



Christmas Brides

Cheryl Bolen

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Three Regency Romance Novellas:

"THE CHRISTMAS WISH"

21,500 words (about 100 pages)

Heat index: Sweet

To grant her dying father his last Christmas wish, Miss Annabelle Pemberton proposes marriage to her father's former ward, the rakish viscount Lord William de Vere. How painful it will be, though, to be trapped in a marriage of convenience with the only man she has ever loved.

Marriage to the wealthy heiress will help restore de Vere's decaying estates, but that is not why he accepts her bizarre proposal. He has grown to love her father as if he were his own, and if Mr. Pemberton selected him for his only child's husband, then Lord de Vere must honor the man's final wishes. Little does he suspect his father-in-law knows him better than he knows himself.

"HOME FOR CHRISTMAS"

20,000 words (about 85 pages)

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For six long years, Captain David St. Vincent has dreamed of returning home to Ramseyfield—and to its prettiest resident, Elizabeth Balfour. To his astonishment, though, it is not Elizabeth, but her plain younger sister, Catherine, whose company he seeks.

Cathy Balfour has worshiped David for as long as she can remember. It was she who wept when he left, she who presented him with a cross to keep him safe while in service to the crown, and she who read and carefully collected the newspaper accounts of his sea battles. But how can one as plain as she ever hope to win his heart?

"CHRISTMAS AT FARLEY MANOR"

Best Historical Novella of 2011*

(This novella was first published as an eBook in 2011.)

Approximate length: 21,000 words (about 100 pages)

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It wasn't to be a real marriage. . .

Harry Tate is an army captain of some means who is almost certain to die when he returns to Spain on the morrow. Elizabeth Hensley is a destitute beauty he's only too happy to help.

Two years later. . .

When they meet again at his ancestral home, Harry is now Viscount Broxbourne, bent on showing his wife how much he wants her to be his real viscountess by Christmas.

Christmas Brides Details

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heidi says

These stories amused me, sometimes because the protagonists were funny and sometimes because there were slightly hilarious errors in the text.

"I take it the races did not progress in an agreeable manor for you."

"A kick in the forelock spurred his mount to a faster clip." I am really hoping for the horse's sake he did not spur his horse in the forelock, because that's the forehead.

"It seemed incredulous that just months ago she'd been a baby."

"The very mention of Annie's death still scraped a deep, retching wound inside him." Eww!

But the internal voice on the characters also amuses me.

"It didn't seem right to be thinking of his bride's breasts during the solemn sacrament of matrimony, but doing so was the only way he could convince himself Miss Annabelle Pemberton was no longer Robert Pemberton's little girl but a full-grown woman who was now to be his own wife."

Overall, these were ok, but not riveting, and I was distracted by them, which probably means the stories were not super compelling to me. They weren't bad, though, just medium.

Read if: You are looking for something fluffy and not too challenging.

Skip if: You, like me, will be distracted by homophone problems and the conviction that the tiny bride whose mother died in childbirth is not going to be the person he gets to grow old with.

Also read:

A Civil Contract for a marriage of convenience with the guy you actually love. (and possibly my favorite Heyer)

P. says

Three fine Christmas stories well worth the read.

Cheesecake says

A boxset of Christmas Novellas by Cheryl Bolen

Each is about a man who has taken a woman for granted for various reasons, only to realize their error.

Each story is less than 100 pages.

No sex (bummer), just kissing, but sweet and not too angsty.

His Christmas Wish 2.5 stars

Anna and William. Their father's were best friends, but Anna's father was more of a father to William than his own. And so William has grown up of thinking Anna (8 years his junior) as a sister, while she grew to

view him as anything BUT a brother. She is constantly hurt over the years with his indifference to her as a woman. Then her father's dying wish is that they marry for Xmas. So they do...

I can't say as I found his change in heart/desire compelling. He was so resolutely sincere in his view of her as a little sister in the first half of the story, and his about face was so quick, that it seemed unfair. I would have enjoyed it more if he'd had to work to make her believe his new devotion to her.

Home For Christmas 2 stars

David and Cathy and her fluff-brained self-absorbed sister, Elizabeth.

David returns from the Napoleonic wars after 6 long years hoping to find Elizabeth, the love of his youth, still open to his suit. But first he happens upon her younger sister, Cathy, who was but a girl of 13 when he left.

