



*All the
Romance
you Need this
Christmas*

Romy Sommer

**All the Romance You Need This
Christmas: 5-Book Festive Collection**

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Sommer R.

All the Romance You Need This Christmas: 5-Book Festive Collection
/ R. Sommer — «HarperCollins»,

The perfect stocking fill of romantic Christmas reads - a festive 5 book romance collection!

The Kiss Before Christmas, Sophie Pembroke As the snow falls on Manhattan, PA Dory Mackenzie is a long way from home and the cosy family Christmases back in Liverpool. So when she agrees to pose as her high-society-boss's girlfriend for the holidays, it's sure to add a bit of spice!

The First Christmas Without You, Michelle Betham Jessie Collins has always wanted to visit Lapland. But this Christmas, more than any other, it's the place she feels she really needs to be as she tries to come to terms with a future she really needs to start living...

Say It With Sequins, Georgia Hill Who Dares Dances is a reality TV show with a difference. Not only do contestants have to learn to dance, they also face a series of bizarre challenges. But these challenges are nothing compared to the scandals happening on – and off – the ballroom floor!

To Catch a Star, Romy Sommer Christian Taylor: Heartthrob. Movie Star. Bad boy. The mischievous actor sets his sights on the one thing he's told he can't have: Teresa Adler, the ultimate Ice Princess. Will the heat of his touch melt her heart?

Christmas at Thornton Hall, Lynn Marie Hulsman Christmas is looking blue for all-American girl Juliet Hill. But then she takes a festive catering job at Thornton Hall in the idyllic Cotswolds countryside, and with a gorgeous resident chef on the scene, could sparks fly as the snow begins to fall?

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Sophie Pembroke

The First Christmas Without You

Michelle Betham

Say It With Sequins

Georgia Hill

To Catch A Star

Romy Sommer

Christmas at Thornton Hall

Lynn Marie Hulsman



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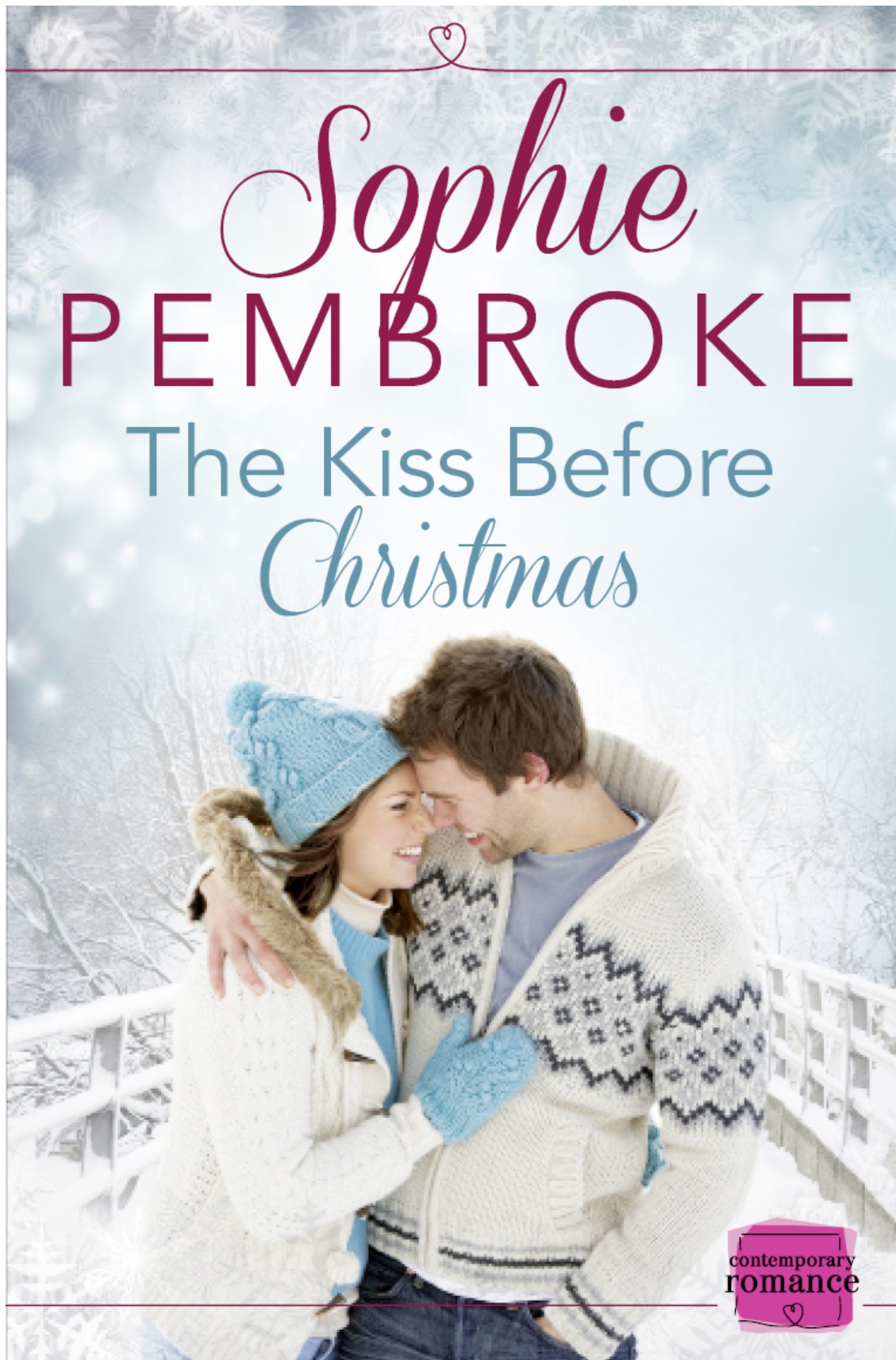
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The Kiss Before Christmas

