

# THE CHRISTMAS UNICORN



A Pride and Prejudice Variation Christmas Short Story

SUMMER HANFORD



# DEAR READER



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With special thanks to Doris and Linda.

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1. [https://summerhanford.com/?page\\_id=2594](https://summerhanford.com/?page_id=2594)

# Chapter One



*Early September, Hertfordshire, 1812, Shortly After Miss Lydia Bennet  
Wed*

Miss Kitty Bennet sat bolt upright in bed, screaming, a hand clutched to her chest. In the wake of her cry, footfalls clattered down the hallway without. Heart hammering, Kitty peered about in the darkness.

Where was she?

Reaching out, she felt the sloped ceiling to her left, then a gaping hole where a gable cut through the truncated wall and the roof alike. Outside, beyond the grasping claws that raked the window, a few distant stars gleamed.

No, not claws, she realized as her bedchamber door burst open and candlelight spilled in. Tree limbs. The tree at the north end of the house. She was in Longbourn's guest room, across the hall from Mary's room.

The same room Kitty had been put in when Lydia was born, sixteen years ago. Kitty hated this room.

"Kitty?" her sister Elizabeth's voice asked.

Kitty blinked into the light of several candles. Her eyes trying to adjust, she made out Elizabeth, their sister Jane, and both Lydia and her new husband, Mr. Wickham. The latter looked her over with one eyebrow cocked. Kitty yanked the blankets up to her chin.

"Are you well?" Jane asked from where they all clustered in the doorway to the guest room.

Rather, Kitty's room, by dint of the larger chamber she once shared with Lydia being designated for visitors. Now that one of her daughters was married, Mrs. Bennet said they must have the larger room for guests so the Wickhams could stay whenever they liked.

Kitty opened her mouth. No words came out. Her heart still pounded. Her mind might realize that the ‘claws’ raking at her window, trying to get in, were tree branches, but her body still did not.

“What was that racket?” Mrs. Bennet’s voice called. “What is everyone doing in the hallway?”

“Kitty suffered a night terror,” Lydia said over her shoulder.

“Kitty is too old for night terrors, and we do not socialize in the hallways in our nightclothes in this house,” Mrs. Bennet declared. “To your rooms, girls. Oh, ah, and you as well, Mr. Wickham.”

“You do not need to order us, Mama,” Lydia said, grasping her husband’s arm and yanking him away. “George and I are very pleased to be in our bed together. Aren’t we, George?”

“Certainly, my pet.”

Kitty hated how smug they both sounded.

They disappeared from sight down the hall, but not quickly enough that Lydia’s, “Kitty is such a child,” didn’t reach Kitty’s ears.

“You will be well?” Jane asked, still in the doorway, while Elizabeth looked down the hall with a frown.

Kitty nodded. “I am sorry for waking you.”

Out of sight, a door closed.

Elizabeth turned back. “It is not as if you woke us on purpose.”

“Jane, Elizabeth,” Mrs. Bennet’s voice snapped.

With final sympathetic looks for Kitty, Jane and Elizabeth retreated. More doors closed. A single light gleamed in the hallway. Candle in hand, Mary, who Kitty had not even realized was there, came forward. Apparently, Mrs. Bennet did not care if her middle daughter returned to her bedchamber or not.

“You have never been able to sleep in this room,” Mary said, coming to Kitty’s bedside.

Kitty sighed. “It is the sloped ceiling, and that tree out there. I cannot really remember when I was two and they put me in here, but I remember horrible yellow eyes staring at me from outside the window.”

That was what she'd been dreaming about. Yellow eyes, and claws raking at the window.

"Yes. A family of owls sometimes lives there. I quite like them."

"Owls?" Kitty repeated, blinking.

"I told you they were owls when we were little, but you would not believe me."

"I do not recall," Kitty admitted. "I do know, because Mama used to go on about it, that even though I was only two, I would always end up back in the larger room with Lydia, until Mama decided I could stay there."

"You do not remember?" Mary reiterated, sounding surprised.

Kitty shook her head. "I was two," she emphasized. Lydia always claimed to remember everything from the moment she was born, which Kitty did not believe, but Kitty could conjure little from before her fourth birthday.

Mary frowned. "I used to take you. That is how you got into Lydia's room with her."

"You did?" Kitty sought back, but simply couldn't remember. "You never said."

Mary shrugged. "If Mama knew that I put you in there, she never would have let you stay, and you would have kept crying all night, keeping me awake."

"Oh." Kitty did not know what to say to that. Mary had helped her, but only so she could sleep well.

"And you were upsetting the owls."

And, apparently, for the owls, but not for Kitty's sake. "Well, ah, I will try not to wake you, or everyone else, again," she mumbled. Her gaze shifted to the window where the claws— No, tree limbs, rattled against the glass.

"I used to tell you stories to help you fall asleep," Mary said abruptly. "Lydia as well, so she would not wake Mama after we woke her, bringing you in. You truly do not recall?"

Kitty shook her head.

"Your favorite was *The Christmas Unicorn*."

"Christmas Unicorn?" Kitty giggled. "Why would there be a unicorn at Christmas?"

Mary shook her head. "The unicorn appears with the first full moon of autumn. If you see it, you make a wish that comes true on Christmas. You could wish to always sleep well from then on."

Kitty gasped as memories of their childhood diversion returned to her. "Lydia and I used to play unicorn! We would sneak out to the garden and sit under the apple trees and wait for the unicorn."

"I know."

"But if you told us that story, why did you not join us?" Kitty asked, frowning.

"You never invited me." With that, Mary turned away. "Rest well," she said as she left Kitty's room, closing the door.

Kitty stared after her middle sister in surprise. Mary was correct. They had never once invited her.

## Chapter Two



Kitty rose the next morning miserable and exhausted. She turned to tug her sheets into some semblance of order, and promptly banged her head on the sloped ceiling. She hated this room.

The truth was, Kitty hated sleeping alone. She knew it was foolish to be afraid of the dark, doubly so at eighteen, and every day she scoffed at her fears and felt certain they were gone. But then night came. Without Lydia's reassuring chatter and the way she snored like their mama, Kitty felt so alone.

At least when Lydia was in Brighton, Kitty had the comfort of their familiar shared room. Maybe after the Wickhams left, Kitty could sneak back into the room she and Lydia used to share and sleep there without Mama knowing, but that wouldn't be for days yet. Until then, how was she meant to sleep?

It did not help that they were nearly to the new moon as well. At night, almost no light came in the gable window. When the little room descended into deep darkness, anything could be hiding in the shadows.

Her room, like Mary's across the hall, didn't have a fireplace, so she hadn't even banked embers to alleviate the darkness. Kitty could keep a candle burning, but that was dangerous and expensive, and Mama would notice if she took too many.

A soft knock sounded. "Kitty?" Mary's voice called.

