

Luke's Rogue Bride

*Love Multiplied Book 4*

By

Rayanna Jamison

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## Prologue

Carolyn sat up in bed with a start, her body shaking from the shock of the dreams that had haunted her as she slept. She hated being home from college for the winter holiday. She loved being with her parents and little sister in Green Valley, but the nightmares never came when she was away at school. Only when she was home.

The darkness covering the room told her it wasn't yet dawn—but there was no way she was going back to sleep. She had an essay to write over break—maybe she could sneak down to the kitchen for some tea and sneak some of the cookies her mothers had baked the day before. With her decision made, she rose from her bed, careful to tiptoe across the creaky floorboards to where her robe hung on a hook near her mirror. Trying hard to banish the images and memories that had haunted her dreams, she snuck down the stairs.

The kitchen was her favorite room in the house, bright and cheery with its big windows and yellow cabinets and French doors that gave way into the more formal dining room. She set her laptop on the table in the breakfast nook and made her way to the pantry to choose her tea.

As the pantry door swung open, her father's voice carried from somewhere in the house, and she froze instinctively. Who was he talking to at this hour, and why? Every hair on her body stood at attention as she listened. There were a good many reasons for one to be taking phone calls at 4:00 am and none of them were good.

“Wow. That’s an incredible offer.”

Offer? That didn't sound like an emergency, nor did it sound scandalous. What was going on here?

“Thank you, Del. I will certainly think about it, although I’m not sure I would be able to convince my wives to move.”

Move? What in the heck was her father talking about? Who was Del? A niggling in her brain reminded her, and her heart stopped. Del was from Filmore, Georgia. The prophet's right-hand man. With the prophet finally in jail where he belonged, Del would be looking to make some changes. Changes were good—but Del was not.

“Well, of course, I’m in charge of my home,” her father huffed, importantly. “It’s just that things are different now. Carolyn’s in college nearby, and Heddy and Myra are happy.

Maddie will be in high school next year. I'm not sure uprooting them all, and moving back to Filmore is the right thing to do."

Uprooting them all? Moving back to Filmore? There was no way in hell she would let that happen. Tears filled her eyes, and the memories she had been holding at bay overcame her as she sank to the floor against the pantry wall.

All of a sudden, she was sixteen again, and in a hospital room just outside of Filmore.

Carolyn was vaguely aware of the sensation that her entire body was on fire. She tried to open her eyes but they were swollen shut.

"You should see the other guy." She didn't recognize the voice but instinctively knew that she was safe.

"Yeah, she really gave it to him. Do you think they'll finally be able to prosecute?" The voice was softer, and female. Carolyn assumed it was a nurse. She remembered calling 911, but nothing after that.

"Unfortunately, this guy seems to be untouchable. They have their own justice system over in Filmore and their so-called prophet is exempt." The voice was hard with unmasked anger.

"Grant, she is a child. What is she like fourteen?"

"Sixteen," the doctor corrected with a sigh. "I've called her parents. They're on their way, not that it will do any good. If they're anything like the other parents I've encountered, she'll be checked out before daybreak, and we will never see her again."

Carolyn knew the doctor spoke the truth. The cycle of abuse at the hands of the prophet was what Filmore was known for. Carolyn had heard the stories of years gone by, the simpler time, under prophets old. To her, the idea of a happy and normal life in Filmore was nothing but a fairytale.

There was a sudden commotion outside the door to her hospital room as the quiet sterile room was suddenly bustling with activity and noise. Her parents had arrived—all of them. Besides being a mecca of incest and abuse, Filmore was a polygamist commune. By Filmore standards, their family was a small one. Her father, Frank, had only two wives, and between them, only two children, Carolyn and her younger sister, Maddie. Maddie was ten—a thought that made Carolyn sick to her stomach. Ten was how old she had been when the abuse started.

With her eyes still shut, Carolyn had to rely on her other senses to stay abreast of what was going on around her. Her mother, Heddy, and her other mother, Myra, flocked around her, each moving to stand on opposite sides of the bed weeping softly. Soft mutters carried from across the room where her father was undoubtedly consulting with the doctor. She tried to concentrate on what they were saying, but they were too far away. When the doctor left the room with a heavy sigh, Carolyn wanted to cry out for him to stay and protect her. Instead, her father joined her mothers at her bedside.

“I can’t imagine what possessed you, daughter, to strike your prophet. We must pray that God will have mercy on your soul, and that the prophet will still allow you to accept penance for your wicked ways.”

