



Holiday Kisses: This Time Next Year\A Rare Gift\It's Not Christmas Without You\Mistletoe and Margaritas

Jaci Burton , Shannon Stacey , HelenKay Dimon , Alison Kent

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Holiday Kisses: This Time Next Year\A Rare Gift\It's Not Christmas Without You\Mistletoe and Margaritas Jaci Burton , Shannon Stacey , HelenKay Dimon , Alison Kent
It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like...Love!

A man gives the gift of trust and receives a second chance at love in return. A woman helps to heal the wounded heart of a soldier. A couple finds that true love knows no distance. And a young widow learns that there can be two great loves in a lifetime. Love, romance and passion come together in this collection of four seasonal shorts.

Anthology includes:

This Time Next Year by Alison Kent

A Rare Gift by Jaci Burton

It's Not Christmas Without You by HelenKay Dimon

Mistletoe and Margaritas by Shannon Stacey

Holiday Kisses: This Time Next Year\A Rare Gift\It's Not Christmas Without You\Mistletoe and Margaritas Details

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From Reader Review Holiday Kisses: This Time Next Year\A Rare Gift\It's Not Christmas Without You\Mistletoe and Margaritas for online ebook

sparklyunikorn says

It's a month of Christmas with lots of Christmas romance! Overall, I gave this book 4 stars and below are reviews for each of four anthologies with ratings, respectively.

This Time Next Year by Alison Kent (5 stars) - It was a story about one with tortured soul and haunted pasts, Dillon, where he met with an ambitious nurse, Breena. Rough weather made them stuck together and they started to learn about each other and eventually, they grew feelings to one another. I loved this story because Dillon was wounded, in his heart, and it was because of Breena, his life switched from sadness to joy he was missed a lot. Breena definitely made a perfect heroin for Dillon because she was understanding and with determination, she would make sure Dillon's life, their lives, this time full with happiness and love.

A Rare Gift by Jaci Burton (3 stars) - It was a story about Wyatt who was scared to fall in love again because of his previous failed marriage but that changed when stubborn Calliope decided that she wouldn't give up on him as she had loved him long before his marriage to her sister. The story was good and I enjoyed how things went and ended. It was just that I wasn't really cool with Calliope because she may be a little bit pushy and desperate even though she's a nice one. To be frank, I actually liked Wyatt and Cassandra's better because the chemistry was there and it was overwhelming despite the meeting between them was short and brief.

It's Not Christmas Without You by HelenKay Dimon (5 stars) - The story was about Austin who wouldn't give up on his on-and-off girlfriend, Carrie because he really loved her. Their love story actually reminded me of something and yeah, I did smile a lot reading at some parts. I liked the story because Austin practically would do anything to get his girl back even if it needed him to understand about things that bored him and he was just scared she would leave, exactly like his mother left him. What he did to Carrie, it was kind of sweet to me and it was Carrie who was at odds, contemplating about everything. But still, the end was satisfying because he got her and she wouldn't leave him. That just made me smile a lot more.

Mistletoe and Margaritas by Shannon Stacey (4 stars) - Another tortured-soul guy who loved a girl that he couldn't have but now that he could but the only thing that stopped him because she was his best friend's widow. I felt so horribly sad for whatever happened to Justin. His story, his confession tore my heart. It even broke my already broken heart when he felt wrong about everything and he scared he betrayed the memory of his late best friend. However, things turned well eventually when both of them, together to move on, for the brightest future ahead. Actually, the romance between them just fine with slight chemistry and it was all Justin and his hard moments, I gave this 4-star.

Recommended and Merry Christmas!

Karen says

Last year around Christmas time I picked up Naughty and Nice, a collection of novellas, because I am a huge fan of Shannon Stacey's novels. I hadn't at that time read anything by the other authors. So I was really

excited when Holiday Kisses came out this year, particularly because Jaci Burton's story is a continuation of sorts from her story in Naughty and Nice.

"This Time Next Year" was an enjoyable story. I've now got a couple of titles on my Kindle by this author and I'm looking forward to reading some more by her.

Jaci Burton's story "A Rare Gift" is Wyatt's story (you can read Ethan's story in Naughty and Nice). The storyline isn't one of my favourites, where one party is now attracted to former spouse's sibling. Its now 3 years since Wyatt divorced Calliope's sister Cassandra and it was a very bitter divorce. Calliope has contracted Wyatt to do some construction work on the day care centre that she runs and there is certainly some pretty strong chemistry between the two. Calliope is really keen to follow through with their chemistry but Wyatt is trying to keep some distance. Being a novella there wasn't a lot of time to develop too much of a story, but I think Jaci has done a great job with this one and I really enjoyed it.

"Its Not Christmas Without You" by HelenKay Dimon. This story was just okay for me, I didn't love it, but I think its because the story wasn't long enough for me to really get a connection with either of the characters. There were still some pretty good qualities about the story and the writing so I'll certainly look for something else by this author.

"Mistletoe and Margaritas" by Shannon Stacey I loved. I'm a huge fan of Shannon's and this was no exception. This one really tugged at the heart strings. Claire has now been a widow for a few years, her husband Brandon dying at a young age. Justin was Brandon's best friend and has been a huge support to Claire in her grief and they are the best of friends. Justin has been in love with Claire for a long time and has kept his feelings to himself. Claire is now feeling some attraction to Justin and after a party one night they both end up in bed together. This is a very touching story about two best friends becoming lovers and how will they get past their grief and feelings of betrayal to Brandon.

I really really liked Shannon Stacey's and Jaci Burton's stories the most, the other two were enjoyable to read but didn't knock my socks off, but enjoyed them enough that I will look for some other stories by Alison Kent and HelenKay Dimon.

Ruth says

This was one fabulous collection of Christmas-themed short stories, provided by netgalley. Shannon Stacey was the only author I'd previously read, but I'm pretty sure I'll be checking all the others after reading these.