Still in her nightclothes, Kitty plopped down to sit on the edge of her bed. "Come in."

Mary pushed the door open, then looked her up and down. "You look tired."

Kitty sighed. "I am tired."

Mary pulled something from behind her back. A rolled sheaf of papers. "I brought you this. Maybe it will help." She proffered the pages to Kitty.

Accepting them, Kitty asked, "What is it?"

"It is the story I used to tell you and Lydia, about the Christmas Unicorn. I wrote it down for you, when we were little, but then Mama decided you should stay in that room with Lydia." Mary shrugged. "When that happened, you two did not need me anymore."

Kitty looked down at the crumpled pile of papers. In a childish script the words, *The Christmas Unicorn*, were written upon the first page. When she lifted that, there was a very bad attempt at drawing what might have been a unicorn.

Looking up, stunned, Kitty asked, "You made this for us?"

Mary reached for the pages. "It is foolish, I know. I should have burned it years ago."

Kitty yanked the pages out of reach. "No, I want to read it." She swallowed, looking down in shame. "I could not sleep all night. I—I am afraid of the dark."

Mary studied her for a long moment. "When the moon is fuller it will shine right in, and it will not be dark at all. You will like that."

Kitty offered a wan smile. "The new moon is not until Saturday." She struggled for a lighter tone. "Which I imagine means that the first full moon of autumn will be here soon."

Mary shook her head. "The next full moon is just before the equinox. The first full moon of autumn will not be until late in October."

Kitty wagged the pages. "Then I have plenty of time to read up on how to win a wish from the Christmas Unicorn."

That drew a smile from Mary.

"I am sorry that Lydia and I never invited you to play unicorns."

Mary looked away, shrugging as if she didn't care, but her smile disappeared.



"I will be ready to go down for breakfast soon," Kitty said, standing. "Will you dine with me?"

Mary nodded. "I am in no great hurry, although I do wish to break my fast before Lydia and Mr. Wickham do."

"They will not be up for hours," Kitty said. "I will be only a moment."

Mary nodded again. "I will be in my room."

Her sister left and Kitty tucked the rumpled pages under her pillow. She would read them later and maybe, as when she was little, the story of the Christmas Unicorn would help her to sleep.

## Chapter Three



Kitty woke gasping in fright, but managed not to scream.

She sat up and lit her candle, her heart thrashing and sweat standing out on her forehead. She needed to hear a reassuring voice, like when her nightmares used to half-wake Lydia and her sister would order her to be quiet. Then she would be able to sleep again. Slipping from her bed, Kitty put on her robe and took up the candle.

Cracking her door open slowly to avoid any loud creaks, she stepped into the hallway, then tiptoed to her old room. Perhaps she could draw Lydia out without Mr. Wickham.

Giggling reached Kitty. Her sister giggling with Mr. Wickham. Kitty inched back from the door.

Turning to the opposite side of the hallway, she crept across to Jane and Elizabeth's shared room. Inside, Kitty could hear the low voices of her eldest sisters exchanging confidences. She could not make out the words, but Kitty knew she would not be welcome. Worse, learning that she feared the dark would only reaffirm their opinion of her. To Jane and Elizabeth, Kitty would always be their silly younger sister, and now she did not even have Lydia to be silly with.

With a sigh, Kitty went back down the hall. Her gaze settled on the door to Mary's room, but she shook her head. She and Mary's breakfast had been convivial, but their conversation stilted. Awkward, even. Kitty did not know if they were destined to ever truly be friends.

Deciding she was more afraid of being mocked by her sisters than of the dark, Kitty squared her shoulders and marched back into her room. With a grimace for the cold, dark, empty chamber, she climbed back into bed.

Something rustled under her pillow, reminding Kitty of the sheaf of papers Mary had given her that morning. As she had yet to extinguish the candle, Kitty pulled the unicorn story free and opened to the first page, where Mary's childish script scrawled, '*Once upon a time...*'

Kitty settled back in bed to read about how a virtuous young woman could, by the light of the first autumnal moon, fall asleep under an apple tree to summon the Christmas Unicorn. It was not a long story, and once it was finished, a bemused smile upon her lips, Kitty put out her candle and drifted into sleep.

## Chapter Four



Kitty woke refreshed, and relieved to have slept through the remainder of the night. She realized it was early for her to be awake, but she rose and dressed regardless. Maybe Mary would be breakfasting now. Even if it made Kitty seem silly, she would tell her sister how much the unicorn story had helped.

Once dressed, Kitty slipped down the hallway to the front stairs. She did her best to be quiet, hoping she and Mary could dine alone as they had the morning before. Papa, Jane, and Elizabeth always breakfasted very early. Mama, the Wickhams, and Kitty usually dined late, and in between, as with everything at Longbourn, was Mary. Given the hour, Kitty hoped she could still meet Mary in the in between time, far more likely if she did not accidentally wake the Wickhams or her mother.

As she tiptoed down the stairs, movement caught Kitty's eye and she halted. Dipping down to peer through the railing, she sighted Mary slipping a missive into the pile of outgoing letters. Kitty frowned. With all of their sisters at home, the only person Mary could be writing to was their Aunt Gardiner, but why would that necessitate sneaking the letter into the pile rather than placing it on top?

Kitty waited until Mary walked away in the direction of the breakfast parlor, then resumed her descent. With a quick glance up and down the hall to assure her that no one was looking, Kitty rifled through the letters. She soon found one in Mary's hand, addressed to a shop in London.

Kitty's shoulders relaxed. Mary was writing to a shop. Likely, she sought more sheet music, and did not want another lecture from Mrs. Bennet on how she chose to spend her pin money. Kitty stifled a snort,

uncertain what she'd been thinking. The notion that Mary, of all of them, would do anything untoward was ridiculous.

Kitty slid the letter back into the neat pile and went down the hallway to join Mary for breakfast.

## Chapter Five



After that, Kitty took to reading *The Christmas Unicorn* every night before bed, and again if she woke up afraid. By the time the Wickhams departed on the tenth of September, Kitty no longer felt bereft of rest. She had Mary to thank for that, and she told her sister so. It was due to Mary that Kitty wouldn't need to skulk about at night, sneaking into her old room.

Not that Mama would have noticed where Kitty chose to sleep, even if she attempted to sleep on the moon. Rumor had Mr. Bingley, a wealthy gentleman who had shown marked interest in Jane the autumn before, returning to Netherfield Park soon, and that was all Mama could think about. It was Mrs. Bennet's greatest desire, the culmination of her hopes, to see Jane married to Mr. Bingley.

As she had taken to breakfasting with Mary, it was she who Kitty asked, "Do you believe Mr. Bingley still cares for Jane?"

Mary stared at her plate, poking at a piece of cold meat with her fork. Kitty had learned that Mary liked to think before she answered. Her silence did not, as Kitty used to believe because Lydia said so, mean that Mary was ignoring a question because she thought it was beneath her. It meant that Mary wanted to do Kitty the courtesy of giving a thoughtful and honest answer.

