



*Twelfth Night:
All I Want for Christmas*

By Emma Petersen

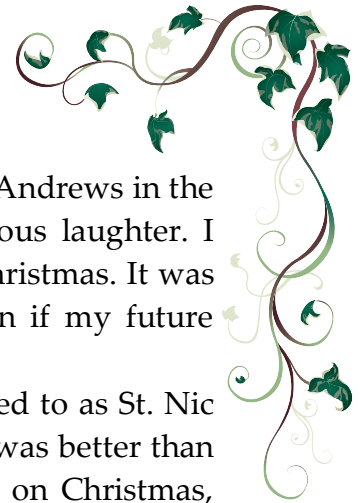


Twelfth Night: All I Want for Christmas

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Twelfth Night: All I Want for Christmas
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"It's the most wonderful time of the yeeeeeeeeeeear!"

And it was. I twirled in a circle, reminiscent of Julie Andrews in the *Sound of Music*, and ignored the curious stares and nervous laughter. I didn't care if they thought I was crazy. I was! Crazy for Christmas. It was my absolute favorite holiday and always would be. Even if my future husband was one the (not so) evil undead.

A year had passed since my boss, still fondly referred to as St. Nic and Nos-fer-hot-u, and I had become a couple. Every day was better than the last, and I just knew he was going to propose to me on Christmas, even though the word Christmas made him flinch and the actual holiday made him itchy.

He was just being silly and hanging on to old superstitions, most of them totally unfounded. He wasn't evil, unless necessary, and he totally didn't burst into flames when entering a sacred building. Our little field trip last night proved that. I grimaced when I thought of his reaction and prayed he still wasn't upset with me about it. I'm sure he wasn't the first or last vampire to go to mass, and while I should have told him, if I had he wouldn't have gone.

I ended my celebratory twirl with a flourish and headed toward Belfry's Department Store. I had to pick up Cyp's gift before headed back to the toy store to pick up my nieces' and nephew's presents.

I loved Christmas. And I couldn't wait to see everyone's faces when they opened their presents. I couldn't wait to see my main squeeze's face when he opened his. This was his first Christmas. *Ever*. It was amazing to think to think that a person older than the country we lived in had never had a Christmas before. Never got to sing carols or decorate a tree. But he would this year and every year after.

I wondered if he was as excited as I was.

Yes, Barbara Jean, he's probably as excited as Jesse Jackson at a Klan meeting. Only instead of a cross on fire, it might be Cypriano if you're not careful.

I shook my head and ignored the cynical bitch that was Bad BJ. Cyp was *not* going to catch on fire. I'd make sure of that. He was just being

unnecessarily cautious. Last night proved that whether he wanted to admit it or not. He had sat through mass, even though he looked like a mouse in a room full of pythons, shook the priest's hand as we were leaving, and I had checked, not one singe. Everything was perfect.

Okay, not everything. Maybe I shouldn't have experimented with the holy water the way I had but it had been just a drop. From his reaction you would have thought I dunked him in it.

I still didn't get it. He could shake Father Jordan, a holy man's, hand but he couldn't touch holy water. Mysterious. I'd have to ask the priest about it when Cyp and I went to our first pre-marriage counseling appointment. Now all I had to do was break the news to Cypriano that there'd be counseling. In a church. And it was required before our wedding, which would also take place in a church.

Still determined to crisp up the groom?

I rolled my eyes and sighed. I was getting married in St. Boniface's, and nothing was going to stop me. Not even the delectable and sometimes stubborn Cypriano San Nicolo.

I was halfway to my destination in Belfry's when something shiny caught my eye. Me and crows, we love the shiny. Stopping, I inched closer, almost afraid what I was seeing was a mirage. It wasn't, and it was perfect. I tiny white cat ornament, with bright emerald green eyes and a ruby red bow.

It was the spitting image of my cat, Duchess, and it would be absolutely gorgeous on the tree. Now if I could get Duchess to wear her ruby red ribbon collar everything would be perfect. I scooped it up, thrilled to get the very last one, and headed to pick up Cyp's present.

"Hi," I greeted the clerk as I approached the counter, my smile so wide it could sell toothpaste. "I'm here to pick up a special order item."

