



The Last Unicorn: The Lost Version

By Peter S. Beagle

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Peter S. Beagle's *The Last Unicorn* has sold at least six million copies around the world since it was published in 1968, and tens of millions of viewers have delighted in the animated film version (for which Peter also wrote the screenplay). But none of the fans of this amazing work have ever known the full story of how *The Last Unicorn* came to be. In 1962, the 23 year-old Beagle was at a career crossroads. His fantasy novel *A Fine and Private Place* had been released to great critical acclaim in 1960, but his mainstream second book had been flatly rejected by his publisher. What Peter wrote next was an 80-page fragment about a unicorn, the last of her kind, lost in the modern world of superhighways and Kodak cameras, with only a banished demon from Hell for a traveling companion. This first take on the beloved classic -- so much the same, so very different -- is now available to readers for the first time, with an introduction and commentary by the author.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

This fragment is Beagle's first, unsuccessful attempt at writing what became his classic fantasy, *The Last Unicorn* (1968), though even his failures are marvels of wry humor and brilliant prose styling. Beagle's introduction illuminates his thought processes behind the composition of *The Last Unicorn*, while his afterword explains "the occasional haunting connection" between this version and the finished one. As in the completed text, an immortal unicorn leaves her lilac wood in search of other unicorns. She engages in witty repartee with a whiny dragon and meets up with a two-headed demon, Azazel and Webster, who are carrying a coal stolen from hell. The unicorn and the demons have some intriguing, whimsical conversations, but the action ends abruptly before resolving any of the characters' fates. Collectors and those interested in the gestation of Beagle's masterpiece will best appreciate this imperfect gem. (*Dec.*)

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From [Booklist](#)

Beagle's modern fantasy classic, *The Last Unicorn* (1968), didn't come easily. He stalled on the first draft, returning to the concept only after a cross-country motor-scooter trip and his book about it, *I See by My Outfit* (1965). While the first draft opens the same as the novel, the principal characters other than the unicorn are different. There's a weary, tattered dragon, who apprises the unicorn of how the world beyond her forest has changed since the heyday of mythic beasts like themselves. Better, there's Azazel and Webster, a two-headed demon kicked out of hell because Webster loudly resisted such infernal improvements as turning off the flames and relegating Satan to figurehead status. The heads' bickering Beagle now sees as in character with his and his road buddy's banter in *I See by My Outfit*, and he says he gave up on the first version because he couldn't continue the satire of religion the demon introduced. Thank heavens, though, that he persevered and now publishes this funny, darkly winsome fragment. *Ray Olson*

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Review

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Users Review

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