Her father’s voice was kind, but his words were horrifying. Carolyn had had quite enough of the prophet’s “penance,” and she knew that she would run away before she would go to him and apologize and beg for more of the same.

“Enough.” Mother Myra’s voice was harder than Carolyn had ever heard from the usually meek woman. She would have gasped if she had had it in her. “The only person here who needs to pray for mercy, Franklin, is you.”

“Myra!” her father gasped. “Now, see here—”

“No! No, you see here, Franklin, I am finished. There will be no penance, no apologies, and no prayers for mercy. I am done standing by quietly like a spineless, brainless lump while you put the needs and wants of a wicked man above the well-being of your wives and your children, whom the Lord has given to you to love and protect. I never should have allowed you to convince me to leave Green Valley all those years ago. You dragged me across the country, promising a better life, a closer relationship to God, and to each other, and more blessings in heaven, and all I have gotten is pain and heartbreak. I have been beaten down with lies and abuse until I feel like I’m a shell of a woman. I didn’t know how to stop the things happening before my very eyes, and I was too worn down with lies to even know better. But not anymore. This little girl lying here in this bed, covered in bruises, and welts, by the hand of a man whose job it is to lead her down the right path with love is your daughter. And your response is to tell her to pray for God’s mercy and to beg the prophet to give her penance? What kind of father are you? What kind of man are you?”

Carolyn managed to pop her eyes open just a sliver to catch a glimpse of the outraged shock on her father's face—he was red faced and sputtering—just as she expected. His mouth was open as if to argue, but so far nothing had come out. Myra, on the other hand, was nearly shaking with rage, but there was a calm strength radiating off her, the likes of which Carolyn had never seen.

Finally, her father found his voice. “Now, wait just a minute, Myra. You are out of line. I never laid a hand on you.”

“You're right, Franklin, you didn't. But you allowed him to while you turned a blind eye. And I wasn't allowed to complain, or believe that it was wrong or unfair, because he was your revered prophet, and he was just showing his care for us all by helping you to mold me into a better wife, and a more Godly woman. And, not being able to turn to you for protection—that was worse. And you know what? As much as I have been trained not to believe it, deep down I know that I deserve better than that.”

Her father had the decency to look ashamed, and perhaps that was what prompted Myra to show him leniency with the next words out of her mouth. “You are not an evil man, Franklin, just a misguided, and brainwashed one. Outside of his evil influence, you could be the man God truly wants you to be. I am leaving tomorrow, and taking Carolyn, and Lord willing, Maddie, and Heddy with me. You can come with us, but we are going either way. I will not turn a blind eye to this man's sickness any longer. He is not a prophet; he is a pervert.”

Carolyn was cheering inside—of all the things she had expected to happen when her parents got here, she had not in her wildest dreams imagined that her meek and subservient mother would take a stand such as this one. She prayed that her father was not able to talk her mother out of it. Carolyn had heard stories of Green Valley growing up. It was where her mother and father had grown up, and met, and it was nothing like Filmore. Even with the pain she was in and her natural fear of the unknown, Carolyn could hardly wait. A move to Green Valley was a fresh start, where nobody knew her, and she could be anything and anybody she wanted.

The thought was a warm blanket around her as she drifted off into a drug induced sleep. It was the sort of deep, but half alert state of sleep where you can hear everything going on around you, but it's like you're in a tunnel of fog, and your body is too heavy and tired to react, and you're not quite sure when you wake up, if it was real, or if it was all a dream.

“Myra,” she heard Heddy say to her mother, “are you sure going back to Green Valley is the best idea? You told me you didn’t agree with, you know, that thing they do!”

“Pshaw,” her mother replied. Whatever that thing had been, her mother didn’t seem worried about it. “Green Valley is safe. What they do is consensual. They are nice people, with a certain belief system, sure, but the bishop is a good man whom I have known all my life. Anything is better than spending even another day here, Heddy. I won’t do it. Look at Carolyn. How would you feel if that were Maddie lying there, and think really hard, because I guarantee that if you don’t come with me, in a few years, it will be. And that man is getting worse every day. There’s always a new vision, a new restriction, a new form of penance. He is a no good, narcissistic, pathological sadist, among other things.”

“I... just... what if Frank doesn’t come? We’ll be ruined women, shamed by our husband! Will they even take us? You know what the prophet does to shamed women!”