Sophie Pembroke



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For Charlotte.

I wouldn't be here without you.

Chapter 1

Dorothea Mackenzie stared at the screen, willing the words to change. They didn't. She tried blinking. Nope, still there, in all their guilt-trip-inducing glory.

My dearest Dory,

We went to choose the Christmas tree yesterday, sweetheart, but it wasn't the same without you. I think Mum was a bit sad decorating it without any of you kids around, but Molly and Tim don't get in until the 24th, and she didn't want to leave it that late. She had 'Lonely This Christmas' playing on a loop. A call from you would definitely cheer her up – especially if you happened to mention your flight times (hint hint!). I can come and collect you from the airport any time on Christmas Eve, just let me know. I've not taken any taxi bookings the whole day, just in case.

Love and mulled wine

Dad x

A definite two-pronged attack. Clever. First mentioning Mum being sad, which they all knew meant big eyes and deep sighs and very brave smiles, and which he knew Dory couldn't stand. And then not taking any bookings on Christmas Eve, a night that promised time-and-a-half for a Liverpool cabbie, and usually some pretty good festive tips, too.

All this despite the fact she'd told him a month and a half ago she wouldn't be home for Christmas. Hell, she'd already posted all their presents.

'They're bringing out the big guns now, then?' Tyler said, reading over her shoulder in that way he knew she hated. 'How are you going to get out of that one?'

Dory shifted her computer screen so he couldn't see. There wasn't a lot of point; she was pretty sure IT would send him up every email she'd ever received or sent if he asked. But it was the principle of the thing. 'Aren't bosses supposed to be less...' She trailed off still in search of the right word to describe Tyler.

'Charming? Handsome? Awesome?' he guessed.

'Intrusive.'

'Hmm. And I thought assistants were supposed to be more fawning, generally.' He wagged a finger at her, mock sternly. 'Don't think you can get away with anything, just because you've got that cute British accent thing going.'

Dory was starting to suspect that her accent was the only reason he'd hired her. It certainly wasn't to fawn over him, since she'd made it painfully clear at the job interview that that wasn't going to happen. In fact, the exact phrase she'd used was 'I'm not the kind of assistant who fetches your dry-cleaning and straightens your tie. I'm the kind of assistant who makes your workload lighter.'

Dad always said she wasn't great with subtle.

Of course, for the brief three-month period when she'd had an assistant of her own, back at her last job – her Dream Job – she hadn't exactly been fawned over either. More insulted, actually.

Maybe her assistant hadn't liked the accent. Liverpudlian was an acquired taste, Dory supposed.

'Was there something you actually wanted?' Dory asked. 'A report that needs writing, or a meeting to set up?'

'Yeah, I need you to pull up the publicity shots from that charity event in Washington D.C. last week. See what people are saying about the cause, the people involved, that sort of thing.'

'You mean you want me to check that they caught your best side in the photos.' She'd been Tyler's assistant for six months now. She knew what *really* mattered to him, and it often had little to do with the multi-million-dollar restaurant chain he stood to inherit, or its subsidiaries – even if he was the CEO.

'That too,' he admitted with a grin. 'Send them through when you've got them.'

