



A
ROBERTSON
FAMILY *a novella*
CHRISTMAS

*the crazy story of one troubled teen
who finds the true meaning of Christmas
where he least expects it*



MISS KAY
ROBERTSON
with **TRAVIS THRASHER**





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A Robertson Family Christmas

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A Robertson Family Christmas is a work of fiction. Where real people, events, establishments, organizations, or locales appear, they are used fictitiously. All other elements of the novel are drawn from the authors' imaginations.

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A Letter from the Author



We receive letters weekly asking what it would truly be like to spend a day or two in West Monroe with my family. Since Christmas is one of my favorite times of year, I decided to set this Duck Commander work of fiction during that wonderful holiday.

When writing this novella, I knew I had to include a few of my favorite things: family, home-grown Louisiana cooking, and my Lord and Savior. I wondered what the Robertson family would look like to someone from a far-off city. While we love to have fun, especially around the holidays, we always keep our focus on the true meaning of Christmas.

Christmas is a chance to get together and laugh

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and remember why we love one another. This book celebrates our true family holiday traditions while also imagining what a stranger might think of them. Especially if he had never heard of the Robertsons. I hope you enjoy this story, 'cause if there's one thing we love in the South . . . it's a tall tale.

Miss Kay



PROLOGUE

The first time Stacy Clarke saw the golden duck call, she thought someone was playing a cruel joke on her. It had been something she casually noticed on her iPhone while waiting in line at the bank. It popped up on her Facebook app in her messages, along with a note of congratulations and encouragement to check her e-mail. Soon she found herself in her car with her heart racing and her hand shaking, waiting to see what the message said.

She knew she couldn't read it in the bank. She didn't want anybody to watch her get emotional.

It had all started as a joke between her and a coworker. She worked at an investment firm as the office manager ever since she had gotten out

of the real estate business back in 2008. That had been a particularly brutal time, with her job imploding and her marriage exploding. Or maybe it was the other way around. Either way, neither survived the end of the year.

There were seven people who worked at the investment firm, including her close friend Deborah. One summer day during lunch, Stacy had been telling her all about her youngest son's issues. She wasn't sure if Hunter was depressed or bored or suicidal or what. Her concern didn't come from the pot she'd found in his bedroom or from the time he stayed at a friend's house all night without asking permission. It just came from his overall blasé attitude about every single thing in this world. She'd had enough.

"You should enter this contest I just found out about," Deborah told her.

Joking, of course.

They both knew about the Robertson family, and Stacy was actually a pretty big fan of them. It wasn't like they could relate to a family of Loui-

siana rednecks. They were suburbanites living an hour west of Chicago in the small town of Appleton. But the beards and the hunting weren't the only foreign things that strangely attracted Stacy.

She loved the values the family had. She loved their beliefs. In a way they seemed naive in this tough and hard world, but this family was tough and hard. She couldn't get enough of the Robertsons and Duck Commander.

"They're having a contest where they'll pick a kid to spend Christmas with them."

"Are you serious?"

"Sure. Saw it on their Facebook page. You should tell Hunter to sign up. Give you some peace and quiet around the holidays."

Deborah had only been joking. And at first, Stacy hadn't given it any more thought. Surely it was for homeless and needy kids. Or really messed-up teens who needed some kind of outlet and a safe home for Christmas. But one night Stacy checked the contest out and realized it was open for anyone.

Anyone.

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So without Hunter's knowledge she signed him up. Not really thinking or dreaming that he'd actually get picked.

But the golden duck call was the sign of the winner. That's what the contest information said:

WHOEVER WINS THE CHRISTMAS WITH THE
ROBERTSONS WILL RECEIVE A GOLDEN DUCK
CALL A FEW WEEKS BEFORE THE HOLIDAY.

It was crazy to think she'd won, because what were the odds? There was no way.

But what about your—?

She silenced her thoughts. No, it just wasn't going to happen. Things didn't happen like this.

There were stories for books and movies and songs and reality shows, but they were made up, like most of the hope in this world. They weren't real. Doors didn't actually open, not ones like this, not in this random of a way.

But you tried and you put your heart and story out there . . .

It was crazy to see her hand shaking like this. It wasn't like she was winning the lottery or something. It could be just a simple thing, really. Hunter could go down there against his will and have an okay time and simply come back with a new experience. Maybe a little different attitude. But was this a life changer? A game changer, as so many liked to say?

She exhaled, then opened the e-mail.

Another image of the golden duck call could be seen.

Hello, Stacy! We're so happy to congratulate you in welcoming Hunter to West Monroe this Christmas. After almost half a million entries, Hunter was chosen to be our special holiday guest! We're so excited to meet him and introduce him to all the Robertsons.

Attached is a document listing the specific details. I also am including my cell phone number for you to give me a call. I know it will be a big deal letting Hunter come down

here. I'd love to just chat briefly over some things whenever you get a chance.

Thanks for trusting us with Hunter! We hope this is going to be something he always remembers and cherishes.

God bless and talk soon.

Korie Robertson

By the second paragraph, the tears were already falling.

It couldn't really be happening, could it?

Did you really put this together, God?

She'd prayed for this to happen. Not for herself. Not for her family. But for Hunter. The ache in her heart was something she carried around all day like a tight belt digging into her skin. The years had passed in a blink as everybody said they would. The little extroverted, energetic toddler who drove her mad had one day woken up a young man, with hair starting to grow on his face and a voice she didn't recognize.

Somewhere in between the toddler and the young man stood a Grand Canyon of grief. One she had to fly over every day. She knew that if she ever stopped and looked down, she'd fall. And it had been a long time since she lost her parachute.

