



*Dora  
Hiers*

*Flirting  
with  
Mistletoe*

# Flirting with Mistletoe

Dora Hiers

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## **Flirting with Mistletoe**

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## *Dedication*

To Jesus. It's all for You, Lord. Thank You for the ultimate gift, no matter what time of year!



## *Praise*

### *Christmas in the Rink*

"Tis the season for love, faith, and joy, and what better way to experience them than by reading this book!" ~Must Love to Read, reviewer on Amazon

"If I could have given 10 stars I would have!!!!"  
~Kindle Customer, reviewer on Amazon

"Heartwarming story of forgiveness and second chances and the perfect read for the Christmas season."  
~Ann E, reviewer on Amazon

### *Rori's Healing*

"The author has woven a story of faith and romance into a delightful book without being preachy."  
~Floryie, Blogger, The Travelogue of a Book Addict

"I was intrigued by this story from the beginning; a woman who works at a llama sanctuary." ~Lauren, Blogger, Romance Novel Giveaways

"I read through this book quickly and had small tantrums in my head when I had to put it down."  
~Aimee, Blogger, Getting Your Read On





*“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith— and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.” ~Ephesians 2:8-9 NIV*

# 1

The woman had a death wish.

Or maybe it was just him she was trying to kill.

Brody Rockford slowed the work truck and leaned forward to scrub a sleeve against the frigid windshield, widening the hole cleared by the defroster.

That was her car! He glared at the lime-green compact on the side of the road, the wipers of the truck barely keeping pace with the snow flurries that hurled sideways against the glass, a freak storm that had popped up with unexpected fury.

He huffed and mashed the brake, babying the steering wheel until the heavy vehicle transitioned to the shoulder of the road. The tires crunched through the snow, finally grinding to a stop just behind her car. He radioed his location and forced himself to stay in the cab and assess the situation, even though his limbs and his heart prompted him to get moving.

The heater blasted warm air against his cheeks, fueling his temper, as he scanned the vicinity. Hard to do with the blinding snow, but finally he made out a

snatch of red, dangling from a tree.

Why should that surprise him? It wasn't the first time and he knew it wouldn't be the last.

Maybe he should hit the switch for the siren or the lights and scare a few years off her life like she always managed to do to him. He didn't bother to squelch the evil smirk from sliding across his face. Nah. He shook his head. He'd never hear the end of it from his parents.

Or hers.

But the smile slipped when Tori's ponytail flopped upside down and the blonde bunch tangled in the bare branches of the tree she'd attached herself to, two legs and one arm draped around a mere stick, that blasted camera stuck to her face—

Time to call her fun to an end. He had two more gates to close after this one, and he didn't want anyone getting hurt because of Tori's callous disregard for time or, in this case, weather.

He shoved the door open, the frigid air cooling his skin but not his irritation. His boots clomped through a good five inches of snow as he stomped to the cluster of trees where his childhood neighbor and high school nemesis dangled.

*Click. Click. Click.* Her finger was trigger happy with no regard for her safety or anyone else's, just like always.

He should just slide the barricade across the road and leave her there until she called for help, but then he'd be the one called upon to rescue her. Neither his parents nor hers would forgive him if she got hurt on his watch. And he'd lose his job.

OK, nemesis might be too strong of a word to describe her, but Tori Stremme had been a thorn in his

side since they toddled around in diapers and their parents used to shove them into the same playpen with the words, "You two play nicely. One day you'll be married." Ha! What were they thinking?

A jerky movement near the base of the trees snagged his attention. A bear? He slowed his pace, his hand hovering around the weapon attached to his belt.

Keeping Tori in his periphery, satisfied that the camera was still busily clicking, he darted his gaze to the ground, and...no danger. Unless he allowed Tori to land on her backside and smoosh the playful pup frolicking in the snow, a toy clamped in its jowls.

He scrubbed a palm across the stubble lining his jaw. Hmm. Maybe that wasn't such a bad idea. It would teach her a valuable life lesson without anybody getting really hurt.

But then the puppy jumped and tumbled, rolling in the snow to land in front of his boots. The pup's oversized ears flopped over most of the wrinkled face. Long legs jumbled together in an awkward pretzel-like position until they finally managed to haul the torso up, then the pup leaned down to sniff his leather boots.

He squatted and held out his hand, which was met with a cold snout, and then a wet tongue. Smiling, he studied the canine as he ran a hand along the short hair, cold and wet from playing in the snow.

