

From the Stacks
By Julie Orf
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I adore Christmas. I adore the music. One of my favorite lines goes, "All the tinsel and lights, and the presents are nice, but the real gift is You!"—it's like being wrapped in a lyric-sized hug. But let's be clear: my decorations do not emerge from storage before December 1. They certainly don't dare step on Thanksgiving's toes. I have my own very important principles about resisting the infamous "Christmas creep" until the turkey has had its moment in the spotlight. However... plotting out my December holiday reading? That's not jumping the gun. That's simply excellent strategy.

Susan Mallery returns with a joyful and utterly irresistible holiday story in *One Big Happy Family*. Julie Parker is initially relieved when her adult children, Nick and Dana, decide to skip the holidays. She plans to use the freedom to enjoy a romantic, cozy Christmas with Heath, the much younger man she has been secretly dating for months. Julie's romantic getaway is derailed when her children suddenly change their minds. Seeking to honor their late father (Julie's ex-husband), they plead for a traditional family gathering at their shared cabin. Julie cannot say no, despite the complications it creates for her secret relationship. The holiday becomes a comedy of errors. However, through the chaos, the group discovers that expanding the family and letting go of past hurts leads to a happier, fuller Christmas for everyone.

A romantic novel with interesting characters and humorous quips by Jenny Colgan entitled, *Midnight at the Christmas Bookshop* will help set a holiday mood. The manager, Carmen Hogan, of McCredie's, a historic bookshop in Edinburgh's Old Town, finds her summer disrupted when an American production company takes over to film a cheesy Christmas movie. Carmen accepts the disruption because the shop desperately needs the money. She uses the windfall to revitalize the store and fight off a hostile buyout from an obnoxious millionaire who wants to replace the historic bookstore with a tacky souvenir shop selling cheap trinkets. As the fake movie set gives way to the real winter season, the "lovely new possibilities" hinted at suggest that Carmen will find a way to save the beloved bookshop and perhaps find a new romance amidst the falling snow.

Another hilarious, romantic gem of a holiday novel is *Bright Lights, Big Christmas* by Mary Kay Andrews. Kerry Tolliver leaves her North Carolina farm to run her family's Christmas tree stand in Greenwich Village. Living in a vintage camper, she hopes to carve out a new path for herself in the big city. The season takes a serious turn when an elderly neighbor disappears. Kerry must combine her country instincts with her new city smarts to find the friend she has come to consider family. Amidst the mystery, Kerry falls for Patrick, a charming single dad. As their chemistry grows, she questions if this holiday romance has a future beyond December.

Richard Paul Evans presents a Christmas novel each year, and *The Christmas Stranger* is about love, loss, and people that we did not know we needed. Three years after losing his family in a Christmas Eve accident, Paul Wanlass has given up on life. His isolated existence in Salt Lake City is interrupted when a mysterious stranger arrives at his door with a hidden agenda. Paul challenges the stranger to provide just one reason to live. Accepting the wager, he warns Paul that the path to the answer will be unlike anything he expects. Paul is thrust into a series of twists, from a robbery that connects him to a grieving widow to the rescue of a bullied young boy. As these broken lives intersect, Paul must uncover the identity of his visitor and decide if he can find meaning in life once again.