“Heddy, listen to me carefully. There is no prophet in Green Valley. There is nobody playing God. There is just a Bishop, and he does his job well. We will be safe there, whether Frank decides to follow us or not. I’ve already put a call in to Bishop Miller and let him know we need emergency assistance. They are setting up a place for us. It might be small, but it will be clean, and it will be safe.”

“Okay.” Heddy was quiet for a minute, before piping up again. Heddy was a good strong woman, but she was the type to worry everything to death, and she especially hated the unknown. “Are you sure we even want Frank to come, Myra? He’s an easily influenced sort. What if he falls into their ways, and tries to, you know?”

“Oh, for Heaven’s sake, Heddy, of course we want him to come. He’s our husband and the girls’ father, and for the last time, there is nothing to worry about in Green Valley. Not even that. It’s completely different than what you are thinking. Not that it matters. Frank is going to have to prove himself changed and reformed from that man’s crazed belief system before he is coming near me with a ten-foot pole. I said he could come with us. I didn’t say I was ready to forgive and forget.”

“I like it when you get feisty, Myra. You should do it more often.”

There was a hint of a smile. “Well, when I’ve had enough, you always know. Now, are you in or what? If you are, you need to go pack up. But don’t load the truck until it’s dark. It’s



safer to leave without tipping anyone off. Bring as little as possible. We can replace things, not people. Be careful.”

“Yes, I’m in and I will. You be careful too.”

The memory took Carolyn’s breath away and filled her with thankfulness. The last three years in Green Valley had been healing and life changing. Going back to Filmore would be a disaster of epic proportions. Maddie was fourteen now, and rebellious in her own ways. With or without the prophet, she would never survive the harsh rules and stifling lifestyle. And Carolyn herself would never be accepted there, never allowed to live a life that wasn’t filled with pain and penance, not after what she had done. After all, she had been a driving force in the investigation that had finally put the prophet behind bars where he belonged. And just because the man was in jail did not make Filmore a safe place to be. The residents of Filmore were brainwashed from birth, so much so that the prophet still ruled over them with an iron fist—even from his prison cell.

Shaking herself from her fog, Carolyn stood on shaky legs, shocked to hear the soft murmur of her father's voice from the other room. She tiptoed to the French doors, and stood trying not to breathe. “Okay, Del, I’ll see what I can do. March at the latest—I understand.”

She heard the click of the dial tone as her father hung up, and heard his footsteps as he made his way back down the hall to whichever bedroom he was staying in tonight. She thought it was Heddy’s, but she couldn’t be sure. Suddenly without appetite, she scurried up the stairs to her room and locked the door behind her. She barely crossed the threshold of her room, before the hopelessness took over and tears truly began to fall and her body convulsed in racking breathless cries—eventually crying herself into a fitful sleep.

\* \* \*

The smells of coffee and bacon lulled Carolyn out of bed in the morning even though facing her father was the last thing she wanted to do. It was Christmas break and there was no avoiding it. She quickly showered, scrubbing her face clean of tear tracks and got dressed.

Maddie was sitting at the table, slurping down a sugary chocolate cereal that would never have been allowed in Filmore—the prophet controlled everything, even what they ate and drank. Her mothers were laughing and carrying on in the kitchen, and her father had his face buried in the business section of the daily paper.

When Carolyn sank into the seat across from him, he lowered his paper and eyed her sharply. “Have you been praying, Carolyn, for God’s word about your future husband? Just because you are in college doesn’t mean you don’t need to be open to His plans for that area of your life.”

It was so opposite everything that had ever been said by her father about the strange courting rituals of Green Valley that Carolyn’s breath caught in her throat. She instinctively opened her mouth to argue, but then she caught a twinge of hope in his hardened expression and realized... he was giving her an out. Did he know she had heard, or was he just doing his level best to ensure that she had a back-up plan regardless of his decision?

She stared back at him open mouthed, trying to figure out what to say and do. The truth was she hadn’t. Carolyn honestly wasn’t sure she believed in God, or that she would be able to hear him, or know what he wanted even if he appeared in front of her and shouted his plans to her face. Praying about your future husband was somewhat of a ritual here in Green Valley. Most girls start praying for their vision around sixteen. Carolyn had never so much as wondered. She didn’t have any plans to stay in Green Valley and become a first, second, or third wife. She had planned to get out after graduation and become somebody’s only wife. Her father was still staring at her intently, in that expectant way he had, and she knew what he wanted her to say, and as sick as it made her, she knew why.