The clerk looked back at me but didn't return my smile. I shrugged mentally. There was nothing he could do to dim my smile.

"Name." If he was any less enthused, he'd be in a coma.

"Barbara Jean Ruiz."

He looked at me as if he was going to say something but instead turned to the computer to his left and typed in what I assumed was my name.

"I don't see an order under that name."

My smile faltered, but just a little. There, of course, was a mistake. "Did you spell it right?" I asked gently. Ruiz was only four letters but it could still be difficult to spell.

"R-U-I-Z."

"Oh, yes, that's how you spell it, but I don't understand. I placed that order months ago. And was assured it would be here on time for Christmas."

"There's no order under that name."

I clenched my teeth, knowing my once toothpaste-advertising smile probably looked more like a grimace. "Okay, how about under the last name San Nicolo?" That must be it. Since Cyp and I had a joint account, they must have accidentally placed the order under *his* last name.

The clerk eyed me for thirty seconds more than I appreciated before turning and loudly typing out Cyp's last name.

"Nope."

I could have sworn there was a smirk in his voice even though his face still looked still bored.

Tears pricked before my eyes. This just couldn't be happening. I had found and special-ordered the absolutely best present for Cypriano ever. I had waited months to see the look on his face and this...this troll was trying to ruin that.

I swallowed hard. "Sir, may I speak with the manager of this department please? I, in good faith, purchased a present for my soon to be fiancé, and our Christmas will be absolutely ruined if it doesn't come in on time."

"Oh course," said the not-so-helpful troll and turned his back to me. He picked up the phone and spoke a few words into it. I didn't hear all of the conversation but I was able to catch, "It's my break anyway."

His break? Was he serious?

I'd break him.

For once I didn't silence or ignore Bad BJ. I wanted to break him! I knew it wasn't his fault my St. Nic's present wasn't there, but there was absolutely no call for him to be rude. He hadn't even apologized.

He left me standing there without so much as a word. I stood

steaming, trying to remember that it was still the most wonderful time of the year. A time for goodwill towards men, even jerky ones.

"Ma'am? You wanted to see a manager?"

I turned. "Yes, I did."

"What can I help you with?"

I thought of St. Nic's present, and once again my eyes filled up with tears. I blinked them back. "I saw the most absolutely perfect gift online on your website. I thought it would be perfect for my soon-to-be fiancé, so I ordered it. I was told since it was a special product, it would take approximately two month to get here but would arrive by Christmas. I get here today, and it's not here. Tomorrow's Christmas Eve, there's no way I'll be able to find another gift that compares to that one."

The manager nodded her head, a sympathetic look on her face. "I apologize for the inconvenience. Let me just look and see if we have any information." She walked around the counter and stopped at the computer terminal. "What is your last name?"

"Ruiz. R-U-I-Z."

She typed it in, looked at the screen, then typed it in again. "Could it be under any other name?" she asked as she turned to face me.

I shook my head. There was no need to try Cyp's last name again.

"Ms. Ruiz, I cannot apologize enough. Here at Belfry's we pride ourselves on customer service. I don't know how this could have happened, but I will make sure I get to the bottom of this. In the meantime, can I help you find another gift? We have some gorgeous cashmere sweaters."

I knew she was only trying to help but a cashmere sweater couldn't compare to the original gift I had gotten for St. Nic. A tear ran down my cheek, and I quickly dashed it away. I was being silly. No one had died. It was just a silly present.

"N—no thank you" I said, my voice catching. It hadn't been just a present. It had been *the* present, the perfect one for my lover's first Christmas. I cleared my throat. "No, thank you."

Her face pinched in sympathy. "Once again, I am so sorry about this."

I nodded, too afraid I'd become overcome with emotion again if I

spoke.

I left the mall after picking up the kids' presents, which thankfully the toy store had not only ordered but had waiting for me, gift-wrapped and ready to go. My cell phone rang again, but I ignored it. I wasn't in a talkative mood. I felt like someone had gotten me a puppy for Christmas, and Belfry's department store had squished it.

It's not the end of the world. And aren't you forgetting the true meaning of Christmas?

Just on time. Good Barbara Jean to the rescue.

I ignored her, too, and began what felt like a mile journey to the front of the store. I needed to call a cab, and I prayed it would get here and get me back home before St. Nic came home from the office.