A Great Dane? Did Tori realize these puppies grew into giants? She'd have to buy a bigger car, for sure, and move into a much larger place.

He stifled a chuckle and glanced back up. Was it his imagination or had Tori's grip slackened? The camera had gone silent. The only sound echoing in the swirl of wind and snow was the puppy's labored breath and Tori's arm slapping around the branch.

He stretched to his full height. He cleared his throat, but that sound got carried off with a strong gust. His traitorous legs slogged closer, so that he was almost directly underneath, the pup nipping at his heels. "Need some help?" He didn't bother hiding his amusement.

Her arm stopped flailing and her body went rigid until her head whipped around to shoot him a startled glare, those honey colored brows narrowing into a dangerous slant. A snowflake slammed into her cheek, and eyelids shuttered over dazzling blue eyes. She was always drop-dead gorgeous when she was angry.

He'd never admit that, especially not to her.

With slow precision for someone so precariously attached to a tree, she opened her eyes. "Help. Yes. That would be *nice*."

"Nice isn't in my vocabulary." At least, not where she was concerned.

"No need to remind me of that," she huffed, her arm back to slapping the branch.

He crossed his arms, rather liking her predicament. This was better than some of the others he'd found her in. "Sarcasm, Tori? I would think that right now you'd be sugary sweet."

She rolled her eyes. Was she counting to ten? She unwrapped the camera strap and dangled it in front of his face. "If you won't rescue me, would you at least save my camera?"

He took it from her and glanced around, looking for a place to set it down.

"Uh oh!" Apprehension punctuated Tori's voice along with a distinct crack.

He looked back up just as the tree branch snapped.

"Ohhhh!" Tori's head was cocked sideways,

concern tightening her lips, fear scrunching her cheeks, one arm extended to shield her fall.

Worry coiled and sprang up from his gut. He hurled the camera, hoping the strap looped over a straggly branch, took a giant step—

She landed on his chest and knocked him off balance.

He reached out, but there was nothing to grab hold of except her waist as they tumbled backward. His rump hit the ground first, the snow cushioning their fall.

*Ooomph!* Tori's weight slammed into his chest, and when he sucked in a breath, all he inhaled was her scent, an alluring combination of cool winter, roses, and cloves.

Somehow, her arms ended up clinging to his neck, her soft curves snuggling against his frame perfectly.

Desire welled up like an unexpected, unwelcome guest.

"Mistletoe!" She squirmed, and he took an elbow to the gut as she unlatched a hand to shoo the jumping pup away, who'd apparently decided her mistress was in her play yard.

The dog alternated between dancing and licking Tori's cheek.

She struggled to get up, planting a palm against his chest and jabbing another elbow to his ribs before she finally disengaged and stood, brushing snow from her red corduroy pants, her accusing eyes rolling over him, her lips quivering, as if he'd been the one to set her fall in motion.

Well, he had considered it. His gaze skimmed those incredibly long legs until his short puffs of breath fogged his view, his reprimand dying on silent, dry

lips. A fat flake pelted his cheek and puddled into his lashes. He blinked and took in a long drag of frigid air.

What just happened there? This type of physical reaction to Tori didn't compute. Yeah, they'd tried dating their senior year in high school, but it'd been mostly to get their parents off their backs. He'd been turned off by her missed dates and competitive spirit, and besides, she'd been all legs and braces back then.

Not soft curves and nice smells or sweet smiles. But she generally reserved those for everybody else.

Finished brushing off the snow, she untangled her camera strap from the slender branch and draped it over her neck, fisted hands against those slim hips, and glared down at him. "That was not the kind of help I was referring to, Brody Rockford."

No sweet smile for him. There. That was better. Now they were back to firm footing. Well, she was, anyways.

His hand slid through the pocket of snow to the ice sheeted below, reminding him of why he'd stopped. "Maybe not, but I was planning—"

A blur of charcoal flashed in front of him and something heavy thudded against his chest, flinging him backwards again. *Ooomph!* A tongue slathered his cheek. Repeatedly.

Between slitted eyelids and blinding snowflakes, he could make out Tori with that blasted camera in front of her face again. Her muffled giggle floated to him on a stiff breeze.

"Get him off of me!" he growled.

*Click. Click. Click.*

"When I get a hold of you, that camera—"

"Mistletoe's a her."

"I don't care if she's a—"

Tires squealed.

He didn't have to look in that direction to know that the vehicle rounded the curve in the road too fast, especially for these hazardous conditions. He should've already had the road closed off.

