outside. There, she looked down the street. Nothing. She ran along the road, knowing that back not too far, there had been a farmhouse.

But as she hurried along, she thought she heard something. Something just off the road in a group of trees.

Angela ran into the trees. She drew her phone out to provide light.

And that's when she saw him.

A form, down on the ground, huddled in, almost covered with leaves.

She looked around carefully and ducked down, quickly assessing what she saw.

The poor man was . . .

Was he dead?

But there was no sign of violence on him. He hadn't been shot. He hadn't been stabbed.

He hadn't been strangled.

She quickly called Jackson.

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He answered.

“Angela? Did you find him?”

“I think so. Jackson, he must have been ill. Maybe a heart condition. He’s here, out here in that little thicket of woods.”

“Was he—”

“No! I think he was just hurrying, worrying maybe . . . I can’t find a pulse, Jackson. We need an ambulance, but I’m not sure there’s any hope, and I think he might have died of natural causes!” she told him.

She winced. Christmas Eve. And here was this man who had tried to do so much for others, dead.

And yet . . .

He had been trying to help others. He had done so! And while she longed to cry, she also felt something wonderful inside.

Goodness and Christmas miracles did exist. There were those who cared more for others than they did for themselves.

“Get an ambulance for me, please!” she begged. “I mean . . .”

She broke off. The ghost of Joshua Shoal was at her side, hunkering down, gently—spiritually—touching the man on the ground.

“Oh, no, no, no, Arnie Seagull! No! You will open your eyes; you are going to make it. I wronged you, my friend. I wronged you!”

Arnie Seagull’s eyes opened. He drew in a deep breath.

“Josh! Joshua! It’s time for me to join you—” Arnie began.

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“No, it is not! You’re a good man; and you’re going to live to go on being a good man, do you hear me! Remember, I was your commanding officer!”

The man on the ground smiled.

And Angela couldn’t tell if she was looking at two ghosts . . .

Or a spirit who had breathed life into another.

But Jackson was good; he’d fulfilled his promise. And in minutes, she heard sirens and EMTs were bursting through the trees.

The spirit of Joshua Shoal stood, smiling.

He looked at Angela.

“Thank you, thank you!” he whispered to her. “Your husband . . . he made his calls. Heidi’s folks have come, the little boy’s parents are applying for asylum—they have a place to stay and some of your Krewe people are coming to fix things. The elderly man and the streetwalker are okay, they’re going to stay in the house for now . . . after they get to the hospital to make sure that Arnie is going to be okay. It’s amazing, it’s amazing . . .!”

He gave her a ghostly hug.

She almost shivered, because he was cold.

She managed not to do so.

He drew away and she gave him a smile, and still he frowned.

“What’s wrong?” he asked her. “Oh, I’m sorry, I guess—”

“No, no, your hug is wonderful. Just a little bit . . . cool,” she told him.

He laughed then. “Cold!”

“No, just cool!” she swore.

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She realized one of the EMTs was staring at her.

She winced inwardly and told him, “I’m sorry, sorry . . . I talk to myself in—”

“Special Agent Crow, you just go on and talk to yourself. This fellow is alive, and I believe we’ll manage to keep him that way. Thanks to you!”

She smiled and looked at Joshua Shoal.

The EMT turned away.

“No. Thanks to *you!*” she said.

*

Naturally, it was late when they got home. But those who had been in the basement who had homes had been allowed to see Arnie at the hospital by everyone concerned.

The elderly man was Frank McCord, and he would be keeping care of Arnie’s house while Arnie was in the hospital—along with Jennie Mason who would be caring for the house and the elderly man.

With Arnie’s help, she had already determined that she could take care of Arnie and Frank and find a part-time job.

A nurse at the hospital had almost immediately set her up with a local café.

And Arnie . . .

Arnie was incredulous.

He would need to endure some surgery, but he would likely heal well, especially with help and care from Frank and Jennie.