He swept off back into his office and Dory turned to more important matters than whether or not Tyler's eyes looked red in some photos surely no one really cared about. Like how to break it to Dad that she really, really wasn't coming home for Christmas.

It wasn't that she didn't *want* to go back to good old Blighty. Her stomach rumbled at the very thought of Dad's Christmas dinner and Mum's mince pies. She was nostalgic about beating her siblings at Monopoly while they drank their way through a bucket of mulled wine until they all ended up writing each other IOUs for ridiculous sums of rent. She wanted a soggy Christmas-Day walk after the Queen's speech and turkey sandwiches while watching the Doctor Who Christmas Special.

But she couldn't.

Working for Tyler Alexander had a lot of perks, but unfortunately the pay wasn't one of them. It paid the rent, got her invited to some pretty cool parties, and provided the entertainment of working with Tyler, scion of the Alexander family and generally fun guy to be around. But it didn't stretch to holiday-period flights to the British Isles.

Of course, she couldn't tell Dad that. Especially since her parents still believed she was working at the aforementioned Dream Job.

She should have told them by now. It wasn't going to get any easier, after all. But she just hadn't found quite the right way to break it to them yet. And yeah, okay, maybe a part of her was still hoping she'd get back the life she moved to the States for, before anybody back home noticed that she'd let it slip through her fingers. Dream job, devoted, successful and *rich* fiancé, Manhattan penthouse apartment... Now she shared a shoebox of a flat an hour's commute away, put up with Tyler's daily demands (while still refusing to deal with his wardrobe in any way) and didn't even want to think about dating. And, as if that weren't enough to make her miserable, she couldn't go home for Christmas.

With a sigh, Dory pushed her chair up to the desk again and rested her hands on the keyboard. How was she going to do this?

She glanced at the office door. When in doubt, blame Tyler.

Dear Dad

I wish I was there to see the tree – send photos? And you know 'Lonely this Christmas' is Mum's favourite. She'd be listening to it even if I was there. Which, unfortunately, I'm not going to be able to be. You know there's nowhere else in the world I want to be on Christmas Day, but I'm afraid work is crazy and I can't get the time off to even fly there and back and say hi at the airport! Maybe in the New Year...

She stopped. Things weren't going to be any better in January, and there was no point pretending that they would.

Deleting the words, she clicked on to the Internet browser and brought up the travel website she used whenever Tyler needed to jet off somewhere at short notice. Typing 'New York' and 'London' into the starting point and destination fields, she held her breath while it did its magic.

When the price range appeared on the screen, she winced and closed the tab. No way. Even if she was willing to give up food and shelter for the foreseeable future, there wasn't enough money in her bank account to get her halfway across the ocean.

Her hand drifted to the locked top drawer of her desk entirely of its own accord. It knew what she kept there, hoping that the lock and key would protect her from temptation. She kept it at work so she didn't have it on hand in her weakest moments. Like late at night, watching QI repeats on her laptop with a large glass of wine, and feeling homesick.

In that drawer, tucked away behind her stationery supplies, was the emergency credit card her father had insisted she get before she'd left for New York with Ewen.

She'd never used it, but she knew the credit limit was high enough to get her a ticket home. She could use it, have a few days with friends and family, then return to New York with nobody any the wiser as to her current fall from perfection. It was an ideal solution – she'd keep up appearances and get to go home for Christmas.

Except she'd be paying off the trip for the rest of her life. And what would she do if there really was an emergency and she couldn't pull out the magic credit card to get her home?

Sighing, Dory pulled her hand away from the drawer. Dad had a rule about credit cards, one he'd drummed into her repeatedly before she left for university, and on every visit thereafter.

It's not an emergency unless someone is bleeding, or there's a real chance of decapitation.

She could probably get away with a more general risk of death than decapitation but still, neither applied in this case. The only thing at risk was her pride. And perhaps her relationship with her parents.

If she asked, if she confessed all, she knew Mum and Dad would try and find a way to pay for her to go home, but they didn't have the money any more than she did. And it would be a one-way trip. If she left New York, broke and desperate, she wouldn't be coming back. And she wasn't ready to give up just yet.

The phone rang in Tyler's office – never a good sign. The only person who had Tyler's direct line, and so didn't have to come through Dory, was his mother. She'd tricked it out of his previous assistant, which might have been why the job suddenly became available. And now Tyler couldn't change the number or his mother would know he was avoiding her.

Personally, Dory was just glad she didn't have to take the calls.

