

## FORLORN UNICORN

By Roxanne Smolen

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Excerpt:

Brittany held open the front door then followed Pippy and Nightwind out to the yard. The sky was overcast, and the breeze had the feel of coming rain. Pippy leaped onto the unicorn's back then scooted forward to allow Brittany room. Brittany had to hike her dress up her thighs before she could climb aboard. Ravyn and Eileen stood together in the doorway, and stupidly, Brittany waved at them although she knew she was as invisible as the unicorn. Nightwind snorted and pranced toward the dirt road that ran alongside the house. Without warning, he took off at a gallop.

He ran on silent footfalls, his hooves so swift they did not strike the ground. In seconds, he was down the road and onto the asphalt highway that led to town. They sped through Loxahatchee then headed east toward West Palm Beach straddling the double yellow line down the middle of the street. Traffic roared past them on either side. Brittany tightened her grasp around Pippy, hoping she didn't lose her balance and pull them both off the unicorn's back.

A maze of sun-bleached buildings opened onto the beach. There weren't many beachgoers on such a gray day—still, Nightwind avoided the sand and ran instead upon the water just before the break of the waves. He did not splash, but Brittany noticed a wake behind them and wondered if others could see it too. She kept her head down, hunkered against Pippy's back. All she heard was the wind and a rhythmic sigh from Nightwind.

They continued running south. Brittany recognized the towering condos along Fort Lauderdale Beach then the eight-mile boardwalk along Miami Beach. Minutes later, they were in the Keys paralleling the bridges that connected the islands. Brittany expected to veer east toward Fairy Island, the secret paradise that offered refuge to all sorts of fairies, but they hugged the chain of islands.

At last, Nightwind galloped over the bank and onto land, snorting and tossing his head. Sweat darkened his white mane. He trotted down a swathe of grass between a walkway and a parking lot toward a large, peach-colored building with an outdoor eating area. Brittany squinted at a sign. *The Backyard at Key West*.

They stopped behind a huge hibiscus bush covered in yellow flowers.

"It is safe to dismount," Pippy said over her shoulder.

Brittany slid backward over the unicorn's rump, stumbled, and sprawled upon the thick grass. A passerby looked at her curiously but didn't stop. Brittany jumped to her feet and straightened her dress.

Pippy slid down smoothly. She patted Nightwind's sweat-stained neck. Without looking at Brittany, she said, "You are to order a table near the water. My queen will join you presently."

"She's already here?"

"Nightwind and I dropped her off first. She wanted to take a stroll."

Brittany nodded. Her legs felt like rubber—grasping with her knees while riding without a saddle used a whole new set of muscles. She patted her hair, hoping the braid held through their windy trip. With her chin high, she wobbled down the walkway toward the restaurant.

"May I help you?" a man asked from behind a lectern.

"A table for two, please. As close to the water as possible." That shouldn't be a problem, she thought looking around. The dining area was only half-filled—the weather wasn't conducive to eating outdoors.

"Of course. This way." The host beckoned her forward.

The deck was concrete. White linen tablecloths rippled in the breeze, draping small, round tables. Green umbrellas on tall goosenecked stands shaded the diners, although the sky was gray and sunless.

Her host pulled out a chair, and Brittany sat at a table overlooking the calm Florida Straits. As her butt touched down, another man appeared and filled her glass with ice water. Brittany noticed that all the attendants were male. They had black dress shirts with the sleeves rolled up and wore their hair in man buns.

Her host handed her a leather-clad menu. She accepted it with a smile. As he walked away, she took off her little backpack purse and hooked it to her chair. The purse was

empty but for a few packets of sleeping powder and a sharpened pencil that she kept for defense. Her phone was in a pocket of her dress.

Moments later, a server approached. “I understand you are expecting another party?”

“Yes.”

“Can I get you something to drink while you wait?”

“Do you have flavored ice tea?”

“Mango.”

“I’ll have two of those, please, and another water.”

“Right away.” He nodded and hurried off.

Brittany glanced around. No sign of the fairy queen. She picked up her water glass and strolled around the perimeter of the dining area as if sightseeing. Sea gulls squawked. Brown pelicans perched on the edge of a nearby pier. At last, she reached the yellow hibiscus bush. Behind it, Pippy brushed Nightwind’s flank while he nibbled blooms from the foliage. If anyone saw it, they would think the blooms were disappearing on their own.

Brittany handed her the glass of water. “This is for Nightwind.”

Pippy’s face lit, but before she could say anything, Brittany continued her stroll around the deck. When she returned to her table, she found two glasses of ice tea and a basket of bread.

She sat and sipped her tea. The menu was lunch only, showcasing salads and a few cold sandwiches. She looked out over the smooth, gray water. A pod of dolphins broke the surface with little humps.