He had changed over the past year and made a lot of concessions, but he was still very old world. His woman—yes, he often times referred to me as *his woman*—did not take cabs. Not when he had a fleet of cars that could take me to the edge of the world if I wanted.

I dismissed his high-handedness and barely resisted reminded him that technically his fleet of cars couldn't take me to the edge of the world because, unlike his buddy Columbus had thought, it was not flat.

Pulling out the phone, I called for a cab before looking at the time. I knew he only wanted what was best for me but even though so much had changed, I hadn't changed. I was still the (semi) crazy cat lady who wrapped presents for her cat and was nearly obsessed with Christmas. My face fell. This year I'd be the crazy cat lady without a present for the man she was in love with. What was I going to do? The present was perfect because it was something you could get for a man who literally had everything. And now it was ruined.

Sighing, I stepped out into the cold night air. It was darker than I had thought, and I didn't see my cab anywhere. Depending on what was going on during the day, Cypriano didn't usually get home until a little after seven.

I looked down at my watch. It was seven fifteen. *Grrrrrrreat*. He

was probably home, wondering where I was. I should call, but I couldn't bring myself to. He would know there was something wrong. Even over the phone, he could tell by my tone of voice when I was upset.

I was just about to reach back in my purse when someone shoved me. Pushing my hands out before me, I tried to catch myself before I hit the ground. When that didn't work, I used them to make sure my head and upper body didn't hit the cement. I waited to hear an apology or at the very least an "excuse me," but all I heard was the sound of laughter and fading footsteps. I looked around, embarrassed, I didn't expect help up, but neither did I expect to look around for my handbag and find it gone.

I nearly screamed. The shove had been no accident. Someone had done it on purpose so they could get to my purse. I stomped my foot and winced in pain, a sob choking me as I realized they had not only taken my handbag but the gifts I had picked up for the babies as well.

Maybe if I got to mall security quick enough, they'd be able to find the thieving pieces of excrement before they got too far. I was just about to turn around when a cab pulled up. It took me a few minutes to make a decision. Opening the cab door, I climbed in. I had had the worst day before the day before Christmas ever, and all I could think of was getting home and letting my St. Nic lick my wounds.

The cab ride home was about as pleasant as the rest of my day. The driver had some horrible speciest station on that talked about the final solution. Not Hitler's but pretty close. Vampires, the broadcaster said, needed to be exterminated like the vermin they were. And if that wasn't bad enough, the cabbie murmured agreement with every hateful, prejudiced word. It seemed like the normally twenty minute cab ride took twenty years or took use back forty. It was saddening that racism—um, specism?—still existed. I hopped out of the cab and gave him the exact fair—yeah, he was so not getting a tip—and limped up the drive to the house that Cypriano and I shared.

The house was one of Cypriano's concessions. To him, it was modest at only three thousand five hundred square feet. And I could admit, considering the other monstrosities we had looked at, it *was* indeed modest. I had thought living in my apartment or his apartments over

Non-Human Resources would have suited us fine, but St. Nic had disagreed. He didn't mind people, human and non, knowing where he rested, but he couldn't stand the thought of them knowing that I, too, lived there.

"I have enemies," he had said.

I tried to joke and tell him the villagers weren't chasing him with torches anymore, but he wouldn't budge. So we--let's be honest, *he*—bought a house. and we had moved in together. I knew he was there waiting for me, and that when he saw my disheveled appearance and noted my missing handbag *after* hearing the cab drive away, he'd be angry. And though it rarely happened, his ire wasn't what I needed tonight.

Walking around the attached garage, I tried to sneak in through the kitchen. It was dark and since I had hurt myself during the fall/mugging, I turned on the light so I wouldn't bump into anything and make what already was sore more so.

I gasped as the lights flickered on to reveal a polished, black-clad St. Nic sitting at the eat-in dining room table, holding a purring Duchess like a version of a scrumptious Dr. Evil.

"You're home." That was lame. Of course he was home, or he wouldn't be sitting in the dark...waiting for me.

I edged around him hoping, in vain, he wouldn't be able to smell the blood from my various scrapes and bruises. Sticking to the walls and counters like they were magnets and I was metal, I tried to ease my way to the dining room so I'd be able to make an escape to the downstairs guest bathroom right off of the formal dining room.

