

Sneak Peek

read chapter one of A Heartfelt Christmas Promise

Vanessa Larkin was supposed to be spending Christmas in Paris, France on a business trip she hoped to enjoy as a working vacation. Instead, she's been assigned to Fraser Hills, North Carolina—home of the Best Fruitcake in the USA—to convert her company's property into warehouse space and shut down Porter's, the fruitcake factory. Offering retirement packages and selling locals on new job opportunities may not spread holiday cheer, but Vanessa believes she's helping secure the town's future.

Mike Marshall's family founded Porter's. For decades, the factory served as the lifeblood of the community until his grandfather sold the business to a Chicago corporation. The sale cost the town its independence—and the Marshalls their family ties. A horse farmer, Mike was never involved with his grandfather's company, but still felt Fraser Hills lost part of its identity. And as a widower raising a teenage daughter, he's suffered enough losses in one lifetime. News of the factory's closing means losing another piece of the town's legacy.

Far from the skyscrapers and rapid pace of the city, Vanessa finds herself enjoying the easygoing rhythms of rural living. With Mike as her guide, she learns to appreciate the simple pleasures found in shared holiday festivities among friends. Fraser Hills is a town she is growing to love—and Mike is someone she is falling in love with. Now all Vanessa needs is a Christmas miracle to give her newfound friends and home a gift they'll cherish for many New Years to come.

there
is always
HOPE



NancyNaigle.com

Dear Friend,

Thank you for checking out my latest novel, *A Heartfelt Christmas Promise*. If you enjoy this little sample, then I hope you'll get a copy and continue reading, and then tell your friends, and help spread the word.

Along with the excerpt, I've included some trivia about the story, printable bookmarks and a coloring page just for fun. Feel free to share this document with friends.

Although *A Heartfelt Christmas Promise* is set in November and December, reviewers are saying it's a story to be enjoyed any time of the year. During these challenging times my wish is that you find hope, laughter, and renewed spirit while reading this story. Dog lovers are sure to fall in love with little Porter. He absolutely stole my heart, and there's more to how that story came about revealed in the interview questions that follow.

With heartfelt thanks!
Jenny



Sneak Peek **Chapter One**

Chapter One

Vanessa slid her hand along the slick wooden banister as she climbed the stairs. The warmth of the wood softened the appearance of the decorative black wrought-iron balusters—a real statement of strength and beauty.

As a young girl, she'd dreamed of living in an elegant house like this, and this one wasn't that far from her office in downtown Chicago, either.

Walking through the guest rooms, she could picture one of them decorated with a colorful handmade quilt atop inviting crisp white sheets. Fluffy feather pillows, soft and firm ones, piled like a cloud for a heavenly night's rest. A small upholstered chair would be perfect by the window overlooking the mature trees in the backyard. Except for the evergreens, almost everything was already winter-bare.

It would be so beautiful blanketed in snow. She could fill brightly colored bird feeders for the red cardinals that just flitted from the bushes at the fence edge to a limb right in front of the window. The only birds outside my windows at my condo are pigeons and all they do is leave a mess on the windowsill. This was definitely a step up, and so quiet compared to the city.

Vanessa walked back downstairs knowing this was the home she'd been searching for. "I love this house." She joined her Realtor, Sally, in the living room. "My friends kept telling me when I found the right one, I'd know it. Now I understand what they meant." Excitement swirled in her stomach like blowing snow in a frosty blizzard.

This is it. Home.

“I can’t believe it.” Vanessa pulled her hands close to her heart. “Finally. Did you keep count of how many houses we’ve looked at?”

“I could do the math, but you don’t really want to know.”

“It’s been nearly a year of house hunting.”

“Your travel schedule didn’t help.”

“True,” Vanessa said. “I was beginning to think I’d have to give up the idea of a house with a yard close to work altogether.”

“I told you I’d find you the perfect house, and Sally Fields always delivers.”

Every time Sally talked about herself it was with first and last name, and usually followed by “no relation to the actress.” Not that anyone would think so. The actress didn’t have an “s” at the end of her name, for one. Plus, Sally the Realtor was a good foot taller than the talented actress with the infectious smile.

Sally strutted through the house like a peacock. “At least you knew what you wanted from day one.”

“I usually do.” Vanessa walked over to the windows that overlooked the deck. “That’s not always a good thing, though.”

As a little girl, she’d loved the rope swing at her cousin Anna’s house. Anna was Mom’s cousin. Anna and Mom had been inseparable until the day Mom died. Swallowing back the sorrow, she concentrated on the trees on this property.

The biggest, a huge oak she’d never be able to wrap her arms around, could easily hold a swing.

Vanessa had spent many hours with Anna while Dad worked. They’d swing for hours in the backyard.