Again, I find I am unconvinced that Cathy isn't second best. We are treated to his thoughts of lust for Elizabeth but for Cathy we only get thoughts about what a super nice charitable girl she is.

When asked twice about his feelings for Cathy, he says that he thinks of her like a sister. He stares at Elizabeth with desire through 90% of the story, even while admitting that she is a shallow uncharitable person. Granted, he has had an image of her as the perfect woman in his head for 6 years... but it was off-putting. Elizabeth plays with his affections at the same time she does a wealthy visiting lord's. She is completely unaware of her sister's desires.

I had to ponder why this story wasn't romantically convincing. I think it has to do with his realization that he loves Cathy and not Elizabeth happening apart from any of the other characters. People that he had lead to believe he cared for Elizabeth instead. So the reader never gets to see the Elizabeth's reaction to him NOT pandering to her every whim and mooning over her instead of Cathy.

There is a brief epilogue a year later with him and Cathy and Elizabeth and her husband (the wealthy lord) having Christmas dinner together. But it was perfunctory and unconvincing as well. A case of the author telling and not showing.

Christmas at Farley Manor 3 stars

This one was the most romantic of the 3 but still kinda dull.

He's an army captain and she's a preacher's daughter left penniless and homeless. He has a baby that his mistress died giving birth to that needs a home. He marries her thinking he is going to die anyways, and here's a ready-made mother for his bastard. Surprisingly this part of the story didn't bother me. I never felt that he cared deeply for the actress/mistress. A couple years later she finds out he is actually an aristocrat which makes her a lady. The story is her meeting his family for the first time and then meeting him again for the second time shortly thereafter. Awkward.

I did enjoy it but found it dragged a bit. The only real difficulty was her inability to see herself as the wife of an aristocrat. I was hoping for more of a 'getting acquainted' story.

Louiseann Walter says

TERRIFIC!!!

This collection of stories was the best I have read in a long time. Each story was different yet all had such Happy Endings. Hope you enjoy them as much as I did.

Rebecca (everyday reader) says

Three sweet, heartwarming Christmas tales of unsuspecting brides, grooms, and families. Good read!!

Jessie says

A sweet and delightful collection of Christmas romances. After reading a book last week where the innocent heroine, didn't act so innocent, I was excited when I read the first novella in this collection and saw the innocent heroine glorying in holding hands with her sudden husband, blushing as she suggested a kiss, and just acting INNOCENT! It really captured the essence of first love. It also wasn't one of those books where you say, "enough with the hand holding and warm looks, kiss her already." I was completely satisfied. I felt like the characters were well developed, and their romances were based on knowledge of each other, not just instant love.

Read it :)

Tina Ullrich says

Joyous Season

Here are three short stories, in pages only. Cheryl Bolen has once again given us sweet romance adding in the Christmas flavor. Her hero's and heroins are a delight. Each bring an inspiring couple together under unusual circumstances but brings out the best in each other. Hats off for fun, flirty reads for all to enjoy.

Caron Pescatore says

These three short stories, set during the Christmas season, all make for lovely reading. They are all well written and engaging, although they could all benefit from being a bit longer. In each story, I felt the ending where the couple fell in love seemed a bit sudden, but if you're willing to suspend disbelief for a time, they all make for a very satisfying read. FYI, all three stories are clean romances--no sex.

THE CHRISTMAS WISH

This first short story was my second favorite of the three. Belle and William have known each other all their lives, as their fathers were best friends since childhood. When William's father died, Belle's father became his guardian and mentor. Since attaining his majority, William, a Viscount, has lived a somewhat rakish lifestyle. He is very attached to his former guardian, and is extremely fond of Belle, who he sees as another younger sister. For her part, Belle has been in love with William for many years, and cannot see herself marrying anyone else--although she cannot conceive of any way she could actually become William's wife. When her father is given a terminal prognosis, Belle is devastated. Her father's dying wish is to see Belle happily settled with a good man. Nothing would make her father happier than to see William and Belle married, who he thinks would make a wonderful couple. To grant her father's dying wish, Belle proposes to William and from there the story quickly progresses to its conclusion. As delightful as this story was, I thought it was a little unrealistic how quickly William came to, not only see Belle in a light other than as a

sister, but to realize that he had fallen in love with her. It was literally only about three days between the time Belle first broaches the topic of marriage to William, and his falling in love with her. Prior to that William had never looked at Belle as anything other than another sister (he has three). In any event, as I said before, if you can suspend your disbelief, this story makes for delightful reading. There really isn't anything Christmasy about this story, other than we are told that's it's set around that season. This was a 4 star read for me.