Cypriano's gazed pinned me, no doubt missing nothing, not even the tiny snowflake that had landed on my jacket on the way into the house.

"Did you have a good day?" I asked, hoping to stall him.

"Not as eventful as yours, cara. Come here." He sat Duchess on the table, something he knew I hated but couldn't break him of. What did he care if a cat was on a table he never used?

"No, darling, not right now. I'll be right back."

Duchess bumped his shoulder before hopping down and making a

beeline for me. *Shoo, shoo, shoo*, I whispered in my mind, know the treacherous hussy would want me to pick her up, even though she and Cyp had probably been in the kitchen a good fifteen minutes waiting for me. And doing what things that could see in the dark did.

Of course, she came trotting right at me and wrapped herself around my ankle. My injured ankle. It was if she knew and wanted to make sure St. Nic knew too.

Bitch.

I pushed her away gently and resumed my attempted escape.

St. Nic stood, and as soon as he did, Duchess left through the door I opened, her tail flouncing behind. And to think I stayed up on more than one occasion wrapping her presents.

"How did you get home, Barbara Jean?"

I weighed my options. I could lie and say a friend. But having never—okay, rarely—lied to him, the idea didn't seem appetizing. "I took a cab," I whispered. I blinked, and St. Nic stood in front of me.

"I didn't hear you, *cara*. What did you say?"

I didn't answer and kept my eyes downcast. I wasn't scared. This was Cyp, my lover and my friend. What was the worst he could do? Give me a lecture. Or, hopefully, a hug.

I let the tears I'd been holding back ever since I'd gotten in the car fill my eyes and lifted my gaze to meet his. "I took a cab."

He didn't say anything. Just gently brushed away one of the tears that escaped down my cheeks.

"Ti prego non piangere, cara. Non riesco a sopportarlo."

He was still more comfortable speaking his first language than English, and I had picked up the phrases he used frequently. *Please don't cry, sweetheart. I can't take it.*

It made me cry harder because he should have scolded me for not listening but instead wrapped his arms around me, gently because he knew about the injuries that lay beneath my clothes.

Before I could say a word, he swept me up into his arms and made his way to our room.

I loved our room. Even though I had gotten rid of my apartment, we had kept my bed and couch. The first places we had made love.

He laid me gently on the mattress and eased off my boots. He made a *tsking* noise but refrained from asking me how my ankle got twisted. Dropping them to the floor, he pushed up my skirts gently, making sure the fabric didn't touch my scraped skin. He inhaled before he leaned forward and kissed my battered skin. I gave a hiccupping gasp, my tears drying nearly instantly as the heat of the caress ricocheted through my body.

He pulled my legs apart, and I eagerly helped, spreading them and lifting my lower body as he pushed the skirt until he was around my waist.

Murmuring words I didn't understand, he licked and kissed every bruise and abrasion until I writhed under his ministrations.

"Cypriano, please."

"*Si, cara*, you know I always do."

I ignored the arrogance in his words because they were true. So very true. He did please every single time, and I wanted him to again. Right now.

I cried out, my back arching as his tongue slipped between my labia. It played a quick teasing game with my clit before his fingers joined in to touch the moisture slicking my sex. My breathing sped up, and the horrible day I'd had faded into oblivion as if it had never happened.

Licking and sucking, he tunneled his fingers deeper into me, purposely gliding them along the millions of nerve endings he mastered. Placing my feet flat on the surface of the bed, I arched up, trying to get closer. Slide his fingers deeper.

His breath feathered against my pussy as he chided me gently. "No, *cara*, disobedient little girls don't get the pleasure easily. They have to earn it."

I cried out as he pulled his finger free from my body and took a step back away from me.

"Cypriano, please."

He didn't acknowledge my plea, just towered over me, his gaze locked between my legs. His hands were on his belt buckle, and just below, even in the darkness, I could see his erection straining against the material of his pants. I swallowed hard and wondered how long he would

make me wait. And if there was a way I could push him far enough that he'd forget about the silly threat of punishment.