"Oh!" Concern threaded Tori's voice, and her head slanted towards the road.

Cradling the dog against his side under one arm like he would a football, he vaulted off the ground and practically shoved Mistletoe into Tori's waiting arms, her worried frown as she stared at the road scaring him just a little. "You need to go. I'll be closing down the road before—"

Rubber crunched through snow, crackling ice as the car careened onto the shoulder, aiming sideways for some tall pines a few yards from them. Then, metal scraped against wood.

*Someone gets hurt.* Adrenaline set his boots in motion. He keyed his radio, his voice terse but calm as he called it in, putting dispatch on standby for an ambulance. He forced his legs to halt and angled over a shoulder. "Tori, I'll—"

"Go. I'll be all right." She waved him on.

The image of her standing there, concern darkening her face, her hands rubbing her upper arms in distress, the playful canine now sitting quietly next to her boots, settled deep in his gut.

That car could've crashed into her and the dog.

Gratitude welled up. As much as they bickered, he surely didn't want anything like that to happen to her. *Thank You, Lord, for sparing her.*

~\*~

Tori Stremme watched Brody's boots slog through the snow to reach the mangled car, steam now rolling out from under the hood.

He jerked the door open and spoke to the driver, nodding.

Was it her imagination or did his spine seem to lose some of its rigidity?

The car slammed into the trees not far from Brody's truck. What if he'd been in it? A chill burrowed its way under her jacket. Closing her eyes against the tremor that rocked her frame, she locked arms around her waist, as if that could protect her from losing Brody. As if he were hers to begin with, but that's how she thought of him. Not like he'd ever return that sentiment, and he'd probably set her straight if he knew.

Her eyelids popped open and her scoff was lost in a gust of wind. When had the temperature dropped? It must have plummeted at least thirty degrees since she'd arrived. Maybe the blanket that she always carried in the trunk would help the person in the car.

"Come, Mistletoe." She hit the fob to open the trunk and reached in for the blanket, cool but soft, and opened the door for Mistletoe to hop in the back seat. "Stay here, sweetie. You'll be out of the way in case the ambulance comes." She set a container filled with water on the back floor and the stuffed reindeer under Mistletoe's chin. "I'll be back. Be a good girl."

Yeah, like that would happen. Hopefully, she wouldn't come back to find teeth marks in the leather seats. She hustled over to the damaged car, the passenger side nestled snug against a couple of pines.

"—my baby!" A woman hunched over the steering wheel, her voice strained and anxious, curls springing

from her coal black hair.

“How far along are you?”

“Seven months.”

Dina Shibly from church? Had to be.

The park was mostly vacant of sightseers this time of year, and none of the regulars usually ventured out this far when heavy snow was predicted.

Unlike her. She'd photographed some of her best shots during or after snowstorms. And there was always the chance that she'd catch Brody on his way home from work. Besides, she didn't know of any other pregnant women with black curly hair in small town Steepleview, Tennessee.

“OK. Just sit tight right where you are. The EMTs are on their way. We'll have them check you and the baby, just to be safe.”

A giant flake landed on her nose and she rubbed it away with her sleeve. She edged next to Brody and touched his arm. “Dina?”

He nodded, his hand on the door frame, his bulk shielding Dina from the snowfall.

“Will this help?” She held up the blanket.

“Yeah. Thanks.” His normally crystalline blue eyes warmed to a peculiar shade of silver. A reflection from the tormented grey sky? Or had she finally done something right for a change?

She tore her gaze away to check on Dina. “Dina, hey, it's Tori. You hanging in there?”

Dina's head came up. Tears trickled down her cheeks, leaving a mascara trail. “I'm worried about the baby.”

“Of course you are.” Tori nudged Brody back with a gentle tug at his upper arm, biting back the bittersweet emotions that bombarded her from

touching him again. Now wasn't the time or place to dwell on what all that meant.

She tucked the blanket around Dina's belly and legs, and then crouched down to peer at her friend.

Dina had joined their singles class a few months ago, newly pregnant and distraught over her breakup with the baby's father.

Tori took Dina's hand and warmed it in hers.

A siren pulsed through the whirl of the wind. The ambulance couldn't be far.

"I was running late for work today and decided to take the shortcut. I've missed so much work already from being sick, but I never meant to hurt my baby," the pregnant woman wailed, a fresh wave of sobs tightening her belly. "Oh!" Dina's fingers gripped hers, squeezing hard enough that tears welled up in her eyes.