And he couldn’t be more grateful to Jackson and Angela.

“I was trying so hard to help people!” he told them. “But if you hadn’t come along . . . well, I’d be dead. And God alone knows what might have happened to the others. It’s . . . it’s Christmas Eve, and somehow, the two of you have worked a miracle, in life, in law . . . in every way!”

“You being alive is the greatest thanks we could have,” Jackson assured him, and Angela squeezed his hand, smiling.

She planted a kiss on his forehead and told him they’d be back to check up on him.

“Strangest thing. I thought I was dead. I thought I saw an old, old friend. A fellow I served with. And I was sure he had come as an escort to the next world. He had a gentle way of taking me on, but . . . he yelled at me! He made me live!” Arnie told them.

Angela glanced at Jackson. They both smiled.

“Hey, who knows? Maybe he did yell at you to live. And if so, he’s happier wherever he is than you’ll ever imagine!”

“Goodnight, sir. And be well!” Jackson told him. “We’ll yell at you, too—if that’s what works.”

Arnie smiled. “Merry Christmas!” he told them.

“Merry Christmas to you!” Angela said.

They turned to leave at last. But Joshua Shoal was standing at the door to Arnie’s hospital room.

“Sir,” Jackson told him. “You’re welcome to come home with us. Our kids—”

“You kids are special, too,” Joshua said, smiling. “But if you don’t mind, I’m going to watch over Arnie through the night.”

“Not at all, sir. We’ll be back for a checkup on Arnie ourselves tomorrow.”

“On Christmas? You have children—”

“Who understand,” Jackson assured him.

Josh nodded, smiled, and headed in to sit by Arnie.

Angela and Jackson were, at last, on the way home.

“Merry Christmas,” Jackson said as they slid into the car.

“Almost, an amazingly—”

Jackson laughed. “No. Merry Christmas,” he told her. “It’s after midnight.”

“Oh! I hope Corby and Victoria do understand—”

“I talked to Mary Tiger. She explained what we were doing. They’re fine, waiting up, and drinking too much hot cocoa, I’m certain,” he told her.

Angela nodded.

The kids were still awake when they walked through the front door. Mary looked at them anxiously, but they smiled.

“Couldn’t have come out better!” Jackson told her.

She yawned.

She was going to bed.

But the kids weren’t. They wanted to hear the story.

And they *were* special kids.

Corby was a teenager, but he was happy to cuddle with his mother. Victoria was cuddled up next to Jackson.

They all sat on the sofa, right before the Christmas tree with its giant, crowning star.

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Taking turns talking, they explained what had happened that night, from the end of the great party the group had enjoyed in the office, on out to the parking lot . . .

And then being stopped by the ghost of Captain Joshua Shoal.

“Of course, we’re so sorry we weren’t here with you two tonight!” Angela told them, managing to hug them both at once since Corby was on her right and Victoria was on her left, wedged between her and Jackson.

“Oh, no, no, no!” Corby said. “We were fine; we have you all the time. Okay, all the time when you’re not working, but we are so glad you do what you do and help save lives and . . .”

“He’s right! Oh, no, no, no!” Victoria said. “It was a great Christmas Eve—okay, so it’s Christmas now! Merry Christmas, we love you, and . . .”

She broke off, looking at her brother.

Corby laughed. “It was kind of cold when Joshua showed up and then hugged you, huh?”

“Just a little,” Angela said.

“The whole thing was incredibly curious, and it’s winter, a hug was cool, and . . .”

Jackson looked at her over Corby’s head and grinned.

“He’s about to say that it’s a ‘curiously cool Christmas,’ am I right?”

Corby burst into laughter and Victoria giggled in turn.

And Jackson smiled. “Merry Christmas, my love!”

“Merry Christmas,” Angela said.

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And she thought it was an amazing Christmas; love and goodness had prevailed in their world, peace and giving.

Peace on earth . . .

Goodwill towards men.