"I believe the real question is, does Jane still care for Mr. Bingley?"

"How can she not?" Kitty shook her head. "Mr. Bingley is very wealthy."

"It is incumbent upon each of us to decide what traits in a gentleman will make us happy, and to select wisely based on those traits. One of them may or may not be wealth." Mary shook her head. "Jane is of a very

sweet and caring temperament. If she were to wed a man she does not love deeply, she would be miserable for the remainder of her days, no matter how vast his fortune.”

Kitty considered that. Lydia always said she needed a fun, wealthy, vigorous gentleman. Kitty supposed Mr. Wickham was two of those things, and Lydia did seem happy. But what did Kitty want in a husband? She had always gone along with Lydia, finding agreement easier than forming her own opinion, with which Lydia would only argue.

Perhaps what Kitty wanted in a husband was someone who would not always argue with her. “What do you want in a husband, Mary?”

Mary's gaze darted in the direction of the parlor door, but no one stood without. The only thing out there at this hour was the pile of letters waiting to be posted. After that first sighting, Kitty had seen Mary send several more letters to London, to the same shop as before.

More interesting, Mary had received missives as well. Ones she immediately tucked away, rather than share them with the family. Mama did not notice because she could only think about Jane and Mr. Bingley. Jane, likewise, appeared quite distracted by that gentleman's eminent return to their neighborhood. Mr. Bennet may have noticed his middle daughter receiving letters, but if he did, he would not trouble to care. Kitty could not account for Elizabeth's distraction. Elizabeth usually noticed everything.

“Someone intelligent,” Mary finally murmured. “Someone who enjoys good conversation, and who has a means of supporting himself.”

Kitty eyed her sister across the breakfast table. “Oh? Do you have a gentleman in mind? Only, someone who can support himself, that sounds rather specific.”

Her attention snapping to Kitty's face, Mary's expression became wary. “It is not specific. A great many men support themselves.”

“But not a great many of our acquaintance.” Looking down at her plate, Kitty added, “One might need to send to London to find such a man.”

Mary stood. "It is time for me to practice the pianoforte. Enjoy the remainder of your breakfast."

Kitty allowed her sister to retreat. Obviously, Mary did not welcome either teasing or prying.

Nor did Kitty press the matter the following morning, not wanting to jeopardize her and Mary's newfound accord. But when a long, wrapped package arrived for Mary a few days later, even Mrs. Bennet noticed. Mary assured them all that the package held rolled up sheet music and carried it off to her room, but Kitty's suspicions were renewed.



## Chapter Six



Mid-September did bring a return of Mr. Bingley and, a few days later, a full moon. Much as Mary had predicted, the closer the moon became to full, the more light flooded Kitty's bedchamber, staving off her fear. Which was fortunate, as there was a great deal of interest taking place, and Kitty wanted to be awake to take it all in. For, along with Mr. Bingley, his friend Mr. Darcy, who had previously found himself far above the company in Hertfordshire, also returned. On his last visit, Mr. Darcy had vexed Elizabeth terribly. Kitty did not know what the difference was now, but this time he seemed kinder and Elizabeth contemplative.

Joy filled the household when Jane and Mr. Bingley became engaged. By this time, the moon was waning again, but Kitty had become more comfortable in her new room, and she still had Mary's Christmas Unicorn story. She also had an idea of what she should wish for if she could lure out the mythical creature under the light of the next full moon.

Kitty knew waiting in the garden for a unicorn was silly. She did not even quite believe in unicorns... but she did not quite not-believe either. The existence of the beast did not matter, though. What mattered was seeking him, a plan which firmed when, not two weeks after Jane and Mr. Bingley became engaged, Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy did as well. Once they both married, Kitty and Mary would be the only two sisters remaining at Longbourn.

The morning of the full moon, several weeks before the double wedding planned for Jane and Elizabeth and their betrotheds, Kitty came down to breakfast full of agitated joy. She planned to ask Mary to go unicorn hunting with her that evening, like she and Lydia used to, and was

very excited to include her sister. Mary would be grateful to be included, and her and Kitty's friendship would grow.

Pleased to find only Mary at the table, Kitty quickly assembled a plate from the sideboard and sat across from her. "Mary, I—"

"Are you going to sneak out and try to lure the unicorn to you tonight so you can wish to always sleep well?" Mary asked at the same moment.

Kitty nodded, though that was not the wish she planned. "I am, and I want you to join me." Kitty could not help but grin, she was so happy to include Mary in an adventure. They would have even more fun than she used to have with Lydia, because Mary was far kinder.

Rather than show the happiness she must feel at being asked, Mary stared. "You never invited me before."

"I know, and I feel terrible about that. That is why I am inviting you now."

Mary frowned. "Do you believe that inviting me now makes up for not inviting me all those years ago?"

Kitty's elation soured. "I know it does not make up for anything. I simply thought it would be fun. That you and I could do it together."

"You are only inviting me because Lydia is gone."

"That is not so," Kitty cried. "Even if Lydia were here, I would be inviting you."

Mary just shook her head. "I have correspondence I plan to see to this evening. I will be too tired to go sit in the garden under the apple tree with you."

"You truly will not join me?" Kitty did not know if she was angry or hurt. Only that emotion clogged her throat. "I am only trying to be your sister and your friend."

Drawing in a long breath, Mary offered, "I will sit out with you under the next full moon."

"The next full moon? The next full moon is not when we can win our wishes from the Christmas Unicorn."

Mary was silent for a long moment. Finally, she mumbled, "I—I think I will not come out tonight, but thank you for inviting me."

Feeling quite awkward, Kitty shrugged. "Perhaps next time then." She stood, her appetite gone. "If you will excuse me, I forgot something in my room." Without waiting for an answer, Kitty turned and fled. Apparently, a childhood story and weeks of convivial behavior did not a sisterly bond make.

## Chapter Seven



Kitty did not read the Christmas Unicorn story that evening. Nor did she actually have to read it any longer, for she knew it by heart. In truth, of late she could simply begin reciting the story to herself and she would fall into a deep dreamless sleep.

But tonight Kitty did not want to sleep. Tonight, despite her consternation with Mary's refusal to join her, Kitty still planned to sneak out into the garden to attempt to use her virtue and an apple tree to bring the Christmas Unicorn to her so she might have her wish.

She waited until the household was asleep, then donned her cloak and crept out into the garden. Wrapping the thick wool tight about her, she sat down on a bench to one side of the little grove of apple trees. Much of their fruit had already been plucked, but here and there round, delicious-looking orbs still dangled, though the apples and the rest of the world were painted in hues of silver by moonlight.

