



# THE MIRROR HAS TWO FACES:

## *Merging Comedy and Tragedy in the Christian Novel*

By Janice Hanna Thompson

*"Through humor, you can soften some of the worst blows that life delivers. And once you find laughter, no matter how painful your situation might be, you can survive it." – Bill Cosby*

All around you, people are struggling. Fighting to stay on top of their finances. Wondering if they should leave their spouses. Battling addictions. You want to write a novel that will change their lives for the better.

Why, then, does a one-liner leap to mind instead of an intense plotline? Why does your mind gravitate to your favorite *I Love Lucy* episode or those quirky characters on *Everybody Loves Raymond*? With all the angst in the world, why tickle the funny bone of your aching reader? Won't that serve as a slap in the face, making her think

you don't care about her pain?

Emphatically no! Humor writing is one of the best ways to share real answers in a non-hurtful way. You **can** impact lives with comedic writing.

Tragedy, at its core, evokes pity and fear. Humor writing points to the same problems your readers face but attempts to distract, to offer that "Calgon, Take Me Away!" moment. That doesn't mean the humor writer can't address real topics. *Au, contraire!*

Beef up the humor in your stories with these seven steps:

**1. Use ordinary people.** Think of Raymond here. Regular guy. Think of Lucy. Regular, though quirky, gal. Novels with a comedic slant must meet the reader where he or she lives.

**2. Diversify your cast.** Make sure you have distinctly different characters in

your story. They need to have different taste in clothing, different political opinions, different off-the-chart personalities, and different ways of dealing with their troubles. Part of what made *I Love Lucy* work was the diverse cast.

**3. Exaggerate.** The writers of *I Love Lucy* discovered the finely tuned art of exaggeration resonated with viewers. If we examine the real story behind Lucy's overblown antics, we find a woman in an odd/mismatched marriage, a woman who struggles with fitting in, a woman who wonders if she has any talents or abilities. Present her problems in a comedic setting and every woman who's ever felt out-of-place can relate. That's why exaggeration works. It's so wacky we don't realize we're getting a life-changing message.

**4. Put the situation in sitcom.** Deliberately put your characters in situa-



tions that make them squirm, then give the reader a roller-coaster ride of emotions as they try to weasel their way out of those situations.

**5. Work in threes.** It might sound funny, but people love threes. There's a natural cadence to repeating something three times for effect or in presenting three odd characters who appear together. Larry, Mo, and Curly?

**6. Pacing.** There's much to be said about the placement of words, phrases, and inflections. Pacing is everything in comedy. Zip, zip, zip! Don't bog your reader down with description or lengthy action beats. Keep it moving.

**7. Do the opposite.** Your reader will expect your characters to respond in a certain way. Throw them off! Let your hero or heroine do something completely out of character.

Make a difference in the lives of your readers—even those facing tragedy. Offer a chuckle, a smile, a hopeful situation through the lives of your characters, then watch your readers' frowns turn upside-down.

**JANICE HANNA THOMPSON** is the author of more than 80 books for the Christian market. She is best known for her romantic comedies. Janice is passionate about her faith and does all she can to share the joy of the Lord with others. She

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## Delivering the Punch Line

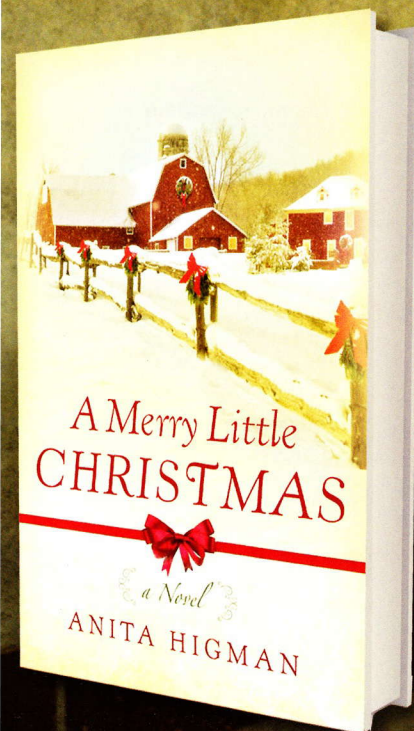
Ever watched a true comedian work? He delivers the setup, draws the audience in, gets them on the edge of their seats, pauses, and then—*bam!* Punch line! And the audience roars.

Want to keep your reader laughing? Become skilled at delivering the punch lines in your story. Create anticipation during the setup phase—don't give away too much too soon. Adequately build then, *shazam!* Punch line!

Of all the situational comedies ever written, nothing surpasses the punch lines of *I Love Lucy*. Poor Lucy took a proverbial beating in every episode, but we didn't mind laughing at—or with—her. The punch lines were beautifully placed. Every episode offered a situation, a setup, and a *wowza* ending.

Try this: Over the next week spend time watching late-night comics deliver their monologues. Pay particular attention to their setup and delivery. Then create situations for your characters that deliver equally comedic outcomes

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