Vanessa remembered lifting her toes toward the tallest branches, soaring high and hoping to reach heaven, and catch a glimpse of Mom with angel wings. Mom seemed so close on those days.

Maybe I'll have two so Anna and I can swing at the same time.

People never outgrow swinging, do they?

Sally rattled on. “. . . and the closets are wonderful. So much storage. You just don't find this kind of house every day. It's a kitchen a chef would kill for, commercial equipment and everything, but it's done so nicely that it's still homey.” She stepped beside Vanessa.

Vanessa tipped her chin up. Sally towered over her at every bit of six feet tall in the too-high heels that were her trademark.

“It's very pretty, but you know I don't cook.” But Anna does. She'd probably really love it.

“Right. Yes, but the in-law suite is nicely set apart with a den. Just like you wanted.” Sally curled the listing sheet in her hand as if she were going to pop a fly on the noggin with it. Or maybe it was more likely that Sally would hit her if she didn't quickly jump on this deal.

Hesitation and second thoughts consumed her. Now that she'd found what she wanted, was it stupid to buy a house this big when technically it could be just her? She'd tried to talk Anna into moving in with her before with no luck. But now that Anna had retired, how could she turn her down? There was plenty of room here for long visits, if she couldn't convince her to move in at first. Vanessa hugged her arms around herself. That's what she truly wanted.

“Wasn't easy to find everything on your list.” Sally looked quite proud of herself. “This one even has the fence for the dog you don't have yet.”

“But you did find it. Thank you.” She opened her arms wide, taking in the fresh spa colors of the great room. “This was totally worth the wait.”

Sally lifted a finger in the air. “Well, there is one teensy hitch.”

The glow in Vanessa’s heart faded. “Don’t tell me this is over my budget.” She tried to maintain her cool, but with her teeth clenched and her fists now too, she was probably far from looking calm. She’d never had a good poker face. “I told you not to show me anything over the budget. I hate it when Realtors pull that, and I left work to meet you today with no notice. Let it be anything but that.”

Her finger and thumb about an inch apart, Sally said, “Just a smidge over.” She winked and expanded the space between her fingers a little more.

That wink about pushed Vanessa over the edge. “You called me away from work to see this house, and it’s over my budget? Really? I had meetings scheduled. You said it was urgent.”

“It’s a sweet deal. It’s going to go quick. We can come in under the listing price, but the agent said they are expecting other offers.”

Don’t they always say that? The house was perfect. “How much over budget are we talking here?”

Sally handed her the listing she’d been twisting in her hands.

Vanessa pulled the paper straight and scanned the information. Her jaw pulsed. This wasn’t teensy at all. “This is a hundred thousand dollars over my budget.”

“But you qualified for—”

Swallowing back what she really wanted to say, she responded simply with a “No ma’am. I set my budget. Not the lender. Period.” Trying to maintain her temper, she turned and walked out. She took her frustration

out on the car door, which she slammed twice as hard as necessary. The clock showed she'd just fallen in love with that house in record time.

On a good note, she could probably get back to the office for the acquisition and merger meeting.

Sally still stood in the doorway as Vanessa backed down the long winding driveway.

What a waste of time.

She pressed the accelerator and headed for the highway without another look back. Once on the interstate, she pushed the buttons to start the heated massage feature on the driver's seat.

A quick glance in the rearview mirror highlighted a deep line on her forehead. The one that always appeared when she was stressed out. She rubbed her finger across it, and opened her eyes wide, trying to force herself to relax.

"I need to focus on work. There are never any surprises there. Just the way I like it." She patted the steering wheel as if she expected it to repeat words of confirmation back. "Forget the house. Even if it was perfect. That'll have to be a project for another time. Another year."

Suddenly, for no apparent reason at all, the traffic snarled to a standstill—cars nose-to-tail for as far as she could see. "Of course."

The car idled at a stop. Her phone rang, and she cringed. Sally would be begging her to reconsider. Just as she was about to silence the ringer, she noticed the caller ID. It wasn't Sally; it was Anna. Her mood lifted instantaneously.

"Anna? How do you always know when I'm out of sorts, and need a friend?"

"It's my superpower, cuz."

Anna might have been joking, but she honestly had an uncanny ability to arrive at every godmother-appropriate point in Vanessa's life. They were first cousins once removed, or was that the same as being second cousins? She never could figure that stuff out.

No one knew genealogy like Mom. All Vanessa really cared about was that Anna was like family, blood relatives or not.

Anna had always called Vanessa "cuz," even though she'd been more like a much, much older sister all Vanessa's life.

"Anna, it's so good to hear from you."

"We are way overdue, aren't we?"

Anna was so much better about calling than she was. "I've been meaning to call."