The first story is This Time Next Year by Alison Kent and it was just one of those books that presses all the right buttons for me. Gorgeous stetson-wearing hero on horseback - check, said hero rescues heroine from snowdrift - check, heroine discovers that not only is the hero a bona fide hero but is also a doctor - check (whilst swooning), blizzard keeps hero and heroine marooned inside, just the two of them - check, and well, you can imagine the rest... Will the heroine turn her back on her dreams and stay with the hero? Will the hero be able to summon the courage to ask the heroine to stay? I can't give away the ending, but let me just say, that it's got one of the most satisfying endings I've read in a contemporary for a long time. 5 stars.

The second book is A Rare Gift by Jaci Burton and although it had some elements in it that I absolutely loved, on the whole I didn't enjoy it as much as I did the other three. I have a real weakness for grumpy heroes and this hero was like Walter Matthau in Grumpy Old Men, except younger and much, much hotter, but not even that could overcome how disappointed I was with the heroine. She started out fine (Calliope is a great name), but then descended into the realms of the ridiculous as she evolved from the very happy (what

is she on?), very pulled-together bundle of fun into a frikkin' therapist, who instinctively *knows* (ugh!) how to heal the hero of all his personal problems, caused by her very own sister. I really wanted to smack her from about halfway through, I'm afraid. The whole falling-in-love-with-your-ex-sister-in-law thing didn't actually bother me, but I don't think the book was remotely realistic in how it ended up, and, unfortunately, towards the end the writing deteriorated for me a bit with too much "he said, she said, he did, she did". I also appreciate that this was part of a series, but I personally don't like it when authors jam the characters from other books in the series down my throat, especially in a novella format. I just doesn't work for me. 2 stars.

The third book is *It's Not Christmas Without You* by HelenKay Dimon, and I really, really enjoyed this one. There's not many times when a book I read mirrors choices I've had to make in my own life, or does it so sympathetically, but this one does. I was incredibly irritated to start with - the heroine acts like she has to apologize for having her own life and chasing her own dreams, but how the story evolves, how the characters evolve is just wonderful. The hero is fun, totally smitten with the heroine, desperate to make her want to share her life with him, but egotistical enough not to realize that this isn't about him, and blind enough not to understand that life isn't all black or white, and yet, he is completely lovable. Don't ask me how the author manages to do it, but she's created a great hero here. And, probably most of all, I love, love, love their HEA. (view spoiler). 5 stars.

The fourth book is *Mistletoe & Margaritas* by Shannon Stacey, and again, I really enjoyed this one. It is far more sad and emotional than most Christmas fluff, and I'll be honest here, I very nearly did blub and it was almost a Moose Tracks-type emergency (you know, only a pint of Moose Tracks, with extra chocolate lumps, is going to make it better). Death, finding love again, how to cope with guilt and just everyday life is right up-front and center with this one. Loved it. 4 stars. I had to knock it down one because I just felt that someone in the heroine's life might have been slightly negative about the choices she and the hero make.

Anyway, this was a great Christmas collection, and I'm definitely keeping it. I'm also going to check out more books by the authors. 4 stars overall.

Joanne says

'Holiday Kisses' is a collection of four novellas that share a theme of couples overcoming obstacles to find true love before Christmas. I found all four stories enjoyable; the last one 'Mistletoe and Margaritas' by Shannon Stacey is my favourite, and in my view the strongest.

The heat from these stories will help keep you warm on a chilly evening.

Julie Barrett says

Holiday Kisses

This Time Next Year by Allison Kent

Brenna Keating is on her way to her grandmothers. She swerves to avoid a deer and finds her car nose deep into a snow pile.

Dillion is on his horse making the rounds when he finds her car and drags her out by a window and brings her back to his place and dresses her ankle and puts her to bed under quilts.

As they sit and talk in front of the first, he's told her they will be snowed in for days as this is the storm of the century.

She finds out he knows a bit about doctoring and makes rounds to the local people on the mountain to see how they are doing and to bring them food or whatever they need. Others on the mountain supply those in need with food if need be.

After they shared a kiss he went out to the barn to work and she decided to make a Christmas tree and decorate it. And she was baking cookies when he came back in. One of the bonds I have with the character here is I also keep my big 20 lb. bag of flour in the freezer.

After they have finished in the bedroom he tells her what the dates on the fan blades mean, very touching and real.

Lots of surprises when she finally gets up from bed. He brings her to her grandmother's on the back of the horse.

The present he gave her was one he made by hand. What a treasure! Later that day he took her back to his cabin and drove her home with plans that her car would be repaired.

They made plans 'this time next year'.

A Rare Gift by Jaci Burton

Wyatt is about to bid on his ex-wife's younger sister Calliope day care center.

When he saw her she did a number to his head. She wasn't like her sister at all and he kept losing track of what she was saying. He better pay attention and get the job, so other contractors didn't get it, and get the job over and done with and get out of there.

She still had a crush on him and when she noticed his clipboard she thought she'd just swing by and drop it off for him, in person. She finally finds him at the bar and gives it to him, gets a beer and proceeds to learn from Joey Johnson how to play pool.

It's late at night and she's still in the building. He goes to find her and walk her out to find a lot of snow on the ground. He puts her in his truck and they go to her house. After a meal and a light kissing it's decided he will spend the night.

He backs away from her, not wanting to start rumors and getting people to gossip about her.

She confronts him and tells him her sister will be in town for the holidays and that he should talk to her and get some closure so they can move on. She sets up the meeting and he is furious with her for doing so....

It's Not Christmas Without You by HelenKay Dimon

Carrie took the job in DC and left her hometown and boyfriend of Hollowoy, WV. This year she's going to stay in town and just work through the holiday, not go back home.

Austin decides they have not broken up at all and if she can't come home he will go to her. He gets a job selling Christmas trees outside her apartment in DC after paying the registering fees.

Lucky his brother Spence got him out of his drunken mode and that's why he was on the trail of Carrie.

They are able to talk and she tells him her mother gave up all her dreams to raise her and her brother. She doesn't want her life to be the same cuz she can see how unhappy her mom is.

Spence is at the tree lot to also give him romantic advice for the month of December. She keeps coming back to the tree lot and still hasn't picked out a tree yet. By the time she did go back to the tree lot he had left the area to drive the first batch of trees back home. He was done, he knew her place was in DC.