“Yes, Sir,” she whispered thickly. “I’ve been praying, and I believe I have received an answer. I shall take it to the bishop this afternoon, so he can pray on it as well.” It seemed like quite the unholy thing to lie about, but she didn’t know what else to do, and her answer would bide her some time to decide. If her parents thought there was a wedding in the works, they would leave her alone long enough for her to come up with a real plan.

“Good, that’s real good, Carolyn.” The thickness in his voice matched her own, and she was shocked to see his eyes were clouded with unshed tears. The sight made her panic. She knew without being told what it meant. He was taking the rest of them and moving back to Filmore.

All she could do was nod in response. The scent of the bacon and the soft melodic laughter coming from the kitchen were now turning her stomach in knots. She hurried to excuse herself, muttering something about needing to finish her Christmas shopping before the crowds got too crazy. She grabbed her purse and Heddy’s car keys and ran out the door.

She held it together by a thread as she turned out the driveway and made the short drive through town. It wasn't until she was on the highway to Everton that she gave herself permission to lose it.

“Mother Freaking Fudge Sticks!” she screamed, pounding her fists on the steering wheel and not giving a damn whether anyone was looking at her funny. Her southern speak always turned heads here in Green Valley. She was used to it by now. “Think, Carolyn, think. Can you stop this, or is it all you can do to save yourself?”

She already knew the answer. Her father had all but given it to her. She was going to have to get married, and since she hadn't been focusing on dating in college, it was going to have to be someone from here in Green Valley. In her mind, there was only one acceptable answer—the soon to be newly appointed bishop himself—Lucas Miller.

It felt deceitful to not at least try to pray for a vision, so that's what she did all day, driving aimlessly back and forth on the road between Everton and Green Valley, trying to get up the courage to do what must be done. She never prayed, ever, and she was utterly convinced that unless Jesus appeared next to her in the flesh with a giant neon sign that said “I am Jesus,” it wouldn't matter if he answered her prayers or not, because she wouldn't know a sign if it smacked her upside the head. For all she knew, the fact that Luke was literally the only name in her head could be a sign. Maybe the reason was that he was the answer to her prayers.

“Yeah, right, Carolyn, maybe it's a sign that you're crazy and selfish, and you're not good enough to marry someone like Lucas Miller anyway, and you need to give it up, go back to school, and just wait and see what happens. March is three months away. A lot can happen in three months.”

If she didn't get married, would her dad make her go back to Filmore? She knew in her heart the answer was yes.

She even tried to make peace with it—to convince herself that with the prophet in jail, things would actually get better, and that her daddy wouldn't go back if he didn't honestly think things would be better. But the truth was, she didn't trust that that was true. Myra had been the one to put her foot down and force them to move. Her father had just followed, and he hadn't seemed too happy about it at the time. Carolyn, however, had been overjoyed. While she didn't truly feel led to the polygamist lifestyle, Green Valley represented freedom.

The memories of those first few weeks in Green Valley snuck up on Carolyn, her stomach clenching as the waves of emotion were physically painful to remember. It had been too long since she had been so stifled, she had nearly forgotten the reality of it. She couldn't go back. And if going forward meant becoming the second Mrs. Lucas Miller, that's what she would do.

Decision finally made, Carolyn turned the car towards Green Valley one last time. She was going to see Luke's father—the retiring bishop of Green Valley—and she was doing it today.

# Chapter One

Lucas stared at his father, slack jawed, unable to hide his disdain at his father's unexpected news. It wasn't that unexpected really. As the newly-appointed bishop of the polygamous community of Green Valley, Lucas expected that he would someday be called to take a second wife. He had not expected it to be so soon, and out of all the women in Green Valley, the fact that his second wife would be somebody like Carolyn had never crossed his mind. "Carolyn? Carolyn Atwood?" His heart dropped to the pit of his stomach and sat there like a rock at the bottom of the ocean.

It crossed his mind that this would have made an April Fool's joke of epic proportions, but it was January first, not April first, and his father wasn't much of a jokester.

"I've been called to marry Carolyn Atwood? My pregnant wife's high school nemesis? Dad, are you sure? Have you prayed about it? Like really prayed, because I hate to say it but this could be Carolyn's way of stirring up trouble."

His father, the previous bishop of Green Valley until today, rubbed his hands over his face and sighed. "Yes, Lucas, I've prayed about little else for the last two weeks since she came to me. And, Lucas, as much as it pains me to say it, and as much as I don't quite understand it, I am absolutely certain that this is God's will."