"I know you're busy. How have you been? You're still working too much, aren't you?"

Vanessa groaned. "Actually, I took a little personal time this morning. I'm on my way to the office now."

"Music to my ears!"

"I may have made that sound better than it really was. It was just a big waste of time."

"Now, why would you say that. Any time off is a blessing."

"I wasted my morning looking at a house that wasn't in my budget. Now I'm sitting in traffic, and late for a meeting."

"It's barely nine o'clock. I'm sure the tide will turn before you even break for lunch."

"If only I ever took one."

"You've got to eat. You need to take care of yourself. We've had this talk before." Anna's voice held that

tone that only mothers could usually get away with.

“I know. I know. If I take a break for a healthy lunch, I’ll get that time back in productivity later.”

“That’s not just me talking,” Anna said. “It’s a proven fact.

Maybe you’d deal better with the stress, too. Couldn’t hurt, right?”

“Hearing your voice has reduced my stress level already.”

“Great. So, catch me up. How’re things going? What’s new?

If you and Robert are looking at houses you two must be talking marriage again?”

“He actually doesn’t know I’ve been house shopping.”

“What? You’re going to have to let that man into your life at some point.”

Vanessa laid out the whole story on the house, and how it was perfect, but not. “And Robert’s been acting like he’s about to pop the question.”

“I’ve been holding back saying this for a long time, but you keep dodging marriage with him. You’ve got to decide if you’re going to marry him, or just let him move on.”

“Well, I—”

“I’m not asking for an explanation. This is something only you can decide, but you two have been together longer than some marriages last these days. It’s not fair to either one of you to let this drag on status quo.”

She blew out a breath. “Anna, I know we look like the perfect couple on paper. He’s nice. Successful. Handsome. Generous. Dependable. The only thing we don’t agree on is he loves living in his rooftop condo, and I’m ready to be out of the city to have a house with a yard, but that’s not the reason.”

“Then what?”

"I don't love him, Anna. I've tried so hard. I like him a lot. I'm just not in love with him." It frustrated her so much.

"Maybe I'm not capable of that kind of love."

"Of love? Everyone is capable of love, Vanessa. Follow your instincts. I think you know what you need to do."

"It's not going to be easy to break it off. But you're right."

She sat there feeling a little numb. Why had she let this go on so long? "Anna, I miss you, and these talks."

"I miss you too. I'm always here for you. We're family."

"I know, but wouldn't it be nice if we lived closer? I was thinking you could even come up here and live with me now that you're retired."

"Things happen for a reason. Sometimes you just have to open your heart, and trust it will all work out the way it's supposed to rather than trying to manage every detail."

Vanessa laughed. "You know how I hate surprises. I don't see that happening."

"Ultimately, the journey will be wonderful. I promise." Anna was always saying stuff like that. Even to people she didn't know. It used to embarrass Vanessa, but now it seemed sweet. "If you say so."

"I do say so. And who knows. Maybe one day we'll live closer, but nothing is stopping us from more frequent visits. We can always fly."

"We'll do better next year."

"Yes, we will. Now, the reason I was calling was that I'd really love it if we could make plans together for the holidays. You could come here. I'll cook and spoil you rotten."

“I don’t—”

“Don’t you dare say no. I’ll fly to you in Chicago if I have to, even if it is bitter cold and damp. Get your calendar out and ink me in. Somewhere. You name the place. I really want to see you.”

Vanessa was already going down a list of things in her mind.

“Wait. Everything’s okay, right?”

“Of course. You’re like the daughter I never had, and you’re so much like your mother. I miss her too, you know. We’ve let too much time slip by. Let’s have a family Christmas this year. You and me.”

Mom had always known how to do it up right. Christmas hadn’t been the same since she passed. Her absence left a gaping hole in everything special. Without her it never seemed worth doing, but spending Christmas with Anna was definitely the next best thing.

“Anna, I’d love to spend the holidays together. Yes. We will absolutely do it.”

“This is the best Christmas gift ever.”

Vanessa’s eyes glossed. “This is going to be perfect. I just pulled in at the office. I’ve got that meeting this morning where I’ll be getting my next assignment. The good news is you might not have to come to freezing Chicago for Christmas. All that hard work I’ve put in over the past few years has me positioned for the pick of the projects. I may very well be working in Paris, France—”

“Paris? Wow. AGC has been really good to you.”

It was true, but she worked hard for everything she got.

“Or Leavenworth, Washington, which doesn’t sound all that fancy, but from what I hear it’s the best place in the whole country to spend Christmas. Fluffy, white snow glistens from every building, and a million

holiday lights decorate the entire Bavarian-style town. It's like being in a snow globe of the North Pole. They even have reindeer."