HOME FOR CHRISTMAS

Of the three stories, this one was, IMO, the most developed. It was also my least favorite. Cathy has loved David for many, many years--ever since she was a child. She was heartbroken when he went off to serve in the Royal Navy during the Napoleonic war. Now, six years later, he has returned home for good. For his part, David has been in love with Cathy's beautiful, older sister, ever since he was a young lad. During the entire six years that he has been away, David has thought constantly about the beautiful Elizabeth. His one wish is to return home and make her his. However, once David becomes acquainted with the grown-up Cathy, who was just twelve when he left, David discovers where his heart truly lies. Cathy is extremely sweet. She's kind, caring, and generous to a fault; always thinking of others before herself. Truly, she was a little too good. Her sister, Elizabeth, on the other hand, is a bit vain and self-centered. Elizabeth is not mean-spirited or unkind; she just can't see the world from any other aspect than her own.

As with the first story, the whole "I'm in love" came a little too quickly. Especially when you consider that David had fancied himself in love with Elizabeth for years!! I also found it unrealistic that it had never before dawned on Cathy that David might be in love with Elizabeth. Per David's own musings, it seems he had made a cake of himself over the lovely female when he was younger, as had half the other men in their village! It seems to me, that it would have been much more believable if Cathy had expected every man to be in love with Elizabeth, if for no other reason than she was so beautiful. But, honestly, what irritated me the most is the fact that the shallow Elizabeth wanted to marry a title, and in the end, she got one. I don't know why it bothered me so much, but it did. I mean, it's not like Elizabeth was so terribly bad. In any event, David and Cathy get their HEA and we even get an epilogue depicting the family a year later. As with the first story, there really isn't anything Christmasy about this story, other than we are told that's it's set around that season. I rate this story 3 1/2 stars.

CHRISTMAS AT FARLEY MANOR

Of the three stories, this one was my favorite. Harry is a Captain in the British army. On the eve of his return to battle, he meets Elizabeth in a church, where the two have gone to find solace. Elizabeth is in dire straits, having just left her employment and with nowhere to go, while Harry is certain he is destined to die when he returns to the Peninsula. Harry has a particular problem--in addition to his certainty that he's going to die--and realizes that he and Elizabeth are in a position to help one another. To that end he proposes marriage to Elizabeth, and the two marry the following morning before his departure. Two years later they are reunited at Harry's family's country estate. As with the first two stories, one must be willing to suspend disbelief, to buy into the fact that Harry was in love with Elizabeth some forty-eight hours after being reunited with her. IMO, had the two corresponded during their time apart, the "falling in love" would have been absolutely believable. Nevertheless, I thought this was a delightful story and was perfectly satisfied with the ending. Of the three stories, this is the only one that has anything remotely Christmas-like about it, as there are references to collecting holly, and other greenery, and decorating the house for the season. I rate this story somewhere between 4 and 4 1/2 stars.

So, bottom line, this collection of Christmas stories makes for delightful reading and is one that I would

recommend as a worthwhile read. Happy reading!

Barbara "Cookie" Serfaty Williams says

Christmas Brides (Three Regency Novellas)

The stories of four young lady becoming Christmas brides. The first "The Christmas Wish" - the love story of Lord de Vere and Annabelle, the second "Home for Christmas" - the love story of the Balfour sisters, and the last "Christmas at the Farley Manor" - the love story of Harry and Elizabeth. Great Christmas romance.

Lisa Montgomery says

The Christmas Wish 21,500 words (about 100 pages) Heat index: Sweet To grant her dying father his last Christmas wish, Miss Annabelle Pemberton proposes marriage to her father's former ward, the rakish viscount Lord William de Vere. How painful it will be, though, to be trapped in a marriage of convenience with the only man she has ever loved. Marriage to the wealthy heiress will help restore de Vere's decaying estates, but that is not why he accepts her bizarre proposal. He has grown to love her father as if he were his own, and if Mr. Pemberton selected him for his only child's husband, then Lord de Vere must honor the man's final wishes. Little does he suspect his father-in-law knows him better than he knows himself.