"Dammit!" Lucas swore under his breath, then winced. He was the bishop now. Such language was unacceptable, and yet here it was, less than ten minutes after he became officially official. His father was probably questioning his wisdom at appointing Lucas for this responsibility laden position at such a young age.

Lucas's father said nothing, just raised his eyebrows and frowned, a sign that he was hyper-aware of his son's delicate position.

Lucas sank into the large leather chair behind the desk that was now his and groaned. "Dad, what do I do?"

"You pray," his father said simply. "You pray for understanding, you pray for peace, and you pray for Carolyn, son, because as unbelievable as it seems, I truly believe that this is something she is struggling with as well. She seemed unsure when she came to see me and there's been a cloud of unease about her these last few weeks."

“If she isn’t sure, or she’s unhappy, she’s supposed to wait. And pray. Why didn’t she just wait?”

“I don’t know, son. I don’t know.”

\* \* \*

Carolyn woke up in her dorm room on the fifth of January and glared at her unblinking phone. Lucas knew by now. He had to. His father had told her he was going to wait until after the Christmas holiday, once his new title of bishop was official. She had been glad to know she would be back at school when the proverbial crap hit the proverbial fan, and had agreed it was for the best. But, Luke’s first official day had been three days ago, and she still hadn’t heard from him. Why hadn’t he called her? March was two short months away and time was of the essence.

After her meeting with Bishop Miller, her father’s behavior had gotten stranger and more suspect. The late-night phone calls had continued, and he had gotten in the habit of slamming his laptop shut every time somebody entered the room. He seemed nervous and on edge all the time, and it had been difficult for Carolyn to witness his erratic behavior, and then look at her mothers and her sister, happy and free and thriving in Green Valley and know that that was all about to end. Unless she could do something to change it. And what? What could she do? The only thing she knew how to do for sure was to save herself. Once she was safe, and she and Lucas were married, she would come clean and ask for his help.

Narrowing her eyes, Carolyn frowned at her phone. It was Friday. She had hoped he would call before the weekend, so that they could move quickly and possibly set up a date for the weekend, but it was beginning to look like that wasn’t in the cards. “C’mon, Lucas, please hurry,” she pleaded aloud, knowing that it would do no good. It was barely eight in the morning. Lucas was probably on his way to a long day at the office and she had to get to class.

\* \* \*

His hand rested on his office phone, but he couldn’t bring himself to pick up the receiver and dial. After three straight days of praying at every chance he got, he had been filled with a sense of urgency. God wanted him to act, but Lucas didn’t feel ready, for a lot of reasons. First and foremost was the fact that he had not told Rosa. He couldn’t. As her husband and leader, it was his job to be firm and steady and help her find peace... but he hadn’t found peace yet himself.

He felt sure that this truly was God's plan, and an urgency that he was supposed to contact her, and set the wheels in motion. But when it came down to the idea that he, Lucas Miller, was supposed to wed Carolyn Atwood, and apparently soon, he just couldn't picture a world in which he, Rosa, Carolyn, and soon, the new baby could co-exist happily under the same roof as a family. He just couldn't.

Moving his hand from the receiver once more, Lucas wished, not for the first time, that he could talk to someone besides his father about his current conundrum. It wasn't the first time in the history of Green Valley that the addition of a wife posed a problem within a marriage due to the fact that the new wife had a unique relationship with a previous wife. Not at all. Lucas' own brother-in-law, Ben, had been in a similar situation a few years ago when he and his first wife, Mollie, had been newlyweds and he had received the call that he was to marry Mollie's best friend Beth Ann. Ben would be a great one to talk to, but he couldn't because he hadn't told Rosa, and Beth Ann was Rosa's sister. Ben's own father, Owen, also had experience as he had married his wife's own sister, but that, too, was too close for comfort. As lost as he was, there was no excuse for taking a chance on it getting back to Rosa before he talked to her,

Normally, custom dictated that he tell Rosa before moving on to contact Carolyn, but that's not what his gut was telling him this time. And it wasn't what he believed God was telling him either. With a heavy sigh, he picked up the phone once more. This time he actually dialed.

\* \* \*

Carolyn's breath hitched in her chest as her phone rang for the sixth time in the last hour since she had gotten back to her dorm room, and finally, she recognized the number as the one from the church in Green Valley.

Trying to stay calm, and praying she was able to take this call without bursting into tears, and confessing everything, Carolyn crossed her fingers, plastered on her biggest fake smile, and hit the green button to answer the call.

"Hello, Carolyn Atwood speaking."