Mistletoe and Margaritas by Shannon Stacey

Claire had lost her husband for over 2 years now and Justin was there for her, always had been, late in getting to her first.

She does bookkeeping for a lot of small businesses in the area at her home.

He's a roofer and in the winter he plow roads in NH and she sometimes tags along with him.

They end up at a party and she's had a few too many and they go back to her house for the night. He can't get over that Brandon was his best friend and he's now having sex with his friends wife-sure he's dead but he still feels like it's wrong.

Will they ever be able to move on or just break it off?

? Kimberly says

It isn't often that I enjoy all of the stories in an anthology, but *Holiday Kisses* delivers. The novel contains four contemporary romances surrounding the holiday season. This is the first time I have ever given a 5 coffee cup review to a collection of works. Each story could stand on its own, and I would gladly read the full length version.

In, *This Time Next Year* by Alison Kent we meet Brenna Keating and Dillon Craig. Brenna is headed to her grandmother's house in the Blue Ridge Mountains. This is a sentimental Christmas for her, because it might be the last she spends with her Gran. When a snow storm hits, Dr. Dillon Craig a retired soldier just back from Afghanistan finds Brenna stuck in a snow bank. The storm is raging and he takes her back to his cabin. Trapped for a few days at the cabin, the sexual tension and Alison's desire to understand Dillon will have you laughing, sighing and shedding a few tears. This was a delightful tale that captured me from page one.

The second story, *A Rare Gift* by Jaci Burton introduces us to Calliope Andrews. She runs a day care center, and has had a crush on Wyatt Kent since she was fifteen. The problem; up until a few years ago he was married to her sister. When she needs to expand her daycare, she calls Kent's family contracting business to do the job. When Wyatt sees Calliope all grown up, he is shocked to find himself attracted to his ex-wife's sister. This is bad, real, bad. They had an ugly divorce and he won't trust his heart to another woman. Calliope is determined to show him that she is nothing like her sister. The tale that unfolds is wildly romantic and kept me up till the wee hours.

The third tale shows love knows no distance. *It's Not Christmas Without You* by HelenKay Dimon is sure to draw at your heartstrings. In this story we meet, Carrie Anders and Austin Thomas. They have been sweethearts since high school. After college, Dillon thinks they will get married and settle down in West Virginia near his family's business, but when Carrie accepts her dream job in Washington, D.C. and ends their relationship his world crashes around him. Dillon thinks she will change her mind that she just needs to get this out of her system. Six months later, he finds out she isn't coming home for the holidays. Determined to win her back, he packs up Christmas trees to sell at an empty lot across from her apartment. He's convinced seeing him, will have her coming to her senses. Watching these two lovebirds figure out compromise is everything, had me laughing at their crazy antics, crying and hoping they find their happily ever after.

In the final story, *Mistletoe and Margaritas* by Shannon Stacey we meet Justin McCormick. Justin has been in love with his best friend's wife, since the three of them met. Fate, led his friend to speak with her first. He has silently stood by, through the courtship, wedding and his best friend's death. Clair Rutledge couldn't have made it through the loss of her husband without their best friend. Justin has been her rock, but suddenly she is noticing, how he fills out his jeans, his smile and his lips. To make matters worse, she is dreaming about him. Watching these two handle the sexual tension, the past and each other is an emotional ride.

Holiday Kisses offers romance, steamy love scenes and happy endings. These are the perfect stories to put you in the holiday mood. I recommend this to fans of contemporary romances. Take a moment to check out each of these authors and their other published works. All of these stories are also available individually. Currently, this novel is only available in eBook format. This novel will be released on December 5, 2011.

I want to thank netGalley and Carina Press for this ARC, in exchange for my unbiased review.

<http://kimbathecaffeinatedbookreviewe...>

Tracy says

Keep Your Eye On That Frost Guy...He Nips

Four holiday romance novellas make up this seasonal delight, and they did a nice job of keeping me toasty on a couple of cold winter nights. Metaphorically, anyway, as southern Florida isn't exactly known for its brisk evening temperatures, even in winter.

This anthology didn't have the shared concept that united the three novellas in the previous anthology I read, but I'm perfectly happy without that. This one was a more consistent and entertaining read, each novella offering something for readers. And especially nice, Carina Press offers each of these four titles individually, for those who prefer to pick and choose. I appreciate that, even though in this case, the set together didn't have any that disappointed. For me, this anthology as a whole rated a little higher than four stars.

This Time Next Year

by Alison Kent

~* 4 Stars *~

27,000 Words

Brenna Keating curses the misinforming weatherman as the flakes begin to fall in earnest on her slow climb up the mountain to her grandmother's house. Her life is at a crossroads and the thought that this may be the last holiday she spends with her beloved grandmother makes this holiday both intensely bittersweet and vitally important. Her entire focus is on enjoying every single holiday tradition before she goes overseas for a year. She should have spared some focus for the deer that's standing in the middle of the winding, snow-covered road.

Rescuing a woman Dr. Dillon Craig knew could only be Brenna Keating from her wrecked car in the middle of a worsening winter storm was just the first good deed the reclusive doctor would be doing this holiday season. Once they're safely back to his mountain home, he's forced to acknowledge how appealing the young woman is. Not that he has any intention of acting on the attraction. He's got far too many of the sorts of wounds that scar the soul, for one. And he knows she's up here to see her grandmother before leaving the country. Messing with the woman in any way, shape, or form would be courting disaster.

With Christmas just days away and the attraction between them heating up the cabin more effectively than a roaring fire, the love that builds between them may be just the Christmas miracle they both need...and deserve.

~*~

I enjoyed this holiday novella. It was beautifully written, and in places emotionally powerful beyond my expectations. The messages of love, healing, and finding your heart's home aren't limited to holiday stories, but they certainly did fit well.

Brenna and Dillon got involved a little quickly for my taste, and I would have preferred the ending be written out a little differently, but this was a lovely novella with two great characters who had genuine chemistry and a relationship with enough depth to appeal. I enjoyed it quite a lot.