"Sounds like the company acquired Santa's summer home."

"I hope not. They told me it was a ski resort and vineyard. Year-round destination."

"Anyplace we go is fine with me," Anna assured her.

"This trip will be my treat. No argument, especially since we have to accommodate my schedule, but I promise it will be less work and more play."

"Your mom would love what a successful businesswoman you've become."

Anna hadn't mentioned Dad. They both knew he'd never admit he was proud of her . . . even if he was. Vanessa had vied for his approval for as long as she could remember. Why can't I let my need for his acknowledgment go?

"And I'm proud of you."

Anna's delicate and comforting voice, like silver bells, left her feeling lighter, and loved.

"Remember when you were six?" Anna asked. "Barely old enough to Magic Marker a poster, but you did and then sold more cookies by yourself than the church did at the Christmas Festival. And when you were in the sixth grade you had more fashion sense than I did, and figured out how to make money using it."

"You funded the start-up for that business."

"Vanessa's Fine Vintage Frills."

"You always believed in me."

"Of course I did."

“I loved going to the flea markets with you, sifting through old jewelry to find just the right pieces for my kiosk. Every Saturday on the driveway.”

“I remember. You’ve always had a head for business,” she said. “You were quite the entrepreneur. I thought you’d own a boutique one day, but I guess I wasn’t dreaming big enough. You’ve done so well. And now you’re picking the projects you want to do. That’s quite an accomplishment.”

There wasn’t anything entrepreneurial about her job now. It was simply making the decisions the executives made become reality. But she was good at it, and she’d moved up quickly. “It’s been a hard road and lots of work, but yes, I’m in an excellent position now.”

“In your career. Yes, I’d agree,” said Anna. “But your personal life could use a major do-over, and spending Christmas together is a good first step.”

“I’ll call you after this meeting, when I get my assignment and know where we’re going. Fingers crossed for Paris!”

Download or order your copy of *A Heartfelt Christmas Promise* now to continue reading.

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Is Fraser Hills, North Carolina a real town?

Nancy - Afraid not. I wanted to set this story in a place where Christmas tree farms dotted the hills, and there was a good chance for snow during the holiday season. I chose the name Fraser Hills because it made me think of the smell of a fresh Fraser fir.

If Fraser Hills, NC were a real town it would be found in the foothills just east of the Smoky Mountains where the blue mist cloaks the peaks and valleys in the most beautiful way.



Click on the links to view these classic commercials on YouTube.

[PUPPY LOVE 2014 - https://bit.ly/33VErrx](https://bit.ly/33VErrx)

[LOST PUPPY 2015 - https://bit.ly/3j1tiwv](https://bit.ly/3j1tiwv)

Where did you get the idea for this book?

Nancy - This answer is going to go to prove that ideas for books can truly come from anywhere!

A Super Bowl Commercial. No kidding! And I'm not even a big football fan, but the Budweiser Super Bowl commercials back in 2014 and 2015 absolutely stole my heart. They were titled Puppy Love and Lost Puppy. (I tucked the links in the sidebar for you so you can watch them.)

The handsome Clydesdale trainer's tender heart made the perfect hero. So, yes...in 2014 this book began tickling me to write it. That's where this story began.



Budweiser Clydesdale Puppy Love Super Bowl 2014 ...



Budweiser "Lost Dog" Superbowl 2015 Commercial THE FEELS

Why Percherons instead of Clydesdales?

Nancy - Many of you know I got married on Christmas day last year. My husband, Andrew, is a horseman. In fact, on our first date he took me to Love Valley to trail ride. It was my first time on horseback! That's a whole other story. Back to the question.

I featured Percherons because a friend of Andrew's owns a Percheron farm. I've had the great pleasure to see foals get their wobbly legs underneath them, and see those powerful majestic adults up close.



What's your favorite part of this story?

Nancy - That's always such a hard question, but I do love that there are actually three romances in this story. Our hero and heroine, Mike and Vanessa, of course, but also young love and a seasoned love between Anna, who is Vanessa's plucky aunt, and Buck who reminds me of Sam Elliott.

The friendships and cozy *in-your-business* of Fraser Hills was fun. I'd love to revisit it with another story set there. You'll have to let me know if you agree.

Did you know I have a Pinterest board for each book?



Is this the only book you have coming out in 2020?

Nancy - No. A Heartfelt Christmas Promise is just the first

Hope at Christmas, as seen on Hallmark Channel was released in trade paperback, digital and audio back in 2018, but for the first time a new mass-market paperback will be released. Just \$7.99 for this perfect stocking stuffer size. The cover is great! See the book tree in the doorway? Love it!



November 3rd, Hallmark will release
Christmas in Evergreen: Tidings of Joy.



