

Excerpt: WRITE CHRISTMAS by Thommy Hutson

“I’m going to say something,” Darla started, “because I’d feel like a liar if I didn’t. We’ve known each other for too long and are too close.” She stopped. She had to clear her throat and steady her voice. “Abby, turning your back on this town at the time of year your father cherished most won’t make the memories go away. It really won’t.”

The very notion pierced Abby. She said nothing in return. How could she even get words out right now if she had them?

Darla stepped forward and grabbed Abby’s hands. “I meant it when I said I’m gonna believe for the both of us. I’m also going to wish for a miracle. A sign. Big or little, one even you can’t ignore.”

“It’d have to be pretty big,” Abby said as she sniffled.

“People change, you wait and see.” Darla hugged her and then stepped away. She turned back once. “People change, Abby.” She winked.

Abby waited for her to turn again. To say something. But it didn’t happen.

She started for home. For a second, she thought of taking a small detour to Cameron’s house. She could knock on the door and explain everything. The deal, her wishes, her hopes, and dreams. But she didn’t. Not now. Chloe would be there. Maybe even her mother. They’d be sitting around the fire, drinking hot chocolate, playing a game. Toby would drop a slobbery chew toy on the board, and everyone would laugh and tell Chloe to pick it up. Doing whatever they could to keep things as normal as possible for as long as possible. Abby would derail all of that with her arrival. And talking about the day, well, she had no idea what that would set off.

Maybe she would take a stroll near the pond. The moonlight on it would be nice. But no. The pond meant so many good things to her growing up, but now it had a too recent memory of Cameron. Of him trying. Of her—not. Was she being unfair to him? To herself?

But something else about the pond nagged at her when she pictured it. A memory, or a feeling, she could not quite place or articulate. A tiny déjà vu she felt compelled to reject.

The pond could wait another night.

Passing by houses and shops, Abby couldn’t help but think of what she’d said. How the picture—that picture—did not, could not, come to life. How nothing was real. She’d never meant to say it. She didn’t believe she really meant it. But even as snow started to fall, and lights

twinkled, and Christmas trees were aglow in living room picture windows, she really did think Christmas had come down to “things.” Sure, things made people happy, but who would they be without them? Why couldn’t they be as happy without a wreath on their door or garland on their porch? Like they were the rest of the year. It worked for the Whos. In a wonderful little story. A tale with a beginning, middle, and happy end.

Nobody in town was a Who. She certainly wasn’t.

And then the inevitable question she had never asked herself came to mind. Who would she be, how much more of a person would she be, if suddenly she adorned herself in, reveled in, celebrated the garland and candy canes and red-nosed reindeer?

Her life contained too many have-to-do’s to be concerned with what-if’s. Those pesky, this could be your life items didn’t matter right now. But she’d think on it. Sleep on it. In her house with no garland, no holiday things.

Except one. The reindeer Chloe loved.

She made it home and felt like the mission, the selling of the company she had kept a secret from everybody, needed to be accomplished. Even though it had caused a tailspin that would no doubt continue until everything and everyone settled down. She went to her attaché and grabbed the contracts and a pen, moved into the living room, and sat on the couch in front of the fireplace. She and her lawyers pored over every word time and time again. What made the deal work. What made the deal worth it.

The time had come, she knew.

She took the pen, removed the cap, and with the contracts on a tray table began to sign.

The pen went dry. She scribbled a little to see if the ink would flow, but she didn’t want to make a hole in the paper. Nothing. She grabbed a different pen and moved over the line next to the “sign here” sticky note.

A second dry scribble. “Oh, come on.” It was ridiculous because it was ridiculous. None of this was a sign, however. If it were, it needed to be way bigger. Dry pens happened. Sorry Darla.

She reached over for her bag and searched inside, deep in the pockets. No other pen. Not even a pencil. She stopped looking and stared into the fire.

Then she remembered. She moved slowly, thinking maybe it all hadn't happened, that she'd dreamed the arguing and shouting with her mother. Her hand moved to her pocket, and she felt it.

Her father's pen.

She pulled the instrument out. Even before the metal tip hovered over the paper, a bit of ink welled. She wondered how. The pen had been in the glass case for years, but ink readied to flow. She stared at the tiny drop of liquid.

It looked almost like a teardrop.

Silly, she thought.

The time had come.

She put the pen to paper and signed her name. Easy.

She sat back and looked at it. The ink flowing from the pen almost—almost—seemed to shimmer, a metallic gold and red and green and silver mixed in an unlikely holiday rainbow. Abby stared in wonder.

Her father's pen. The only explanation.

She smiled at the thought of him drawing away in right angles and wide arcs. Sketching and shading. Creating. She thought hard, tried to recall if this aspect of colorburst life had happened before. As a child, perhaps. When she used to—

She stopped herself. She hadn't uttered the word, but *believe* had been what she'd almost said, what her mind and heart had begun to put forth.

Abby closed her eyes, opened them, and looked down once again at the signature she scribbled. The big N, the looping O's, and the flowing S's in her last name were still there, but everything else changed. As quickly as she thought she noticed something incredible happening, something special—that for an instant the ink, the lifeblood of the writing instrument she gripped enjoyed a life of its own—it vanished. The fleeting moment where anything could happen, and perhaps did, ruined.

The magic, if there were magic at all, had gone.

The ink, now nothing more than a drab black, absorbed into the white paper of the contract that would forever be its home.

"I told you, Dad. There is no Christmas magic."

She yawned and stared into the fire with heavy eyes. She would rest for a little bit, until Chloe and Stella came home. She would see them, everyone would be calm, and they would talk.

Things will be all right.

Things will be different.

Christmastime could fix it, after all.

It was the last thought as her eyes closed.

And she slept.