A Rare Gift

by Jaci Burton
~* 3.5 Stars *~
28,000 Words

Wyatt Kent has nothing but bad memories and regret from the marriage that ended three years ago. Now he's got to face a construction job contracted by his ex-wife's sister. He'd rather be nailed to the frame of the room addition for day care owner Calliope Andrews than deal with the sheer physical lust the feisty woman inspires in him. And when did the little girl he knew become such a pushy, gorgeous, sexy creature intent on driving him out of his mind...or his pants?

Callie has loved Wyatt since she was a socially awkward college kid, and even she had known that he and her sister were a bad match long before they even tied the knot. It's been three years since the breakup, though, and Wyatt has become a grouchy, grim, stick-in-the-mud. She is just who he needs to give him the love he deserves. And with winter wrapping tight around them, she has every intention of doing just that...just as soon as she convinces him she is nothing like her sister.

~*~

While Burton writes a perfectly cohesive, well-developed novella with believable characters and lots of sizzle, I can't say I was thrilled by every aspect of this one. I have to give credit to Burton, I enjoyed Wyatt and Callie together by the end, and that was pretty impressive considering how much I disliked the premise of Wyatt being previously married to Callie's sister. Which was a lot. I really don't like inter-familial relationships.

I also could have done without the "knocking up" conversation and I would have happily exchanged a sex scene for a more complex and significant confrontation between Wyatt and Cassandra. After three years of the sort of negative emotions that were generated by that divorce, the resolution seemed a little too easy and superficial, even for a novella. Still, the story definitely had it's good points, and I really enjoyed Callie's feisty spirit. This one may not have been my favorite in the bunch, but it was better than okay, even with my issues.

It's Not Christmas Without You

by HelenKay Dimon
~* 4.5 Stars *~
28,000 Words

Missing and loving on-again, off-again boyfriend Austin Thomas was never the issue for Carrie Anders. That's why she took her dream job at the museum in D.C. and that's why she made the painful decision not to return to her hometown in West Virginia for the holidays. Even her determination to live her life to the fullest couldn't withstand her heart's desire for Austin when she is with him. He just can't seem to understand how desperate she is to not live a life of regret. To not turn out like her mother.

Austin has always known that he and Carrie were meant for each other. They have the sort of love that lasts a lifetime. All he has to do is remind her of that, which is why he is dragging his brother and a bunch of Christmas trees into D.C., camping out in the vacant lot across from Carrie's apartment, and staying until he can convince her to come home with him. Because one thing he knows, Carrie isn't like his own mother, who walked away from her family without a backward glance and put a career first. She couldn't be. And this Christmas he'll finally convince her of that.

~*~

HelenKay Dimon is a new author for me, and that brings up one of the best things about

anthologies...exposure to authors you may not have read before. I loved her breezy, humor-rich writing style and the clever way it lightened the tone of some fairly serious relationship issues. Austin was a wickedly charming guy who was utterly clueless about Carrie's needs, but he sure did try hard. Carrie was equally lovable - if a bit too self-absorbed to the detriment of Austin's issues. I can't say much for their ability to communicate effectively, though.

Dimon managed to tell a lot of story in the space allowed. I especially enjoyed Austin's brother as a secondary character, and the backstory of Austin's issue with alcohol added some nice depth to his character and the overall romance arc. The entire novella had a very complete-story feel to it that is often lacking in stories of this length. I wasn't totally thrilled with the logistics that Austin and Carrie worked out at the end, though. It was a little too nebulous for my HEA-loving heart.

Overall this was a wonderful, fun, and funny novella with charming characters. It touched on enough serious issues to have weight and offered enough holiday-flavored romance to warm up the most Scrooged heart. It's definitely put me on the lookout for more stories by Dimon.

Mistletoe & Margaritas

by Shannon Stacey

~* 5 Stars *~

20,000 Words

When Claire Rutledge's husband died two years ago, the grief and guilt would have crippled her if it hadn't been for her husband's best friend, Justin McCormick...now her best friend. In the two years since, they have relied on each other, spent time together, worked together, crashed at each other's homes, doing everything two best friends do. Until Justin shows up in the last place Claire was expecting him...her dreams. The sort of dreams that she hasn't had since her husband died. Hot, sensual dreams that leave her wanting.

He can't do it anymore. Can't be with Claire, see her look at him as a trusted friend when he aches for her so badly, yearns for her so damn much. It's Justin's private shame, his deepest secret. He is in love with his best friend and has been from the moment he saw her...even before she'd gotten married and slipped beyond his reach forever. He is going to have to give her up, because the one thing he can't do is dishonor the memory of the man who trusted him to watch out for her.

If he can get through the holidays, he'll do the right thing and walk away. His resolution gets tested, though, the night of the Christmas party. The night his best friend and the woman he's loved for years looks at him across a crowded room with a glint in her eye that he recognizes for the frequency he's felt it within himself. It's desire. For him. Maybe this holiday will see all his Christmas wishes granted, after all. Maybe.

~*~

Neither the shorter length nor the less complex plot prevented this novella from being my favorite in the bunch. Not only is the friends-to-lovers theme my favorite of the romance tropes, but Stacey imbued this story with some very painful but emotionally honest moments that resonated with a level of realism I appreciated. Both Claire and Justin struck me as earnest and believable, and while their short journey didn't have room for much depth in plot, it packed a punch and carried me right along with the story.

This one made me feel good as I rooted for Claire to embrace her new leash on romantic life, as I watched Justin come to terms with the understanding that being with Claire doesn't make his guilt go away. Though, to be fair, I wanted to bop him on the head a bit for that. Still, I loved when Justin admitted the full scope of his feelings for Claire and let her know just how long he'd loved her. I melted a little at that. I even enjoyed the method Stacey used to get the two crazy kids together for their HEA. Just about everything in this short, sweet novella appealed.

Disclosure: An ARC of this book was provided to me by Carina Press via NetGalley. This rating, review, and all included thoughts and comments are my own.

~*~*~*~

Reviewed for One Good Book Deserves Another.