The bench was not overly comfortable, but Kitty still found herself drifting to sleep again and again, lulled by the hum of night sounds and the shimmer of moonlight. She and Lydia had always fallen asleep out here, which was probably why they never once managed to see the unicorn.

Kitty vowed not to fall asleep tonight. Still, just to rest her eyes, she curled up on the bench under her cloak, her head pillowed on her hands.

"Kitty," a low, hollow-sounding voice called softly. "Kitty Bennet."

Kitty blinked her eyes open. She sat up looking about. Had she heard her name?

Her gaze caught on something. A spiraled, twisted horn peeking up out of Mrs. Bennet's rose bushes.

Kitty gasped, her hands flying to her mouth.

"Kitty Bennet, I am the Christmas Unicorn. I have come to hear your wish."

The voice was haunting and eerie, as if it came down a tunnel. Kitty lowered her hands from her mouth, blinking at the horn sticking up from her mother's roses. "Christmas Unicorn, is that truly you?"

"It is I, the Christmas Unicorn. Make your wish quickly, for I have many maidens to visit this full moon."

"Oh, Christmas Unicorn, I have waited so many years to see you. And I do have a wish. A wish for my sister, Mary."

A strange sound came from the rose bush. The horn teetered, then rightened. "Speak your wish, for I must depart."

Putting all her heart into her words, Kitty said, "I wish for my sister Mary to find her perfect gentleman for Christmas. A gentleman who is intelligent, and enjoys discussions, and music, and has the means by which to support himself."

The horn seemed almost to tremble, then the bushes shook. The horn dipped, disappearing from sight. The rustling ceased.

Kitty jumped up from the bench. "Christmas Unicorn, did you hear my wish? Will it come true?"

She rushed over to the rose bushes, but her seeking gaze found no unicorn. Not even a horse. Only moonlight that echoed with the song of night insects.

Her heart beating in triple time, Kitty returned to the bench to collect her cloak. She knew the night was still cold, but her elation at seeing the Christmas Unicorn chased away any chill. She could hardly wait until morning when she could tell Mary.

Kitty would not tell anyone else, though. Mama, Jane, and Elizabeth were too wrapped up in plans for the upcoming double wedding, and would dismiss her as either mad or a fool, weddings or no weddings. Lydia didn't answer letters anyhow. Only Mary would believe her, and know that Kitty was not silly.

Oh, how she wished Mary had been here to see...but then, perhaps that was why the unicorn had finally appeared? Perhaps a maiden had to be alone?

With a shrug for her lack of answers and the unlikelihood of ever finding any, Kitty bundled her cloak to her chest and hurried inside. She did not even need to begin reciting the Christmas Unicorn story to fall asleep. Her heart full of joy, sleep found her the moment her head touched the pillow.

## Chapter Eight



The next morning when Kitty rushed into the breakfast parlor, Mary looked up with a tentative smile.

Kitty answered with a grin, excitement bubbling through her, and hurried over to the table. "I saw him. He was there, Mary. The Christmas Unicorn."

"He was? You did?" Mary asked, an odd note in her voice that Kitty couldn't identify.

Disbelief? Envy?

Kitty shrugged, not caring. Mary would still be happy for her. They were meant to be friends. "Yes, he was and I did, and I made my wish."

"I am glad." Mary looked down at her plate, then up again. "I am sorry I did not go out into the garden with you."

Planting her hands on her hips, Kitty studied her older sister. They were alone in the breakfast parlor, so she had no compunction about saying, "I am certain your correspondences were very important," with exaggerated meaning. "You do, after all, have a great deal of sheet music to order, even though you rarely play any new pieces."

Mary's cheeks went red.

"I knew it," Kitty gasped, delighted. She pulled out the chair next to Mary's. "Who is he? When did you begin writing to him? Does anyone else know or only me?"

Wide-eyed, Mary shook her head. "W-what makes you say that I have been writing to anyone?"

"Because I see you sneaking letters into the pile, and hiding the ones you receive. I would be amazed if you were writing to Aunt Gardiner with such frequency and secrecy, and astounded if your correspondent

were Lydia." Who could not even be bothered to write to Kitty or even their mother.

Mary's blush deepened. "I did write to a shop to inquire about a purchase. It simply... It grew from there."

"How long has this been going on?" Kitty asked eagerly. "Do you love him?"

Her rounded eyes full of worry, Mary whispered, "Since September, and I fear that I have come to hold him in admiration."

"But that is wonderful." Ignoring that they were both seated, Kitty hugged her sister. "You should have come out with me last night. You could have wished for him to come meet you, and marry you." Then Kitty could have used her wish to win a suitor of her own. Still, she was very glad to hear that the Christmas Unicorn already had Mary's future well in hand. Certainly, her wish could only have bolstered the strength of Mary's secret suitor's affection.

Mary pulled away. "It is not wonderful. It is ridiculous. I have never even met Mr. Randel."

"Mr. Randel," Kitty breathed, happy to have a name for Mary's beau. "Mrs. Mary Randel. That sounds divine."

"What sounds divine?" Mrs. Bennet asked, entering the breakfast parlor.

"A cup of chocolate," Kitty said, then proceeded to look about. "But there is none."

"To be certain there is none. We will not be serving chocolate until Jane's and Elizabeth's weddings." Mrs. Bennet's face took on a dreamy look. "Oh, to have two daughters married at once, to two such wealthy gentlemen." She let out a long, happy sigh, and drifted over to the sideboard to fill a plate.

Kitty looked at Mary and winked. Mary went red again.



## Chapter Nine



After that, Kitty wheedled every detail about Mr. Randel from Mary. As time passed and they neared their sisters' joint wedding day in late November, Kitty and Mary's friendship grew. By the time that happy day was upon them, when Mr. Randel would write, Mary would immediately share any news he imparted with Kitty.

Kitty learned to sleep alone in her new room. She still did not care for the sloped ceiling and the branches that scratched against the window, but when the owls returned and scared her, Mary hurried into her room to reassure her. Once she grew accustomed to them, Kitty quite liked the owls. She imagined they were, in actuality, looking out for her. Mary pointed out that they did eat mice, and Kitty agreed that she did not want mice getting into her room.

A few days before the double wedding, when everyone was paying Kitty and Mary even less attention than usual, Mary received a particularly weighty missive while Kitty and her sisters sat with Mrs. Bennet in the drawing room. Kitty watched Mary slip the letter into her skirt pocket. Mary then waited until Mrs. Bennet returned to effusing over her soon-to-be-married daughters before excusing herself to her room. Kitty imagined her up there reading, and wondered what Mr. Randel's letter said.

"Kitty," Mrs. Bennet's voice broke into Kitty's imaginings. "I need you and Mary to embroider serviettes. I have decided that every one used for the wedding breakfast should have the date stitched upon it."

Kitty groaned. "That will take days."

"It truly is not necessary," Jane said.

"It is not as if we will forget the date," Elizabeth added.