Far down the walkway, Brittany noticed a woman. She wore a mint green business suit with a short skirt and matching heels, and she had a small white dog on a long leash. The interesting thing was that there was a break in the clouds above her and a single ray of sunlight speared down, following the woman like a spotlight.

It was Alyssum, the fairy queen. She wore oversized sunglasses to hide her too-large eyes and a wide-brimmed hat to cover her pointed ears. Most likely she had dressed to fit in, but she was too drop-dead gorgeous not to be noticed. Brittany chuckled and shook her head—and as she moved, she realized that Alyssum wasn’t walking a dog at

all. It was Sparkles Twilight, the baby unicorn that Alyssum had gifted to Brittany for saving her mother, Queen Chandrelle. The unicorn was enchanted to look like a dog.

Smiling, Brittany got to her feet. "Good afternoon, your majesty."

Alyssum looked flustered and worn out. She collapsed onto her chair. "Hello, Brittany."

Derailed by the queen's lack of enthusiasm, Brittany turned her attention to Sparkles Twilight. "Hello, Sparkie. How are you today?"

At least, the unicorn seemed happy to see her. Sparkles Twilight was about two feet tall with a frizzy mane and a bump where her horn would grow in. She bleated like a lamb, but the fairy enchantment made it sound like the yipping of a puppy. It was odd to hear both sounds at the same time. It was odder still when Sparkie backed up and gave a tremendous sneeze. Everywhere her sneeze touched, flowers sprang up.

"What the...?" Brittany recoiled.

Looking bored, Queen Alyssum reached under the table and snatched up a small bouquet of daisies and daffodils. She set them on the table and rubbed her brow. "I have many problems this day, Brittany Meyer. And all of them stem from you."

"Me?" Brittany sank onto her seat. "What did I do?"

"It's more what you have not done." Alyssum sipped her ice tea, and her face smoothed. "This is quite good."

"Let's get back to me being a problem."

"When I gifted Sparkles Twilight to you, I did not consider that you do not live on the island. She is bonded to you but never sees you, and she has become... forlorn."

"So, she's a forlorn unicorn," Brittany said, trying to keep up.

"Indeed." She sipped more iced tea.

Their server approached. "Good afternoon, ladies. Have you had a chance to look at the menu?"

"Do you still have fruit on a plate?" Alyssum asked.

He smiled. "Yes, our fruit salad."

"I'll have one of those and more of this concoction." She lifted her glass.

"Very well, madam. And for you?" He looked at Brittany.

"I'll have the same." Brittany handed the menus to him.

As he left, Sparkie sneezed again. Queen Alyssum swiped beneath the table and brought up more flowers, this time purple tulips.

In a restrained voice, Brittany said, “But you still haven’t explained...” She motioned at the bouquet.

Alyssum leaned forward. “I just did,” she hissed. “Sparkle Twilight is sad. Unicorns aren’t meant to be sad. They’re meant to frolic in the flowers with rainbows shooting out of their every orifice. Her sadness has brought about an allergic reaction, and every sneeze shoots out something magical. Usually flowers. The rest of the herd has rejected her, which only adds to her sadness. Lunette, the mother, refuses to nurse, so Gil-Gael was feeding her with a...” She rolled her eyes. “A bee-bee bottle.”

“Oh, I see.” Brittany leaned back, stunned. “Pippy mentioned that Gil-Gael was gone.”

“Which brings us to another problem. When I named you Friend of Fae, it caused a schism. A rift between my people. Many say that by being friendly to a human, I have proven myself unfit to lead. They have removed themselves from the village. This includes Gil-Gael and his wife, the Head of Security. Most of the security force has gone with them, which is unfortunate because anyone who knows how to fight is on their side. I fear at any moment they will attack.”

“Let me see if I have this straight. Our friendship has caused civil war among the fairies?”

“It has.”

“But why can’t a fairy be friends with a human?”

Alyssum slurped the last of her tea through the straw. “Long ago, before time was time, the Fae and humankind lived in harmony. But then humans developed religion and decreed that all supernatural folk, including witches like you, were to be eradicated. Centuries of persecution followed. Too many centuries to be easily mended. I thought you were a sign. I was mistaken.”

Brittany blinked. This was it, the perfect opportunity to ask Alyssum why she said Brittany’s coming had been foretold. But as she struggled to phrase the question, their lunches arrived.

Her fruit salad was artfully arranged on a large plate—first lettuce leaves, then pineapple rings around the edge like the petals of a flower, then a scoop of diced fruit in

the middle topped with a cloud of vanilla yogurt. The fairy queen ate with her butter knife, spearing the fruit and dipping it in the yogurt. Brittany decided against correcting her and used a fork instead. The ripe fruit was tangy and sweet.

After several moments, Brittany said nonchalantly, “The first time we met, you mentioned that my coming had been foretold. What did you mean by that?”