AnnaBanana says

This time next year by Alison Kent

On her way to Grandma's to spend what could be their last Christmas together Brenna ends up in a ditch before she can make it there. She's rescued by Dillon, a reclusive Doctor who is just home from Iraq, she ends up spending time in his snowed in cabin with him because they can't make it to her Grandma's house. Dillon is content with his lonely life, living with his memories of lost friends and soldiers until Brenna comes along and Brenna has her life all planned out, unsuspecting of the attraction she's going to feel towards Dillon. They can either continue their lonely lives or they can embrace the sizzling attraction and see where it takes them.

A Rare Gift by Jaci Burton

After a horrible marriage Wyatt has no desire to get involved with anyone, especially his ex's little sister but when Calliope asks him to be the one to add the addition onto her daycare center he just can't tell her no. He figures he'll get in there, get it planned out and let his men do the work but when he ends up being there every day he can't help but notice how beautiful Calliope has become since he last saw her. Calliope has always had a crush on Wyatt and she just can't believe her sister let him get away. So when the opportunity presents it's self she takes it and him and gets something amazing back. Can Wyatt get over his unfinished business with her sister and his ex or will it prevent him from a happy ending that he can have with Calliope if only he will let go.

It's Not Christmas Without You by HelenKay Dimon

Carrie left Austin and West Virginia to pursue her dream of working in a real museum after Austin made it clear he wouldn't support her. They had been together for years but it wasn't enough for her. Even so, after living in D.C. and working her dream job she misses Austin more than ever but she isn't willing to run home to him because it will prove him right and even with missing him, he isn't right. Austin has loved Carrie for a long time and he knows being with her is how he wants to spend his life, he just needs to convince her and bring her home. So he comes up with a plan to do that but it back fires on him and he realizes she was right and she deserves to be happy in the job she wants. Can they come to a common goal or will they forever live apart because she isn't willing to give up her job and he isn't willing to move to D.C. with her?

Mistletoe and Margaritas by Shannon Stacey

Claire still believes in love despite losing her husband to a tragic accident two years ago and she thinks she may be ready to start dating again...maybe. Justin was her husband's best friend and is now her best friend. He was there for her when she lost her husband and has continued to be there for her. Until recently she only saw him as a friend but thanks to hints from a friend and the sexy dreams she's been having she's starting to see there is much more to Justin than her friend. Justin has been in love with his best friend's wife since the moment he saw her but he learned to live with and to hide it. But after two years of being the best friend, watching Claire grieve and then find her way back to normal life he's learned it's not so easy to hide it

anymore. After a party they attended together they take that step past friendship but can they deal with it the next day. Can Claire love him as a man and not just a friend and can Justin get passed Claire being his best friends wife?

This is a great holiday read! As I've mentioned before Christmas books are my favorite, they help get me in the spirit of the season. This one was no different. All for stories were good classic romance. A little steamy, very sweet and full of holiday magic. This Time Next Year was good but not a favorite. I really like Jaci Burton's A Rare Gift. It was a very sweet read and it was a typical Burton story and since I like her books that's a good thing. I wasn't very fond of It's Not Christmas Without You by HelenKay Dimon. The whole story kind of annoyed me because I would never pick a job over my true love and I just could relate but that was just me. The last story, Mistletoe & Margaritas by Shannon Stacey was my favorite. Such a touching story of love and loss and a beautiful friendship with so much potential to become more. Over all this was a great read and I recommend it to all romance lovers! I give it 4.5 Stars!

Kristen says

3 1/2 to 4 stars for overall anthology.

This Time Next Year **3 to 3 1/2 stars**

Overall, I enjoyed this Christmas novella but felt there was too much plot for such a short story. Because of that, the ending felt rushed and somewhat unsatisfying.

A Rare Gift **3 1/2 to 4 stars**

I really enjoyed this Christmas novella. The heroine was simply fantastic and though the hero came across more like a cantankerous old fart than a torture hero, I did warm up to him by the end. This was an angsty but good read.

It's Not Christmas Without You **3 stars**

Overall, this was a cute, funny, and steamy novella that bordered on the trite. I liked it but didn't love it.

Mistletoe & Margaritas **3 to 3 1/2 stars**

Mistletoe and Margaritas is a sweet, slightly angsty and mildly steamy friends-to-lovers novella. I liked this short story but didn't love it. I felt it was too short for the context and the ending too rushed and abrupt. Still, it was a good holiday read.

UniquelyMoi ~ BlithelyBookish says

From the cover: A man gives the gift of trust and receives a second chance at love in return. A woman helps to heal the wounded heart of a soldier. A couple finds that true love knows no distance. And a young widow learns that there can be two great loves in a lifetime. Love, romance and passion come together in this collection of four seasonal shorts.

1. *This Time Next Year* by Alison Kent - 4 stars - This was just such a wonderful story about life, the choices we make, love and healing. Dillon is one of those heroes who I can never get enough of. He's tormented by things in his past, things that no one should have to deal with. Breena is a wonderful, giving heroine who has what it takes to help Dillon move forward, let go of the things he has no control over and open himself up to the possibility of love. 27,000 words

2. *A Rare Gift* by Jaci Burton - 3 stars - Jaci Burton is a gifted writer, and this started out being a great holiday tale, but ended up just being a frustrating story about two people who really had no business being in a relationship. Wyatt's stubbornness bordered on cruelty, and Calliope just kept going back for more when she should have kicked him to the curb. And unfortunately, the resolution needed so that they could be together just felt too rushed to make me believe that everything was going to be okay. As I said, Ms. Burton is a gifted writer and I'm sure if this had been a full length story, or even just a little longer than it was, she could have pulled it off. Unfortunately, this story just didn't have that 'feel good' Christmas magic that I look for in my holiday reads. 28,000 words

3. *It's Not Christmas Without You* by HelenKay Dimon - 4 stars – This is another author whose works I'd not yet had the pleasure of reading, but you can bet I'll be checking out her backlist, soon. This was a funny, sweet, romantic and steamy story about loving enough to let go. This one had me laughing one minute, crying the next and all the while knowing that *"If you love something set it free; if it returns it's yours forever, if not it was never meant to be."* 28,000 words

4. *Mistletoe and Margaritas* by Shannon Stacey - 5 stars - Wow! What a wonderful story!! I'm a huge Shannon Stacey fan and my love of her writing just keeps growing. This is an emotional 'best friends to lovers' story that had me in tears because, even though it's been years since the death of Claire's husband, who was also Justin's best friend, they have so much guilt about being able to move on and fall in love, especially with one another. *Mistletoe and Margaritas* has a perfectly magical *happily ever after*. 20,000 words

The bottom line - I know that if you add up the actual star ratings of each individual story, this collection comes out to a 4 star rating, but overall this anthology left me feeling so good, I'm giving it a rating of 5, anyway! This is one of the best Christmas anthologies I've read, written by four very talented and creative authors. Romantic, funny, and definitely steamy... if you're looking for some great stories to cuddle up with on a cold winter's night, look no further than this great collection!