"Nonsense. Your sisters are happy to do this for you. Kitty, fetch Mary."

Kitty stood. "I will see if I can find her." And when she did, they would both sneak out and take a walk, so they could talk about Mr. Randal's letter, and not embroider dates on serviettes. Leaving the drawing room, Kitty rushed up the stairs and down the hall, hardly knocking before bursting into Mary's room.

Mary looked up, startled. "He—he says he will be in Meryton before Christmas."

Kitty squealed with delight, although she had expected as much. After all, the Christmas Unicorn was to make certain that Mary found true love *by* Christmas, and time was running out. "Is he coming to see you?"

Mary shook her head. "No. Well, perhaps. He loaned me..." She trailed off, her gaze darting to her wardrobe. "He sent a great deal of sheet music and I promised to return it."

Kitty frowned. Mary had said that last in a rush, which meant she was lying, but about what? Kitty would find out on their walk. "We must go out."

"Go out?" Mary asked, confused.

"Yes. It is walk, or spend all day embroidering serviettes." Kitty rushed over to Mary's wardrobe. "You will need your hat and gloves. It is quite—"

"Kitty, no," Mary cried as Kitty reached up for one of her sister's hat boxes.

Kitty's hand closed on a long, cylindrical object. She frowned, pulling it down from atop the boxes.

Not a cylinder. An elongated cone made of some sort of spiraled bone or...

Kitty whirled, the long, spiraled horn in hand. She held it out to Mary. "This...this is the unicorn's horn," she breathed.

Mary stared at her, face red.

"Why do you have the unicorn's horn?" Kitty asked, confused.

"I—I do not. It—that is, it, ah—"

"I only saw the horn," Kitty realized. "And you gave me the book, and you would not go out to wait with me because of letters, which is the poorest excuse I have ever heard." Her voice grew more choked with every word. "You could have at least come up with a better lie."

Mary stared at her with wide, worried eyes. "I did not think you would invite me. You never did before."

Kitty's hand tightened around the horn. "There was never any Christmas Unicorn."

Mute, her face white now, Mary shook her head.

"You only wanted to make a fool of me," Kitty cried. "You wanted to prove that I am a silly girl."

"No," Mary gasped. "I thought you would wish to sleep better, and that if you did, if you believed, then—"

"And to think I wasted my wish on you," Kitty snapped. Tears pooled in her eyes. "Not that it was a real wish. It was all a trick. You have likely been writing to your Mr. Randel and laughing at me." With a sob, she threw the horn at Mary, whirled, and ran from the room.

It was mere steps to her own, so she could not help but hear Mary call, "Kitty! Kitty, I did n—"

Kitty slammed her bedroom door. Quickly, she locked it as well.

"Kitty?" Mary's voice called.

"Go away." Kitty sprawled onto her bed and pulled a pillow over her head, trying to blot out Mary.

How could she have thought Mary wanted to be friends? Everyone knew Kitty was one of the silly Bennet sisters. Perhaps the silliest of all because she'd always been content in Lydia's shadow. Mary was studious. Serious. What use had she for someone like Kitty?

"Kitty, please. I am sorry. Please let me explain."

Kitty pulled more pillows over her head. She couldn't believe Mary had made her into the butt of some joke. Some farce she and her Mr. Randel had carried out. Kitty was not only silly, she was a fool.

## Chapter Ten



Jane's and Elizabeth's weddings and wedding breakfast came and went without anyone noticing Kitty's misery. She could not even enjoy the drinking chocolate, she was so exhausted from being unable to sleep, as she refused to seek the solace of the Christmas Unicorn story. It was a silly story, for silly girls, and Kitty was determined she no longer was such.

On top of that, her hands ached from hours and hours of stitching the day's date over and over. The wedding breakfast was miserable.

Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy left first, and almost early enough as to be rude. Some hours later, Jane and Mr. Bingley departed as well, at which point the remainder of the guests began to trickle out. Though enduring the weddings and the breakfast had seemed like agony, it also felt as if no time had passed at all when Kitty found herself in the little front parlor with her mother and Mary, Longbourn feeling decidedly empty. Where once there were five, suddenly only two daughters remained.

The worst part was, Kitty was stuck with Mary. After her sister's elaborate prank, Mary was Kitty's least favorite. Life would be far more endurable had any other of their sisters remained instead.

"Mama, now that Jane and Elizabeth are gone, could not their room become the guest room, and Kitty have her old bedroom back?" Mary said from where she stood in the front window looking up the drive.

Kitty's eyes went wide. That was a good, kind idea. Was Mary trying to make amends?

"Were anyone to have that room, you would, being the elder," Mrs. Bennet, who reclined on a settee with a handkerchief over her eyes, replied. "But now that I have three daughters married, and married so well, I believe we require both of the larger rooms for guests."

“But Jane and Mr. Bingley are only three miles away,” Mary protested. “And Mr. Darcy is hardly likely to visit at the same time as the Wickhams.”

“Nonsense. They are all fast friends.”

Kitty didn’t know what had taken place between Mr. Darcy and Mr. Wickham, but even she knew they were not friends. Anything else aside, Mr. Wickham had spread a great deal of malicious gossip about Mr. Darcy, all over Meryton.

Mary looked at Kitty and shrugged.

Kitty turned away. Even if Mary’s plan had worked, it would not have made up for making Kitty the butt of her prank. No, as far as Kitty was concerned, she and Mary were not friends. They were not even speaking.

Time marched on, November becoming December, but Kitty maintained her resolve. Mary, after a few awkward attempts to converse, seemed resigned to Kitty’s anger. For her part, Kitty did wonder how her sister and Mr. Randel were getting on, but she had made up her mind that Mary was not her friend, so she couldn’t very well ask.

What tested Kitty’s resolve the most was the middle of the night, when she woke up afraid and alone in her little bedroom, dark and cold again now that the Christmas Unicorn did not exist. Even though her resentment of Mary’s prank didn’t dim, sometimes Kitty would become so afraid and so miserable that she would light a candle, take out Mary’s childish manuscript, and read the story. On those nights, Kitty could sleep.

Still, as December wore on, Kitty began to wonder if Mary regretted her prank. She seemed listless, and she’d lost weight. When Kitty put aside her anger for a moment and studied her sister, she had to conclude that Mary appeared quite miserable.

Of course, Kitty certainly wanted Mary to be miserable. She deserved as much for her cruel prank. Still, there was a limit to how much misery Kitty could wish on her sister.

One morning near the end of December, when she wandered out into the garden to escape her mother's prattle about how lovely Christmas must be at Pemberley and how fortunate the Gardiners were to be there, Kitty found Mary sitting on the bench by the apple trees, sobbing. In that moment, Kitty knew that limit had been reached. She did not want Mary to be unhappy anymore.

# Chapter Eleven



“Mary,” Kitty exclaimed, hurrying to her sister, who had a letter open in her lap. “Whatever is the matter?”