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Christmas at Farley Manor Best Historical Novella of 2011* (This novella was first published as an ebook in 2011.) Approximate length: 21,000 words (about 100 pages) Heat index: Sweet It wasn't to be a real marriage. . . Harry Tate is an army captain of some means who is almost certain to die when he returns to Spain on the morrow. Elizabeth Hensley is a destitute beauty he's only too happy to help. Two years later. . . When they meet again at his ancestral home, Harry is now Viscount Broxbourne, bent on showing his wife how much he wants her to be his real viscountess by Christmas. *Winner in Romance Through the Ages, sponsored by Hearts Through History

I had read "Christmas at Farley Manor" previously, but not the other two. These were light reading and entertaining, but I do not think they were Ms. Bolen's best work.

Sandy says

I really liked this collection. My only complaint was that some felt a little short. In the first story, The Christmas Wish, I felt there needed to be a little more to explain De Vere's change of heart. He was so adamant and then goes for a ride and voila, everything has changed. I know things have to get wrapped up

quickly in a novella but it just felt too quick for me. I did really enjoy the overall narrative and the characters together and really was wrapped up in their story.

The second story, Home for Christmas, was probably my favorite and that one felt short to me but I think that's just because I wanted to read more about the characters but I'll admit it ended in a good place. I liked the comparison between the two sisters without going over the top. I felt like the description of the hero's realization of his feelings progressed nicely (kind of what I wish I'd seen more of in the first story).

The third one, Christmas at Farley Manor, I liked and disliked. I didn't like the premise at all and didn't think it was remotely believable. This guy has such noble intentions to do right by his bastard child he arranges to marry a woman who is a stranger and gives her money to raise the child? And never corresponds with her while away? Why not just leave her with the mother's prostitute friend? At least he knew her. It just seemed ridiculous. Now, if you can put all that aside, when he comes home the story was well written and I really enjoyed the growing romance between him and the woman who raised his child and how the family treated them and how she and the child bonded.

I enjoyed the collection as a whole and her writing enough that I've already put some of her books into my way too long "to read" list and look forward to reading more by her soon.

Millie says

Christmas Brides - Romance for Christmas!

Cheryl Bolen's Christmas Brides is a delightful collection of short stories, perfect for those of us who enjoy a sweet and "clean" read. I especially liked the way the author took her time to let us into the thoughts and feelings of her characters. In each story, you can see the emotional and mental process the hero and heroine go through on their way to discovering they're madly in love! If you are looking for stories that are sexually provocative, then skip this collection. If however, you want to read stories that are in the spirit of traditional Regency and sweep you away from daily cares, this is the one. All the short stories are very good, but my personal favorite is "Christmas at Farley Manor. This one has more of a rags to riches, Cinderella-like feel to it.

Cheryl Bolen's "Christmas Brides" is a special treat not to be missed.

Janice Hougland says

This was such a wonderful book to read during the holidays as it consisted of three novellas that could be read in a couple of sittings, and they gave me the uplifting and relaxation that I needed during this hectic time. The first novella, The Christmas Wish, was a delightful love story about childhood friends who became more to each other later in life. The second novella, Home for Christmas, was another lovely story about a soldier returning from war, hoping to find the lady he had dreamed about for so long, only to find another who meant the world to him. The third novella, Christmas at Farley Manor, was the novella I enjoyed most of all, a story about a man who took a chance and married a female stranger to take care of his illegitimate daughter while he was away at war, only to fall in love with her when he returned. I highly recommend this holiday book to readers.

Dancer says

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Bolen is one of my favorite authors. I had read "Christmas at Farley Manor" previously, but the other two welcomed readings. They each have strong heroines in the mode of traditional Regencies. That being said, in the first story, I found Belle's cough more than a bit distracting. Moreover, it is not consistent nor is the issue resolved.

AnnMarie says

I love Christmas, I love a wedding, and I love all three of these Christmas Brides stories. Cheryl Bolen has a real understanding of all things regency, if I didn't know better I'd say she's an immortal who has lived through the ages herself :D The plots of the books and their characters are captivating, and add to that the descriptive text about the places and the clothes, and the way of life, then you have the perfect romantic novel.