This ebook was provided by netgalley.com in behalf of Carina Press.

Note: The stories in *Holiday Kisses* are also available for purchase separately, if that's more to your liking.

Melissa says

Shannon Stacey- Mistletoe & Margaritas

It's common knowledge that with novellas most people feel like there is a shortage character growth & that the story moved to fast and they often feel rushed. I definitely felt that with Mistletoes & Margaritas. I'm not saying it was bad, I just felt that this could have been a 5+ star with all the she-bang, if it were a full length novel.

Young widow Claire Rutledge and Justin McCormick have been friends for years. Justin has loved Claire

since he first saw her, but his best friend got to her first. Following Brendan's death Claire and Justin grew closer and helped each other through the pain of the tragic accident.

I can't really say too much without giving the whole story away, but I think it's definitely worth reading and that you will wish it were longer.

There is something about the way Shannon Stacey writes, that gets to me. Her writing style is easy to follow and her storylines have just enough humor to make you laugh out loud. Her characters are some of the best I've had the pleasure of reading about, and I can always expect to read a few lines that will make me get teary eyed and the ending will always leave a smile on my face.

4 stars

Jaci Burton- A Rare Gift

Jaci Burton is a well known author to me and one that I like quite a bit.

A Rare Gift features Wyatt Kent, (we met him in last year novella All She Wants For Christmas) as the brooding, bitter divorcee that mopes around and has nothing to do with the opposite sex.

Calliope Andrews is Wyatt's ex-wife's little sister. She's funny and sweet and is full of life, I liked her quite a bit.

The two enter a business agreement and soon the sparks start flying. Wyatt learns he needs to let go of the past and Calliope is right there not letting anything stop him.

I really like the beginning and middle part of this story, the end felt kind of rushed.

I'm really looking forward to next year's installment featuring Brody Kent. (I hope)

All in all A Rare Gift was a light, fun, flirty, novella to try out if you want to get a quick read in.

3 ½ stars

Helen Kay Dimon- It's Not Christmas Without You

Carrie Anders and Austin Thomas has had an on again off again relationship going on since high school.

When Carrie wants to move to the city a few hours from their home town, for a new job at a prestigious museum and Austin declines to follow, Carrie leaves him and head for DC.

This book, of course has a HEA, I just don't by it. Mainly because I have a hard time believing long distance relationships work (for long period of time.) Other than that it was a cute short read.

3 stars

Allison Kent- This Time Next Year

While on her way to visit her Gram, Brenna Keating takes a detour, well sorta, more of a ditch, when her car crashes. Being stuck there in the freezing cold Dillon Craig shows up on a horse to rescue the granddaughter of one of the ladies on the mountain he visits weekly.

This is my first read by Allison Kent, I like her writing style and I'm looking forward to reading more.

I liked This Time Next Year just fine, but I felt the ending was rushed. In fact, when I turned the page I wasn't expecting for it to end. So that was a little shocker.

3 ½ stars

*I read these novella's out-of-order, the correct order is Allison Kent, Jaci Burton, Helen Kay Dimon and Shannon Stacey.

I Received this ARC copy for an honest review via NetGalley.

Marlene says

Holiday Kisses from Carina Press is another book in their terrific Christmas anthologies. I say terrific because the formula they use is terrific. They publish the four stories together under one theme, and people have the choice to purchase all four together, or, they're available separately. This is a terrific solution to the "your mileage may vary" problem usually found in anthologies.

There's the obvious theme in this collection. Okay, there are two obvious themes. It's a romance anthology. And it's a collection of romances centered around the Christmas holidays. But I noticed that all the stories had the additional theme of second chances. In every story, either one of the couple is getting a second chance at life or love, or they are taking a second chance on their relationship. Or in one case, it may be a fifth, sixth or tenth chance. You'll see.

This Time Next Year by Alison Kent is the story of a woman with a plan for her life, and a man who has given up on all of his. Brenna Keating plans to follow in her family's footsteps. After one last Christmas with her grandmother in the North Carolina mountains, she's off to take her nursing skills to far-flung outposts, just as her grandmother did and just as her parents currently are. Instead, a blizzard wrecks her car, and she is snowbound for three days with Dillon Craig, an ex-Army doctor with PTSD who has practically become a hermit. Sharing the cabin forces Dillon to confront his self-imposed distance from the world, and his familiarity with Brenda from his conversations with her grandmother help him begin to break down the walls he has built between himself and others. The sexual chemistry between them is impossible to ignore, being as they are snowbound in a small cabin. But when the roads are clear, has Brenda build enough of a bridge for Dillon to take a second chance at living a full and real life?

Escape Rating A: There was a lot packed into this story. All the characters are multi-layered, including Brenda's grandmother. Brenda's family history and her need to establish herself also play a big part in this surprisingly meaty tale.

Jaci Burton's A Rare Gift is about a crazy idea that works. Calliope Andrews needs to build an addition onto her day care center. Of course, she wants to hire the best construction firm in town for the job. There's this one problem. The man who owns that firm is her ex-brother-in-law, Wyatt Kent. Not only was his divorce from her sister really nasty, but Calliope has had a crush on Wyatt since the first time he walked into her parents' house. But Calliope's not sixteen anymore, and she wants Wyatt for herself this time. All she has to do is get him to see that she's the right sister for him. And figure out a way to deal with family reunions with his hopefully once and future in-laws.