"Contractions?" Brody leaned in to ask, his breath warming Tori's neck, his intoxicating scent of woods and spice drifting into her space.

She steeled her spine, fighting the desire to lean into him, but that was hard to do in a crouching position, so she held her breath.

"This...is...my first. I...don't know," Dina finally managed to say through gritted teeth.

A siren blasted three short times, close, and Brody stretched back up to his full, six-foot plus height.

Finally, Tori could breathe in something besides his all-too-male scent. *Thank You, Lord!*

"You're all right, Dina. Take a deep breath. Please don't worry. That'll just stress your sweet little guy."

Dina did as she asked, her chest rising and falling.

"I'll check in on you at the hospital, OK?"

Dina nodded, fear making her dark eyes seem as

wide as the sausage patties Tori had eaten for breakfast.

She patted Dina's leg and stepped away from the car so the EMTs could get in and work on her friend.

Brody had his leg hiked up on his truck bumper, talking on the radio. She joined him, waiting until he finished his conversation with the dispatcher, requesting a wrecker.

"Do you think she'll have the baby tonight?"

He sighed, dropped his boot back to the ground and stuffed his hands in his pockets. When he met her gaze, his expression reflected her worry. "Hope and pray not."

"Yeah, me, too." She appreciated that Brody was open and unashamed of his faith, unlike other guys she'd dated.

He crossed arms, the bulges of his biceps showing through his jacket sleeves, and settled his rump against the truck's hood, showing off sculpted abs and incredibly long legs.

Her gaze traveled the length of him, then landed back on his stubbled jaw, firm and sturdy, just like the rest of him. His faith wasn't the only thing she appreciated.

"I'll be closing the gate as soon as the rescue truck leaves. Need some help packing up your stuff?" he asked, kindness glimmering from his eyes.

What was up with that? Kindness and Brody just didn't compute. At least, not with her.

"Oh! My camera!" She bolted, slogging through the snow to where she'd been perched in the tree, dollar signs and snowflakes clouding her path. Even though the digital camera was dubbed water and freeze proof, by now, the wet snow likely would've

ruined it. It wasn't her most expensive camera, but she'd have to shell out a few hundred to replace it.

Boots crunched behind her, keeping pace and then forging ahead. Brody snatched something off of a tree limb and held it up to inspect. "Appears to have survived you throwing yourself at me."

"Throwing myself at you?" she shrieked, skidding to a stop, barely missing the wall that was his massive chest. "You left me hanging!"

"I offered to help." His lips had the audacity to curve up on the edges.

"That's your idea of help? Catching me when I fall?"

He flicked his head sideways, his brows quirked. "You need somebody to pick up the pieces."

"What?" She scoffed and her jaw disengaged, leaving her mouth wide open. A fat flake melted on her tongue. "I may not be the most graceful of women, but I certainly don't need *you* to rescue me! I've made it this far—"

"Because of me." His lips parted to reveal teeth his parents had paid big bucks for.

"You!" She plucked the camera strap from his fingers and pivoted, but her boot slipped out from underneath her. Her arms flailed, spinning in circles without catching anything. The camera slapped her cheek. She'd sport a bruise on her face and her rump, but she could do nothing to break the fall.

An arm slid under each of hers, saving her from more humiliation. He leaned close, the cool air puffing his cinnamon scented breath to tickle her ear. "That's right. I'm your knight in shining armor." He chuckled and lifted her upright.

"Knight in shining armor? More like a—"

“Don’t say it,” he warned, with more than a bit of humor lacing his voice.

Now that she was back on her feet, she jerked away from his hold and took off for her car.

Three short siren blasts startled her as the rescue truck passed, the driver saluting Brody.

She almost lost her footing. Again.

The wind blew his chuckle her way. “Think you can make it home all right?”

She acted as if she didn’t hear him, stalked to her car, and jerked the door open, practically diving inside for refuge. She might not have hurt herself falling on the snow, but she’d fallen for Brody Rockford hard a long time ago, and there was no prescription for a broken heart.

Mistletoe poked her snout through the opening from the back seat and nuzzled Tori’s arm.

She rubbed the soft fur along the dog’s head, disappointment slinking into her belly as the sun disappeared beyond the mountain. But that was nothing new around Brody. She’d been fighting this battle since—well, as long as she could remember. He didn’t like her and he probably never would, so why did she always feel the need to prove something to him? It didn’t matter how much she loved him, she couldn’t change who she was.