Scooting back on the bed, I spread my legs wider and grinned as his breath hissed between his teeth. Pushing up, I rested against the pillows piled against the headboard and slowly trailed my fingers down. I was wet. Wetter than I usually was during an encounter with him. I didn't know why, but I knew I burned and the thought of him denying me what we both wanted...needed made me want to weep again.

"Cyp, please, I need you."

At first I thought he'd ignore me again, but he didn't. He knelt between my legs and pushed away my fingers, which were playing idly in my wetness.

"You need me?" he asked as he leaned closer until he was inches away from my sex. "I dunno, *cara*. I don't think you need me all that much."

"I do," I whispered. My voice was soft, breathy.

He pressed a kissed to my mound, trailing his way down until he reached the vulnerable vein in my inner thigh. My sex tightened, he rarely took blood from his area but when he did...

Cypriano brushed his lips against it, licking it, teasing it until I moaned. When he struck, it was so quickly I barely registered his head moving. His teeth sank deep the same time his fingers did. Plunging them deep into my pussy, he curved them up and with unerring accuracy found my spot. He closed his mouth of the wound and stroked almost in the same rhythm as he sucked.

Tension wound through my body, and I writhed against him as I felt the orgasm build. It would be great, but I wanted him inside of me. The comfort of his body against mine, inside mine as he fed from me.

I opened my mouth to tell him what I needed when my orgasm struck without warning. I cried out, my eyes closed as ecstasy pumped through me. Trying to catch my breath, I almost didn't register the weight of his body on mine.

It was like this sometimes, as if he could read my mind. I clutched his shoulders as I wrapped my legs around his waist. I breathed his name, my own personal prayer, and raised my head to meet his kiss as his lips

pressed against mine.

The metallic taste of my blood didn't disgust me like I had once thought it would. I kept him alive, a part of me lived inside of him, and just as I would take his blood, the act seemed just as intimate as our love making.

"Now, Cypriano, now pl—" I didn't finish the sentence before he was inside me, deep, so deep I didn't think I'd ever be able to distinguish where I stopped and he began.

Our mouths still locked together as he rocked into me. It didn't take long before the tension wound tight in my stomach, and I knew I'd come again. Pulling my mouth away from his, I buried my face in the curve of his neck before biting down.

Cypriano moaned, and I echoed it as he sank his fangs deep in the side of my neck and propelled me into another orgasm. Spasms spread outward, rippling in waves, and I cried out as he pounded into me.

Ramming deep, he groaned as he came inside me.

The room was quiet, not even our breathing could be heard in the silence. I lay on Cypriano's chest and wondered what he was thinking.

Tears ran down my face as I thought of how his first Christmas had been ruined. I wanted him to know the joy and love my parents had always given me and my brother, Joaquin, at this time of year. Cyp had been alone so long. For once, I wanted him to know what it was like to have family and a holiday.

Before I could explain to him why I was crying he gathered me in his arms and held me as I cried.

"I just wanted Christmas to be special to and for you," I whispered without prompting.

He sighed and brushed my hair back from my face. "Don't you know by now, Barbara Jean, that it is? It will always be burnt into my very soul because it was when I was given the gift of your love."

I pulled back so I could see his face.

"And for you, I'd do anything. Brave anything. Priests, mass, holy water, and a church wedding."

My cheeks heated. "You knew?"

"*Cara mia*, of course I knew. I'd do anything for you." He grabbed

my hand and slipped something cold and hard on my finger. It glittered in the darkness, and my heartbeat sped up.

I didn't mind that he didn't officially ask because there was absolutely no doubt what my answer would be. Only one thing diminished my joy.

"I have nothing to give you in return. The department--"

He pressed his finger tips against my lips. "Don't be silly. You have given me everything, and I will always be thankful for that. Merry Christmas, my love."

I wrapped my arms around him and squeezed tight. Christmas wasn't only the most wonderful time of the year. *Any time* I was with my St. Nic was also the most wonderful time of the year too.

"Merry Christmas." I pressed my lips against his, and we set off to make more wonderful Christmas memories.

Just me and my St. Nic.

The End

Author Bio

Emma Petersen wrote her first romance in high school after falling in love with historical romances and has been writing ever since. She lives in sunny California with a cool cat named Toussaint and is working through an addiction to shoes. You can find out more about her books by visiting her website at www.emmapetersen.com.