Escape Rating B+: This was just a fun story. Going after your ex-brother-in-law is a little odd, but it works. Calliope's maneuvering so that everyone gets closure and can move past the very icky past was a tad manipulative, but necessary in context. This one is just good fun.

It's Not Christmas Without You by HelenKay Dimon is about a young couple with very different dreams. Carrie Anders and Austin Thomas have gotten together and broken up over and over (and over) again. But this time Carrie thinks it's for good. She took a job at a big museum in Washington, D.C. because that's her dream. And Austin, well, he just never really listened when she talked about her dreams. He's always been sure that her dreams of arranging major museum exhibitions are something she'll outgrow. Where his dream of working at, and eventually taking over his family tree farm are what's really important. And Austin is certain they are meant to be together. So he rents the corner lot next to her apartment building in DC to sell Christmas Trees and brings a little bit of their West Virginia country to DC to convince her that she's meant to come home with him. But it takes a major event at her museum, one that she arranged, for him to finally start to listen.

Escape Rating C: This was the weakest story in the collection. Austin was too smug for too long for any woman with a spine, which Carrie has, to have forgiven him that easily. It just doesn't quite work.

Mistletoe and Margaritas by Shannon Stacey is a terrific "friends into lovers" story that happens to take place at Christmas. Claire Rutledge has been a widow for two years. She's held her life together with the help of her best friend, Justin McCormick. What Claire doesn't know is that Justin has loved her since the very first moment he saw her, but his best friend Brendan got there first, and married her. But for the last few months, Claire's been having some "extra-friendly" thoughts about Justin, not knowing that Justin would be more than eager to reciprocate. Until, after a holiday party where they both have just enough margaritas to let their drinks do the talking, they cross the boundary from friends to lovers, at least for one night. The question is, can they be both? And can they build something new and wonderful without Brendan's ghost getting in the way?

Escape Rating B+: Anyone who enjoys a good "friends into lovers" story will love this one.

I love this formula of Carina's, I hope they do this again next Christmas.

Tina "IRead2Escape" says

Holiday Kisses is a compilation of 4 wonderful stories. I have read a few anthologies over the last few weeks and I have to say this is one of the best I've read. Overall, I would give this a 4.5 rating. Below, I will review each book individually.

This Time Next Year by Alison Kent.

I really, really enjoyed this book! This Time Next Year is a short story, yet packed with so much. The time these 2 characters spent with each other never felt rushed or like, we as the readers, were shortchanged.

Brenna Keating finds herself in a ditch, during a blizzard, without much hope. How could this have happened? She planned so well. Following the weather report she left in plenty of time to make it to her grandmother's cabin in the mountains before the blizzard came through. Unfortunately, Mother Nature didn't watch the same report. This is so bad on so many levels. For one, it's possibly the last Christmas she will have with her Grandma since she will be going to another country to volunteer her nursing skills. Her Grandma isn't getting any younger. Who knows what could happen? Secondly, she is stranded in a blizzard and no options for escape. That is until Dillon rides up on his horse to save the day. He saves her life, takes her to his home to wait out the storm and makes her question her future.

Dillon Craig is getting through his life day by day. Still plagued by his memories and nightmares from his

time in Afghanistan, he just puts one foot in front of the other and plods along. As a doctor for the people who live on his mountain he is well known and liked. It's something to break up his day, even if it doesn't erase his torment. Bringing Brenna home may have been the biggest mistake he's ever made, but what choice did he have? He didn't expect her to work her way into his heart and to get passed every defense he had constructed. On top of it all, this relationship has a guaranteed expiration date. Brenna is only in the US for a few more days.

He wanted her. She wanted him. So what if the timing was all wrong and they'd have only this? It was more than the men he'd lost had been given.

If I had to pick one complaint about this book it would be that it's too darned short. I couldn't get enough of these characters and their story. Like I said, you never felt short changed, but I could have read about them forever.

A Rare Gift by Jaci Burton

This series just keeps getting better and better. A Rare Gift is the 2nd book in the Kent Brothers series and by far my favorite.

Wyatt Kent has turned surly and bitter since his divorce 2 years before. He's gone about his life and job in the family construction business. But, people tend to keep their distance when he's in a mood, which is all the time. Hired to build an addition at the local daycare is his worst nightmare come true. Not only is the daycare owned by his ex-wife's sister, but he is overwhelmingly attracted to her and can't seem to control himself at all.

Calliope Andrews always had a crush on her sister's boyfriend turned husband, not that it could have gone anywhere. She was the polar opposite of her sister. Where her sister was beautiful, Calliope was plain and geeky. Where her sister was thin with a great body, Calliope was on the chunky side. Where her sister was popular and always got what she set her sights on, Calliope was shy and stuck to books and herself. Now home from college and the owner of her very own daycare center Calliope has changed physically, but is still the sweet, lovable, loyal opposite to her sister. She's still in love with Wyatt and has to find a way to convince him that she isn't her sister; he needs to make peace with his past and trust Calliope to be a part of his future.

"I'm not good at this."

"This?"

"Relationships. Women. Dealing with them. I'll try to do better, but I'm probably not going to be good at it. You should know that going in, so you can change your mind if you want."

This series is a must read. It's short, sweet and soooo good!

It's Not Christmas Without You by HelenKay Dimon

I made the mistake of reading the 3rd book in this series before getting to book 1 and 2. I can say from personal experience that these books can be read independently and out of order without messing up the story. It's Not Christmas Without You is the first book of the Holloway series by HelenKay Dimon. It's a nice, simple, short, easy, romantic read. Don't go in expecting anything overly challenging or riveting and you'll be fine.

Carrie Anders left her small town and boyfriend for a big, fancy job in the city. She loves everything about it, but can't seem to get her mind off of the ex. If only they could have come to some sort of compromise, but

he just doesn't respect or recognize the importance of what she does. There is no way she will give up her life and job for a man. She's seen her mom do it and she shudders at the thought of 20 years down the road, sitting across the table from her husband and resenting him for all that she's lost.