Mary looked up with watery, red-rimmed eyes. She met Kitty’s gaze, shook her head, and sobbed harder.

“Whatever it is, we can fix it,” Kitty said, dropping to sit beside her sister on the bench.

Mary just shook her head again.

Kitty pursed her lips, uncertain what to do. Mary was not given to fits of crying. “Is this about Mr. Randel?”

“H-he wrote again to ask if he may call when he is in Meryton,” Mary sobbed, rattling the letter.

“Oh, but surely that is a good thing? You know what I wished. You were there.” Tricking me. “So, you see, your Mr. Randel will find you before Christmas, and that is only a few days away.”

“There is no Christmas Unicorn and I do not want him to find me. Ever since he first suggested he call, I have not written back.”

“I know *that* Christmas Unicorn was not real, but you have a unicorn horn, so unicorns are real, so the wish might still work,” Kitty countered. “Even if you were only making a fool of me.”

“I was not making a fool of you,” Mary snapped, dashing at her eyes. “I thought you would wish to sleep well, and that if you believed in the Christmas Unicorn, your wish would come true. And that horn is a nar-whal horn. They are giant, strange sea creatures. I began writing to Mr. Randel to procure one, but they are rare and he only lent me the horn, and h-he w-wants to call to take it back.”

Mary dissolved into crying again.

Kitty hugged her sister close, seeing part of the trouble. Being a man, Mr. Randel had proposed a logical, ordinary, non-romantic reason for meeting Mary. A matter of business and nothing more.

Men were so foolish that way.

“Shhh. Do not worry,” Kitty murmured, patting Mary’s hair. “Why have you not written back? Will it not be good to finally meet him?” Kitty wrinkled her nose. “Might he not think you mean to steal his nar-wha’s-it horn if you do not write back? Perhaps if you simply reply to him that he may call, the magic of the Christmas Unicorn will do the rest.”

“Narwhal,” Mary muttered. “And were you not listening? None of it is real.”

“My wish for you was,” Kitty said firmly. “And you said that if I believed in my wish to sleep well, I would. Well, I believe in my wish for you to find love before Christmas, so you will.”

Mary pulled back, blinking at her. She tugged a handkerchief from her pocket and blotted her face. “You truly believe that?”

“I truly do.”

Huffing a big sigh, Mary looked away. Finally, her face crumpled once more into tears. “I cannot meet him.”

Kitty frowned. “Whyever not?”

Mary twisted her handkerchief. “What if he does not care for me when we meet in person? We both know he will not find me pretty.” She met Kitty’s gaze with pleading, red-rimmed eyes. “Our correspondence is the best thing in my life. If he meets me, and I am disappointing to him, that will end.”

Kitty’s jaw hinged open as she realized the truth. “You are scared.”

Mary’s spine snapped straight, red suffusing her cheeks, then she slumped. “I am.”

Kitty reached for her hand. “You must write to him.” Her sister’s fingers were icy. “You cannot miss this chance for happiness because you are afraid.” She squeezed Mary’s fingers. “If I learned to sleep alone in that



horrible little room, you can write to a man you esteem and give him permission to call.”

“No, I cannot. I told you, our correspondence is the most important thing in my life. I cannot risk that. It is not like being afraid of the dark. Not some si—” Mary broke off, gulping.

“Some silly fear?” Kitty finished for her.

“I did not say that.” Mary clutched at Kitty’s hand.

“You very nearly did.” Kitty pulled her fingers free. “You were about to.”

“I did not mean it.”

Kitty looked down. “You did.” She came to her feet, resolve filling her. She knew how hard she had worked to overcome her fear. How difficult doing so had been. “Excuse me.”

“Kitty,” Mary said, reaching out.

Kitty shook her head and kept walking. Behind her, small sobs told her that Mary once more cried, but Kitty didn’t turn back. She hurried into the house...

...and up to Mary’s room.

## Chapter Twelve



Scrambling, uncertain for how long Mary would remain in the cold garden crying, Kitty yanked open Mary's wardrobe. She set aside the narwhal horn and searched the hatboxes, the wardrobe floor, the pockets of Mary's gowns.

No letters.

Kitty dove under the bed.

Nothing.

Finally, feeling defeated before she'd even begun to enact her plan, she went to Mary's desk.

All of the letters were there in a drawer. Not hidden at all.

Kitty blinked at them, fresh sorrow filling her on Mary's behalf. What would it be like to know their mother cared so little for what happened to you that she did not even trouble to go through your desk? Mrs. Bennet went through Kitty's things routinely, and had always gone through Lydia's as well.

Pushing aside the unfairness of their mother's neglect, Kitty turned over the top letter and read the address. Once she felt she would recall the street and number long enough to jot them down in her room, she shoved the letters back away. She glanced about the room to ensure she hadn't left anything out of order, then hurried across to hers. Closing the door, Kitty leaned against it, breathing as hard as if she'd run back from Meryton.

She went to her desk and wrote out Mr. Randel's address, then began a letter to him. Outside her door, footfalls sounded and floorboards creaked. Kitty paused, holding her breath. She should have locked her door.

But Mary went into her own room. Relieved, Kitty returned to writing.

Once she felt she had a clear, concise letter penned, she left the page to dry and dug out her pin money. She had plenty now that Lydia was no longer about to extort it from her, though her younger sister had already written once asking if Kitty had any to pass along.

Gratitude that she had not given in to that demand filled Kitty, for she had a much more important use for her pin money than whatever frivolity Lydia wanted. Grabbing her cloak, hat, and gloves, Kitty made ready to go to Meryton. She would hire a special courier to take Mr. Randel her letter.

## Chapter Thirteen



After meeting Mary in the garden, Kitty was much happier, having decided that her sister had indeed been attempting to help her, not to trick her. Mary, however, was definitely not happy. So acute was the misery of Kitty's older sister that Mary took to her bed. The eve before Christmas, when Kitty joined her mother and father in the entrance hall to depart for church, still with no word from Mr. Randel, Mary was nowhere to be found.

"Kitty, collect your sister," Mrs. Bennet snapped. "I do not know what has got into the girl these past few days, but I will not be late for the service."

"Maybe she is sad that the Gardiners are at Pemberley with Lizzy and Mr. Darcy," Kitty said to deflect her mother, then she started up the staircase. Although she knew the Gardiners' absence wasn't the source of Mary's sorrow, Kitty was a bit sad about it. Usually their aunt and uncle, and their cousins, joined them at Longbourn, livening up Christmas. This year, the manor house felt cold and empty.

Reaching Mary's door, Kitty knocked, and was unsurprised to receive no reply. She pushed open the door to find Mary buried in her blankets, only her head sticking out. Her hair was in disarray and her skin pale. She slept, but dark hollows underscored her eyes.