Within moments, a message from Tyler flashed up on her screen. *Get photos. Now!*

Dory rolled her eyes. Classic avoidance tactic. She would go in there, needing to urgently speak to him about photos, of all things, and he could legitimately tell his mother he had to go because something had come up.

Pulling up the search engine, she typed Tyler's name into the search box. Usually that was all it took to get the most recent articles and photos up. She'd narrow it down by venue and event if there were too many. But before she could click search, the phone rang.

'Tyler Alexander's office,' Dory said. 'How can I help you?'

'Is my brother there?' The voice was unfamiliar, even after six months of working for Tyler, but she could make an easy educated guess at its owner. Lucas Alexander. The black sheep.

'I'm sorry Mr Alexander, Tyler is on the phone right now.' What did he want? She supposed this was the time of year when estranged brothers might suddenly get in touch, if only to discuss what on earth to buy their mother – the original woman-who-has-everything – for Christmas.

'Let me guess – our mother.' He sounded almost amused. His voice was deeper than Tyler's, richer somehow.

'I believe it might be.' Dory clicked search then, while it was working, opened a new tab and typed the name 'Lucas Alexander' into the search bar. *Let's see exactly who I'm talking to.* 'Do you want me to ask Tyler to patch you in on a conference call with them?'

'God, no!' As Lucas spoke, a series of images began to load on Dory's screen, all several years old, and all gorgeous. Lucas Alexander in a suit, on his wedding day, in shorts and a t-shirt on some beach somewhere... and one, the most recent shot of him, two years ago, in a dark coat and sunglasses. She clicked on that one.

'In that case, can I take a message?' she asked. The new page loaded with the headline 'Alexander Drop Out?' Dory scrolled down. *CEO of the Alexander Corporation and heir to the family fortune, Lucas Alexander last night sensationally stepped down from the company, amid rumours of his divorce from socialite Cheryl Franklin.*

'If she's on the phone, then she's already seen the photos. I take it Tyler hasn't yet?' Lucas said.

'Photos?' Dory guiltily clicked back to the tab with the photos she was *supposed* to be looking for. 'Oh my.'

'Yeah. Not exactly the public image my dad usually likes us to promote for the Corporation.' Lucas sighed. 'It's going to be a long Christmas break. Look, tell him I tried to warn him, yeah?'

'I will,' Dory promised, eyes still glued to the screen and the phone still in her hand long after Lucas had hung up.

As the dial tone buzzed, she finally put it down. *Get it together, Dory.* She needed to figure out exactly what was going on here.

Okay, so to start with, those weren't photos from the latest charity gala. Dory was pretty sure he'd never have his hand that far up a woman's dress in front of the country's foremost do-gooders. She squinted at the picture on the screen. Who was she? No one Dory recognised, although the lighting and the woman's position made it hard to pick out much beyond dark hair and long legs. Which didn't narrow it down much. Tyler had what you might call A Type. Every woman she'd ever seen him out with had dark hair and long legs.

Hell, *she* had dark hair and reasonably lengthy legs. It could be her, except she'd never get that up-close-and-personal with her boss. She liked a guy with a little more depth, thanks.

A guy unlike her ex, as it turned out.

Although, now she thought about it, while she'd seen Tyler with a variety of women on his arms over the last six months, she'd never seen him with the same one twice. And she'd never seen him look at one like he could barely stop himself touching her, cameras be damned.

Whoever the woman in these photos was, she mattered to him. And he really wasn't going to like the world seeing that. Let alone his mother...

Dory clicked on the article that went with the photos, checking the date stamp and scanning the text. The usual words popped out – *Alexander family scion, billionaire, most eligible* – but this time her eye stopped and paid attention to the second paragraph.

Usually seen in public with exactly the right woman for the occasion, accessorising his charity galas, publicity events and even dinner invitations like he'd match his tie to his suit, Tyler Alexander has never been afraid to show off his companions. Which makes us wonder about this one! Who is she? Where did they meet? Why is he keeping her a secret? And – could it be because, at last, Tyler has found The One?

Oh dear. Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear. He really wasn't going to like this. Apart from anything else, it might give the girl expectations – something Tyler studiously tried to avoid.

She looked at the picture again. Maybe this one really was different, though. In which case he'd probably be up in arms about invasion of privacy. Some days, you really couldn't win with Tyler.

Reluctantly, she emailed him the link, then waited. Not for very long, mind. Within a minute, there was a reply.

GET IN HERE NOW!