Alyssum did not answer right away. “There is a prophecy, and it goes like this. Born of the stars, neither Fae nor human, known both as friend and usurper, the Queen of Darkness and Light shall arrive unannounced to mend the unmendable, to unite the lost. Mark her well by her words—I didn’t mean anyone any harm.” She looked at Brittany. “As you may recall, those were your precise words upon entering our village.”

Brittany nodded slowly. She remembered saying that.

“So, I don’t think I can be blamed for thinking you were The One. But, of course, you are not. And now things are worse.”

Brittany glared across the table. So, she was being blamed for this *schism* because she wasn’t the Queen of Darkness and Light? Did Alyssum think to ask her opinion before naming her Friend of Fae? A web of white light laced Brittany’s fingers, and she hid her hands beneath the napkin on her lap. In a dark voice, she said, “I think you were having problems with your constituents long before I arrived. There are fairy drug dealers on the mainland selling such things as powdered troll bones.”

Alyssum dropped her sunglasses down her nose and peered over the rim. “Are you serious? This is most unsettling. I will look into it, of course.” She stood. “I must get back. Nightwind will be rested by now.”

Brittany yelped. “You’re just going to strand me here?”

“Of course not. I’ve arranged for a driver. He will take you home.”

Brittany glanced around. “What does he look like?”

“Young. But of course, all humans are young. Light hair. He has a car. Blue, I think.” From thin air, she produced an envelope. “Please pay for our lunches and give the rest to the driver.” She turned to leave.

“Wait! What about Sparkles Twilight?”

“Have I not made myself clear?” Alyssum snapped. “Sparkles Twilight is not wanted on the island. You will have to care for her yourself.”

Brittany's jaw dropped. How was she going to care for a baby unicorn? She watched Alyssum walk out of the eatery and circle behind the yellow hibiscus bush. Moments later, Nightwind trotted out with both Pippy and Alyssum on his back. He cantered down the swath of grass, picking up speed. And just like that, they were gone.

Brittany leaned back, flabbergasted. What on Earth was she going to do? Sparkie brayed and butted her leg.

The server appeared. "Have you finished here?"

"Yes," she said distractedly. "Check please."

He carried their half-eaten lunches away.

And as he did, another man approached the table. He was well-dressed in a sports jacket and polo shirt. He had handsome Asian features and thick, dark hair. "Hello." He smiled. "I understand you need a lift to the mainland."

Brittany stared at the Asian man. She did not want to get into a car with someone she didn't know. She squeaked, "Alyssum said you'd have light hair."

"You know how it is. One human looks like another to a fairy." He shrugged. "But I assure you I'm safe. Alyssum vetted me personally."

Brittany shrank back. This was a bad idea. She should call Ravyn and ask her to drive down to get her. She touched the skirt of her dress to be sure her phone was still in her pocket.

He quirked his brow, looking amused. "You'd better decide quickly. When Alyssum left, she took her enchantment with her."

Brittany gasped and looked under the table. Sparkie was no longer a little dog. If not for her mane and fluffy tail, she might be mistaken for a goat. Because she was a baby, she didn't have the defensive ability to turn invisible as the older unicorns did. "Oh, no." What was she going to do?

"I'll tell you what. I'll pull the car around right there." He pointed across the grassy swathe to the parking lot. "When you see me, walk across the field. Don't run. You don't want to draw attention to yourself."

"All right," she whispered.

He walked away. She grabbed her purse from the back of the chair.

The server brought the check.

“Wait.” She looked into the envelope. It was stuffed with fifty-dollar bills. She took one out and handed it to the server. “Keep the change.”

He smiled. “Thank you, ma’am.”

Behind him, a car pulled into the spot the man had indicated. A jet-black Lexus. Not blue as the queen said.

She doubled the leash around her hand. Don’t run, the man told her. Well, she was seriously considering running the other way. But just then, Sparkie sneezed and sprayed daffodils all over the table leg. Oh, no. *What was she going to do?*

The Asian man got out of the car and opened both doors on the passenger side. Brittany put the envelope into her backpack and, gulping down a dry throat, walked across the grass toward the Lexus.

Thank you for reading this sample chapter of Forlorn Unicorn.

Forlorn Unicorn is available exclusively for [Kindle and Kindle Unlimited](#). The entire series can be found at [Amazon](#).

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### **[About Roxanne Smolen](#)**

Roxanne Smolen is the author of the popular Cody Forester Novels and the new Brittany Meyer Novellas. Like many authors, she started writing stories as soon as she learned how to hold a crayon. However, she didn't write professionally until twenty years ago when she lost her eyesight. She has since penned several novels of science fiction and magical realism. Her heroes are often teenagers because she believes that young adults will change the world. She lives in South Florida not far from where the Brittany Meyer Novellas take place.