Kitty sighed. She'd wanted love for Mary, but Mr. Randel's lack of a reply to Kitty's very blunt letter spoke of a gentleman who truly had thought his correspondence with Mary to be merely convivial. Faced with her sister's misery, Kitty wished Mary did not care so very much for her Mr. Randel.

She cared far more than Lydia did for Mr. Wickham, Kitty could tell. Maybe even more than Jane cared for Mr. Bingley, though Kitty could not be certain. How had Mary been so tricked into affection, a trick far more cruel than the one Kitty had imagined her sister to have played on her? It hardly seemed possible.

Because it was not, Kitty decided. Mary was sensible. Logical. Not at all given to fancy. Mr. Randel must care for her. He must have been delayed or...or Kitty did not know what, but something. Kitty had to keep believing. Belief was the true secret to the power of the Christmas Unicorn.

Closing the door softly, Kitty went back down to excuse her sister.

Church was always wonderful on Christmas Eve and, for a time, Kitty managed to forget about Mary's sorrow. As well, Jane and Mr. Bingley were there, and waited to wish them happy Christmas Eve after the service, departing with promises to call on the morrow. Everything was festive and cheery, though Jane seemed a touch worried about Mary's lack of attendance. Everyone knew missing church was not like her.

After farewelling the Bingleys, Kitty stood between her mother and father in the mass of people waiting for their carriages and attempted to ignore Mrs. Bennet's low, running commentary about their neighbors.

"...wore that exact hat last Christmas," Mrs. Bennet was saying. Words that were normally reserved for Lydia, but Lydia was no longer here. "I would be embarrassed, were I her. And look at Mrs. Long's cloak. That color has not been in fashion for Seasons. Honestly, I do believe that with three daughters married, and one of them to Mr. Darcy of Pemberley, no one here can compare to us."

Kitty looked about at their neighbors as Mrs. Bennet kept up a stream of commentary on their standings and apparel, hoping against hope that no one listened. Fortunately, their carriage was not too far back in the line. Soon, they were on their way home.

They arrived to the sight of an unknown conveyance in the drive. As their carriage drew nearer, Kitty scooted across her seat to take in a gen-

tleman standing before Longbourn. His place about halfway between his gig and the front door seemed to indicate that he had not yet applied for entrance. He looked up at the façade, a bundle of hothouse flowers in hand and a wrapped package tucked under his arm.

“Who is that?” Mrs. Bennet asked.

Elation shot through Kitty. “It must be Mr. Randel.”

“Who is Mr. Randel?” Mrs. Bennet demanded.

The gentleman turned, startled, and Kitty realized he’d been so absorbed in staring at their house that he hadn’t realized they came up the drive until that moment. Their carriage slowed, rolling to a halt behind his.

“Mr. Randel is the gentleman with whom our middle daughter has been corresponding since September,” Kitty’s father said.

Jaw dropping open, Kitty turned to him, stunned.

Mr. Bennet winked.

“Mary has been corresponding with a gentleman?” Mrs. Bennet cried. “We will see about that.” Not waiting for a footman, she flung open the door.

Quicker than her mother, Kitty jumped out. She rushed up to the man, joy vibrating through her. “Mr. Randel?”

He blinked at her, nodded, and said, “You must be Miss Kitty.”

Kitty grinned. “I am.”

“I, ah, I received your letter.”

“Her letter?” Mrs. Bennet’s tone held accusation as she barreled up to him. “I thought you said he has been corresponding with my Mary, Mr. Bennet.”

Reaching Kitty’s other side at a more reasonable pace, Kitty’s father nodded. “So he has.”

Mary! When Kitty had checked on her before church, her sister had been in no state to meet Mr. Randel. “Excuse me. I must get Mary,” Kitty cried. She stepped around the gentleman, calling back, “Do invite him

in, Papa,” before hurrying through a front door that opened for her, several of Longbourn’s staff peering out.

Cloak flapping, Kitty charged up the staircase and down the hall, and into Mary’s room.

Her sister sat up, mouth slack and hair sticking up every which way. “What has happened?”

Kitty charged up to the bed and grabbed Mary’s arm. “We must get you up and dressed.”

Mary looked about, alarm on her face. “Is there a fire?”

“Fire?” Kitty tugged harder. “Mr. Randel is here.”

“Here?” Mary squeaked.

“With flowers and a gift.”

Mary gaped at her.

“Get up,” Kitty demanded, tugging her sister’s arm.

Mary finally complied. In a flurry of muslin, lace, and the firm application of a comb, Kitty helped her ready. Not fifteen minutes later, Mary stood in the center of her room, properly garbed, if wan, trembling like the last leaf on an apple tree with a gale blowing.

“I cannot go down there,” Mary whispered.

“You can and you will.” Kitty wrapped her arm through her sister’s. “He is here. He came all this way for you.”

Mary continued to shake. Worse, her feet didn’t move.

“And,” Kitty added, realizing the one thing that would spur her sister into motion, “I left him with Mama and Papa.”

Her eyes flying wide, Mary pulled free of Kitty and rushed to the door.

## Chapter Fourteen



Kitty looked after her sister as Mary darted down the hallway, then went to her wardrobe to collect the narwhal horn. Not that she truly felt Mr. Randel would care if Mary brought the horn to him, but the false unicorn horn had served them well, and Mr. Randel should have it back.

The horn secured, Kitty hurried after her sister. She reached the bottom of the staircase in time to see Mary halt in the middle of the front parlor's doorway. Slowing her momentum, Kitty took the remaining steps at a sedate pace, not wanting to distract Mary.

Or Mr. Randel who, Kitty saw once she was far enough down the steps, stood in the center of the parlor, Mr. and Mrs. Bennet to either side of him. Silent, he stared at Mary. Equally mute, she stared back.

Kitty was about to shove her sister forward when Mr. Randel thrust out the flowers. "Miss Mary?"

Mary nodded.

"I know you did not give me permission to call, but..." He trailed off, looking about the room.

Their mother glowered at him, but Papa watched with wry amusement.

Mr. Randel cleared his throat. "I do need the horn, I am afraid. I promised it and the other I have to—" He looked around again. "Well, to a certain lady, for a certain Christmas production tomorrow at a certain castle. I truly should not say more."

"Then you are only here for the horn?" Mary asked in a small voice.

Kitty's heart constricted. He couldn't be. He'd brought flowers. She couldn't see her sister's face, but Mary's voice sounded choked with tears.

"W-windsor Castle?" Mrs. Bennet stammered.



Mr. Randel glanced at her, clearly surprised to recall anyone else other than Mary, and Kitty's hope renewed. "I, ah, I cannot say, Mrs. Bennet. I apologize."

Mary took a step forward. "Are you only here for the horn?" she repeated, the words steadier this time.