He was still on the phone to his mother, so Dory slipped through the door and sat very, very quietly in the visitor's chair on the other side of his desk. The chances of him not noticing she was there were slim, especially since he'd ordered her in, but she figured it was worth a try. She took a moment to remind herself that this *was not* her fault. She hadn't been on a date with a strange woman, or got caught. She hadn't even been responsible for making the dinner reservation, since she hadn't even known he'd gone. She was in no way responsible for this. It was important to remember this – these things had a tendency to become completely irrelevant when Tyler was in a snit and looking for someone to blame.

'I can't just... she might have plans, Mother.' Tyler slumped back in his chair, his eyes closed. 'Yes, we've talked about... I'm sure she'd...' He sighed. Dory sympathised; getting a word in edgeways when talking to Felicia Alexander was clearly not easy. 'Mother. I'll ask her, okay? I don't know what else you want me to do.' Stupid question. Tyler went silent again as his mother presumably gave him a list. 'Fine. I'll ask. Goodbye, Mother.'

Throwing the phone at the desk, he reached up to rub his temples. Dory, more concerned about his mother eavesdropping on whatever conversation followed, picked up the receiver and put it back on the hook. Then she sat back and waited for the blame to fall.

‘How could you let them post that picture?’ Tyler pointed at her, eyes open and accusing now.

‘How could you let them take it?’ she countered. ‘And it’s a bit hard to pull photos of you I don’t even know exist, out with a woman I didn’t know you were dating, on an evening I didn’t even know you were out.’

After six months, he followed that ramble of thought without too much trouble. One of the reasons she liked working for him.

Tyler sighed. ‘Yeah, okay. I screwed up. It’s just...’

‘She matters to you?’ Dory guessed, when he paused.

A sharp, short nod was the only acknowledgement she got. ‘But she is *not* a woman I can take home to meet the family over the holidays.’

Why not? Dory didn’t ask, because making Tyler madder didn’t seem like a good to-do list item for the day, but she couldn’t help but come up with some answers on her own. Was she a prostitute? The daughter of a business rival? His ex? Or just someone who’d be deemed unsuitable by the Alexander family at large? That probably took up most of the population.

‘Your mother wants you to take her home to Midfield House for Christmas?’

Tyler groaned and nodded. ‘Apparently it’s the only socially acceptable thing to do after you appear in a compromising photo with a woman, and it’s plastered all over the Internet.’

‘Of course.’ Only Felicia Alexander would have a book of etiquette for this situation. Tyler always said that because the Alexanders were only old-ish money, with their first restaurant opened in the early twentieth century, rather than old nineteenth-century industrialist money, his mother always felt she had to be even more proper than proper. ‘So what’re you going to do?’

Dory leant forward, resting her elbows on his desk, and stared across at him. Tyler Alexander under pressure; often when he did his best work, she’d found.

But apparently not today. He sighed and rubbed a hand across his forehead. ‘Call my lawyer, I suppose. See if we can cut some sort of deal with the magazine in question before the pictures make it from online to print. Get them to take them down, maybe. Break a leg so I don’t have to go home for Christmas.’

He was joking, of course. Even if he didn’t look like it. But just in case... ‘Don’t say that. It’ll be your own fault if you slip on the pavement on the way to catch a cab to the train station.’

‘Sidewalk,’ Tyler corrected her. Dory sighed. He was determined to make her a real American, one colloquialism at a time.

‘Besides, home is where you’re supposed to be for the holidays. Holidays are for family.’

Tyler’s gaze jerked up to meet hers. ‘You’re not going home,’ he pointed out.

Dory sank backwards with a sigh, thinking of the email she still had to send to Dad. ‘I would if I could. It’s just... not possible.’

‘Because...?’

‘Because you don’t pay me enough,’ she said, smirking at him. It was a familiar argument. Of course, the truth was, even a hefty pay rise would be swallowed up by frivolous expenses like food and heating. Basic living expenses were extreme in New York. She’d thought, coming from London, she’d be used to it. But in London she’d had the ex to share the bills with. Of course, she’d thought she’d be sharing with him in New York, too...

‘What if I could arrange for you to go home for New Year?’ Tyler asked. The gleam in his eye told her there’d be a catch, but the surge of excitement that coursed through her overwhelmed any caution.

‘Really? That would be... God, that would be fantastic.’ It wasn’t Christmas, of course, but it was a damn sight better than nothing. Her parents might even still be speaking to her by the time she got there if she could mollify them with a trip home at the end of the month.

‘I’ll book you a ticket,’ Tyler promised, smiling beatifically. ‘If you spend Christmas with my family.’

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