Austin Thomas has decided to take action. Carrie isn't coming home for Christmas so he'll go to her. Taking some of the trees from the family tree farm he gets the necessary permits and sets up a Christmas tree sale right across the parking lot from Carrie's apartment. Hoping that Carrie will soon get this whole "important city job" out of her system and come home, he has decided to remind her who is home waiting for her. He loves her and she loves him. There is no reason for this separation and the constant break ups.

"The hammering you feel?" Right there, just inches apart, he placed her palm over his heart. "You do that to me."

I really enjoyed seeing Austin wake up and see what a chauvinist he was. I loved seeing how he stepped right up as soon as he realized it and I loved how Carrie and he worked through the obstacles that they were facing to find something that worked for the both of them.

Mistletoe and Margaritas by Shannon Stacey

This was a sweet little read by Shannon Stacey. As novellas tend to be, it was short and wrapped up quickly. But it didn't feel overly abrupt, which I sometimes think is a problem with short stories.

After losing her husband 2 years before to a car accident, Claire Rutledge thinks it is time to give herself another chance at love. The problem is the person who is stirring these emotions in her just happens to be her dead husband's best friend.

Justin McCormick has always been in love with Claire. He saw her first years before, but he would never have even thought about pursuing a relationship with Claire after his best friend fell for her. Now, that his friend is gone Justin finds himself falling back in love with Claire more and more everyday. He just has to find a way to deal with the guilt or walk away.

I actually downloaded this and listened to the audible version. The narrator, Macleod Andrews, was pretty good considering I don't usually do well with men reading romance novels. He struggled a bit with the female voices, but nothing too distracting.

You can find this review and others at <http://tinar1121.blogspot.com>

Francesca the Fierce (Under the Covers Book Blog) says

This review was posted at Under The Covers

Such an enjoyable Christmas anthology. All that snow and the inconveniences *ehem* it can cause when it leaves two people stranded or forced to share confined spaces together, maybe with a bed around...

This Time Next Year by Alison Kent - 3.5 Stars

Breana is heading to her grandmas' house to spend what will most likely be her last Christmas with her. After this she's going to Malawi for a trip as a peace corp nurse basically and she probably won't come back next year for Christmas and her grandma might not last much longer. But Mother Nature has different plans for her and on her way there she gets hit with a snowstorm and slides off the road, crashes her car and gets

almost snowed in. In comes Dillon to the rescue. He's the "mountain doctor" (as well as the mountain's most eligible bachelor) and he knows Breena's grandma is expecting her so he was on the look out and rescues her from freezing to death. He's got skeletons in his closet but with Breena he manages to open up and wish for things that he never thought he could have. But is she the woman to put those ghosts to rest?

A Rare Gift by Jaci Burton - 4.5 Stars

This story is the reason why I bought this anthology. Yes I know I could've bought just this story, but last year I enjoyed all four novellas in the Christmas anthology that the Kent Brothers # 1 was in sooooo here I am. The Kent brothers are hot general contractors. You gotta love a man that works with his hands *waggle seybrows*. Much in the same way as his brother in book 1, Wyatt was previously married. But in his case he married the hot popular woman that everyone wanted. And he was the hot young stud all the girls wanted to have. He didn't know that's why she married him and they ended up going through a bad divorce. And now he has to do a job for her little sister. Calliope was a bit chunkier, with frizzy, curly hair from what he remembered; so he was not expecting the knockout that greeted him. And she is nothing like her sister. She's sweet and caring, she runs a childcare business, she's good with kids, people love her. And even though she's much younger than him and he feels he's broken he can't help but to be extremely attracted to her. Like watch-out-the-room-is-on-fire attracted to her. I have a special place in my heart for the Kent brothers so I LOVED this story and can't wait for the next one to fall! But this one.... droolworthy!

It's Not Christmas Without You by HelenKay Dimon - 3 Stars

My least favorite of the anthology but still sweet and entertaining. Carrie and Austin are high school sweethearts. They grew up in West Virginia in a small town so when Carrie wanted to pursue her dreams of working at a prestigious museum and move to the big city. Austin didn't want to relocate thinking her place was there with him. So they broke up. And Carrie loves him too much to go back home for Christmas, see him, and fall back into bed with him so she decides to stay in the city for the Holidays. But Austin thinks its time she sees where she belongs and opens up a Christmas tree lot outside of her apartment building in the hopes to win her back and bring her back home with him. I didn't like Austin's attitude toward Carrie's work, which was her problem with him. I thought he was a bit of a self-centered ass and it was all about him at the end of the day. Until at the end of the story the lightbulb goes on. I still didn't feel how they could make things work.

Mistletoe and Margaritas by Shannon Stacey - 4.5 Stars

So so cute. Justin has been in love with Claire for over 7 years. But his best friend was the one who made the move first and married her. And two years ago he died in an accident. After that, Justin has been there for Claire, helping her get through it and being her best friend. But it's so hard to love and lust and have to hide how he really feels. I thought they were perfect together, I just didn't understand how he wanted her so bad and then he's the one that says he can't do it because of his best friend? And she didn't notice how hot he was until her friend points that out to her? Other than those minor issues for me I enjoyed the story a lot. It was very cute and sweet and sexy.

Lynsey says

Absolutely wonderful feel good Christmas stories and I LOVED THEM! All stories were either great or nearly great, which hardly ever happens!

This Time Next Year - Alison Kent, 4.5 stars

A really beautiful story and I loved the ending. Not what I expected to happen which made it a refreshing surprise.

A Rare Gift - Jaci Burton, 5 stars

This was my absolute fav and I really REALLY loved it. This story is worth the money alone!!

It's Not Christmas Without You - HelenKay Dimon, 4 stars

This is actually my least fav because lack-of-communication stories just don't really work for me. This one in particular I found a little unfeasible when the couple had known each other for so long. Still, most of the story was very heartfelt and the ending was incredibly romantic.

Mistletoe and Margaritas - Shannon Stacey, 4.5 stars

I really loved this! I adore reading about a Widow finding love again.