Finally seeming to remember he had legs and feet as well, Mr. Randel came across the room to stand before her. He caught one of her hands in his, then bowed over her fingers. As he straightened, he proffered the flowers once more. "I will toss that horn back into the sea from whence it washed up if that is what it takes to prove to you that I did not ask to call on you simply to reclaim a narwhal horn."

Mary accepted the flowers with both hands. She brought them to her face, the beguiling scent of hothouse roses wafting out to reach Kitty where she still stood at the base of the staircase. After inhaling deeply, Mary looked up at Mr. Randel. Kitty squeezed the false-unicorn horn tight, wishing she could see Mary's face. Willing a tiny bit more Christmas Unicorn magic into being.

"Truly?" Mary asked, so much hope captured in that one word that tears prickled Kitty's eyes.

Mr. Randel smiled. "Truly. I have been enamored of you ever since I received your first letter."

"You are enamored with Mary from a letter?" Mrs. Bennet demanded.

Mr. Randel nodded, but he kept his focus on Mary. "I have been beguiled by your mind, and by your heart. And while I treasure our correspondence, it is my greatest wish that I may begin calling on you, Miss Mary Bennet."

"That is my greatest wish too," Mary said, her reply all but drowned out by Mrs. Bennet's cry of, "She accepts," and Kitty's delighted squeal.

A babble of talking ensued, and refreshments were called for. Kitty returned the narwhal horn, a bit sad to see it go, until Mr. Randel opened his bundle. Inside were presents. A book for Mr. Bennet. Fancy confec-

tions for Mrs. Bennet. Sheet music and a lovely gold locket on a chain for Mary, who blushed prettily when she opened such a telling gift.

And for Kitty, a small porcelain sculpture of a unicorn. Carefully, Kitty hugged it close, enamored with the delicate beauty of the piece, and stammered her thanks. Next year, she would wish for a man like Mr. Randel for herself.

Late that evening, Mary walked Mr. Randel out to what Kitty expected would be a long carriage ride to a castle he adamantly refused to name, to turn over the reunited pair of narwhal horns to the staff there, and Kitty and her parents went up to bed. Kitty held her porcelain unicorn carefully as she ascended, listening as her father quietly explained to Mrs. Bennet that Hill had informed him of Mary's clandestine letters months ago, and he had thoroughly vetted the gentleman, with Mr. Gardiner's help. Apparently, Mr. Randel's shop specialized in expensive and difficult to procure goods, and he was at least as well off as Uncle Gardiner. Reaching the top of the staircase behind her parents, Kitty smiled.

Once in her room, she placed her unicorn safely on her desk, angling him so he could watch her sleep. Filled with joy, she readied for bed, then climbed under the covers. She was about to put out her candle when a soft knock sounded.

"Kitty?" Mary's voice called.

"Come in."

Mary, still in her gown and her cheeks bright from being out in the cold, came in and closed the door softly. Kitty sat up as Mary crossed to perch on the edge of her bed. Kitty smiled, but Mary did not answer in kind. Instead, she toyed with the locket she now wore. Mr. Randel's gift to her.

"Is there anything inside it?" Kitty asked.

Mary shook her head. "He said he would like us to fill it together." She blushed.

"It is very pretty." Why was her sister so serious? "He is very nice, your Mr. Randel."

That brought a smile to Mary's lips. "He truly is. He is everything he seemed in his letters. He said he will be back tomorrow afternoon."

"He cannot mean to manage much sleep, then." Kitty's grin widened. "I imagine seeing you is more important to him than sleeping, though."

Mary's blush deepened, but she released her locket and met Kitty's gaze squarely. "He told me that you wrote to him."

Oh no. Was Mary angry? "I know I should not have gone into—"

"You wrote to him even though I called your fear of the dark silly," Mary said, cutting off Kitty's apology. Tears filled Mary's eyes. She opened her arms wide. "Thank you."

Kitty hugged her sister, her smile returning. "Sometimes, we need a little help from each other to be brave."

Mary nodded against her shoulder. "Sometimes we do."

"And that is what sisters are for."

Mary released her, dabbing at her eyes. "No. That is what friends are for, and I am so glad to have a friend in you."

Kitty hugged her again, quick, then released her, not wanting to start crying too. "Happy Christmas, Mary."

"Happy Christmas," Mary replied, standing to go.

It wasn't until her sister reached the door that Kitty realized she had one last question. "Did Mr. Randel pick out the unicorn all on his own?"

Mary turned back, smiling even though her cheeks were damp with tears. "No. I asked him to find one for you before...well, before we argued. I am surprised he remembered."

"But he did, because he's wonderful, is he not, your Mr. Randel?"

Mary nodded. "I do believe he is."

Kitty snuggled back down into her bed. "Thank you for my unicorn."

"Sleep well," Mary said, opening the door.

"You too," Kitty replied, though she doubted Mary would sleep. Not with the excitement of finally meeting Mr. Randel.

Kitty would, though. She would sleep well tonight, and the next, and from now on. Kitty was not afraid of the dark any longer. And, thanks to Mary, she had her very own Christmas Unicorn.



Thank you so much for reading. I hope you enjoyed this tale of sisterly love and Christmas magic. If so, you may want to sign up for my mailing list to hear about a new Christmas story every year (among other books, of course). Just visit my website at [summerhanford.com](http://summerhanford.com)<sup>1</sup>

And if you really enjoyed this story (or really didn't and want to share that), please consider leaving a review: [Review on Amazon](#)<sup>2</sup>

Or, for more short reads, try *The Adventures of Anne de Bourgh of Rosings* vol. I<sup>3</sup> and *The Adventures of Anne de Bourgh of Rosings* vol.

II<sup>4</sup>.

Merry Christmas!



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1. <https://summerhanford.com/pride-and-prejudice-variations/>

2. <https://www.amazon.com/review/create-review/?ie=UTF8&channel=glance-de-tail&asin=B0G6CWMBSR>

3. <https://getbook.at/AdventuresAnnedeBourgh>

4. <https://getbook.at/AnnesAdventuresvII>

# ABOUT SUMMER



Summer Hanford writes gripping Epic Fantasy, swashbuckling Historical Romance, and best-selling *Pride and Prejudice* retellings. She lives in the lovely Finger Lakes Region of New York with her husband and compulsory, deliberately spoiled, cat. The newest addition to their household, an energetic setter-shepherd mix, has been trying, and failing, to gain acceptance from the cat for eight years now, but is adored by the humans.

Since the moment she read her first novel, Summer's passion has always been writing, and epic adventures. As a child growing up on a dairy farm, she built castles made of hay and wielded swords made of fence posts. She is also passionate about animals, travel, and organizing her closet. Nothing pleases her more than a row of tops broken down by sleeve length and ordered by color...except working on her latest novel with her cat in her lap, her dog lounging on the rug dreaming of squirrels, and a cup of tea at hand.

For more about Summer, visit [www.summerhanford.com](http://www.summerhanford.com)<sup>1</sup>.

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