The worry crept in, of course. Like it always did. What would Hunter say? How would he react? What about her ex? What about Carson, Hunter's older brother?

So many questions floated around without answers.

She knew she couldn't answer any of them right now. She would take them one at a time. Just like she had taken life a day at a time for over half a decade now ever since finding herself a single parent.

She would take one step and then another. Sometimes she wondered how many she'd be able to take, but then another day would be sinking away and she would realize she'd made it.

Stacy knew she wasn't the one giving herself strength. She just feared that Hunter would never realize that.

She closed her eyes and did the first thing that needed to be done. She thanked God.

Then, as she finally drove away from the bank, she began to try to figure out how and when she would tell Hunter.

He would definitely *not* be thankful. But then again, maybe any reaction from him would be better than what he'd become this past year.

She could hope.

Sometimes that's all anybody could do.

Hope and pray.



1
I WON'T BE HOME
for CHRISTMAS

Hunter held the plastic gift card like it was a business card from someone selling life insurance. On the front of it was the white Apple logo that matched his laptop and his iPhone and his “I” life. On the back was his name and \$250 written in pen that had smudged so it was barely readable.

Hunter Clarke’s father was speeding to get to the airport. Not because he might miss his flight but because Hunter might. And heaven forbid that might mean he had to stay home and actually spend Christmas with his family.

“That would stink if you got a ticket,” Hunter told his father.

“I’d make your mother pay for it then.”

This actually made Hunter laugh. “I’d like to see *that*.”

The BMW switched two lanes without his father bothering to signal.

“I asked Stacy to take you since this was her idea to start with, but she said she couldn’t leave work.”

“I don’t have to go.”

His father let out an annoyed sigh. “We talked about this.”

“I think Mom and you talked about it. Somehow I wasn’t a part of the conversation.”

Which was typical of how they operated. His entire life was dictated by others in another room. Who he’d stay with and where he’d go and what he’d do.

Sometimes he thought of the news story about the girl suing her parents. Sometimes he thought of trying that himself, but then again, he was only seventeen years old.

*Maybe in another year I'll take 'em both to court.
Failure to parent in any meaningful way. Emotional
damages of a million dollars.*

“You know I’ll be with Carson over break.”

“I could go too,” Hunter said.

“Not this time,” Dad said. “I told you—soon enough. We’re gonna be busy, and I don’t think you’d have much fun.”

Hunter didn’t say anything more. He’d already tried harder than usual. Most of the time he just kept his mouth shut when it came to Dad and his precious older brother. “Carson this” and “Carson that” and training and summer workouts and games and schedules and off-season and all that nonsense.

His older brother was born with the ability to catch a football and run. The only thing Hunter really caught in his life was a case of chicken pox or measles or rheumatic fever. The last one was quite a doozy, too.

But I'm very clever.

Hunter knew that football got you far in life. Being clever got you sent to the principal’s office.

“I still think duck calls are made up,” Hunter said. “They can’t be real. A business built off making duck calls? Come on.”

“Quite a successful business. See—you put your mind to it, you can come up with something like that.”

“Obviously I have to. ‘Cause it’s not like my athletic abilities are gonna get me far.”

Dad was way past the point of taking bait like this, but that didn’t mean Hunter wouldn’t still try. He thought of the evening when his mother told him about winning the contest. The first thing Hunter had ever won, and it was like sending him away to prison.

Louisiana? Duck hunting? Bearded men?

At first he had thought it was a joke, but he also knew Mom wasn’t the joking kind. Then he simply told her no, he wasn’t going to do it. It finally took getting Dad on the phone to make Hunter realize this was not something he could get out of. He had tried numerous times to tell them he wasn’t going, but they made it very clear he was leaving.

“I really hate everything about this,” Hunter said.

Dad’s jaw tightened as he looked at him. “You’re always telling me that you’re tired of being at home, that you’re tired of being around your mother.”

Yeah, 'cause I want to be with Carson and you.

“This is your chance to get away.”

“Spring break in Cancún is getting away,” Hunter said. “This is just being gone.”

Soon the BMW was parked alongside the curb outside the doors for American Airlines.

“Look, buddy, this is gonna be fun. Do you realize who you’re spending Christmas with?”

“People keep telling me,” Hunter said.

He hated when his father used the word *buddy*. Dogs should be called buddy, not youngest sons.

“Do you know I had two different fathers try to buy this off me?”

“I wouldn’t have objected,” Hunter replied. “We could have split the earnings. Not told Mom. Gone to an NFL play-off game.”

He got a clap on the shoulder. “Think of this as some grand adventure.”

“Yeah, okay.”

“And hey—don’t you go spending that gift card until you’re with me,” Dad said with a grin that reminded him of Carson.

“I won’t.”

“Merry Christmas.”

It was three days before the actual day, so Hunter assumed he was supposed to wear these words on his chest like a name tag at some awful function.

“Tell Carson I said to break a leg,” Hunter said.

Dad just shook his head. He hated that joke and so did Carson. They had a thing about being superstitious.

Hunter also had a thing about being super sick when it came to almost anything to do with Carson. Yet the truth was that if Dad asked him to go to Carson’s university, Arizona State, and hang out with them for the next two weeks, Hunter would do it in a heartbeat.

He knew it would also probably be the two best weeks of his life.

He grabbed his backpack and suitcase and slipped out of the car. He headed through the sliding-glass doors and toward security. Dad had been nice enough to print off his boarding pass. So very thoughtful of him.

As he stood in line, Hunter saw a family of four waiting together and talking and laughing. He watched them more out of fascination than anything else.

The frustrating part of life wasn't the sadness he carried around like house keys in his pocket. It was standing at a closed door, knowing there was something better behind it.

Standing there and never, ever finding the right key to open it.