"Hello, Carolyn, this is Lucas Miller of Green Valley." His introduction was stiff and formal, causing her to falter before continuing.

"Why hello, Lucas Miller of Green Valley," Carolyn said with an exaggerated giggle. "I know exactly who you are, silly boy. How could I forget a man as sweet and handsome as yourself?"

As soon as the words left her lips, she winced. She was fully aware that she used flirting as a coping mechanism in uncomfortable situations. She was also fully aware that out of all the young men in Green Valley, Lucas was the least likely to respond with encouragement. “Anyhoo,” she continued, her southern accent fuller than usual, “It’s absolutely lovely to hear from you, Lucas, though I can’t imagine why you are calling.”

“Cut the bull-honkey, Carolyn. You know exactly why I am calling. It has to do with you telling my father that you had a vision we were to be married.”

“Oh.” She hesitated, her flirtatious and blasé southern belle demeanor flying out the window leaving the insecure, self-loathing teenager she had once been in its place. “That.”

“Yes, that.” Luke’s response was simple and pointed.

“I.. how do you feel about that?” Wiping her eyes, she tried to hide the tremor in her voice. She was glad this was happening over the phone so Lucas couldn’t see how close she was to tears anticipating his reaction.

“Honestly, I feel confused. I also feel certain that this is right, and that it is His will, whether or not I understand his reasons. I also feel like it’s important for us to talk face to face as soon as possible.”

Lucas’ insistence that this was God’s plan made her feel sick to her stomach. As a man of God, Lucas took God’s will very seriously. Someday he would find out that this wasn’t his will at all, but Carolyn’s saving grace. She hoped he could forgive her when that day came. For now, she focused on the positive. He wanted to see her and soon.

“That would be lovely!” Carolyn forced herself to sound cheerful and gracious despite her conflicting emotions.

“Great. How does tomorrow night sound? I have a meeting in the morning and I need to work on my sermon for Sunday, but I figure I should be able to leave here by four at the latest. We can get an early dinner, and then walk around downtown for a bit and talk? Have you tried the new Italian place downtown yet? We can meet there around five, if that works for you.”

“Meet tomorrow night at five at Luciano’s? That sounds perfect, and no, I haven’t been there yet.” She didn’t add that the reason for that was that Italian was her least favorite cuisine. The new restaurant had great reviews, and she was sure she could find something she would want to eat. If the food was sub-par, the company would make up for it.

“Excellent. We can try it together. I’ll see you tomorrow night then. Goodbye, Carolyn.”



“Goodbye, Lucas.”

She hung up the phone, expecting to feel relief that he had called, that her plan was finally moving forward, even if she didn't feel any of the joy or excitement that one was supposed to feel when one was courting—but relief didn't come.

\* \* \*

Luciano's was new downtown, a small space in a historic part of the downtown scape. It occupied a corner spot that had been an old-fashioned candy shoppe and soda fountain for as long as Lucas could remember, up until the owner passed away last year.

Lucas got there early. He had written his sermon last night so as to get a head start today in case of traffic. It was a good thing, too, he was only fifteen minutes early instead of the hour he would have been if there was no traffic. The interior of the restaurant was classy-casual, well-lit and decorated in yellow, red, and green tones, with paintings of grapes, olives, and wine bottles scattered around, reminding Lucas of a Tuscan villa. He asked for a table in the back, hoping for some privacy—tonight was going to be awkward enough as it was.

After being assured that they had a private table available, and would save it for him, he waited for Carolyn out front.

To his surprise, she arrived on foot, and dressed much more modestly than usual. A yellow button front cardigan covered a white blouse that was actually buttoned to the bottom of her collarbone for once, and gave way to a full poplin skirt, that was blue and decorated with large yellow flowers. Breathing an inward sigh of relief, he let go of his worry about Carolyn's wardrobe. What she was wearing was still much more revealing than most women in Green Valley would wear, but for Carolyn it was tame.

Good. He told himself. That meant Carolyn fully understood what his expectations would be of her as a bishop's wife, at least in the modesty department. It was one less thing for them to talk about tonight since there were so many others.

Nervously, he watched as Carolyn made her way down the sidewalk until she reached him, and to his surprise stood stiffly in front of him, as if she were unsure what to do or say around him, now that he was no longer Lucas, the boy she had gone to school with, but was now Lucas, Bishop of Green Valley and her future husband. He had never before seen Carolyn Atwood speechless in any situation. It was totally out of character and completely endearing.

It also gave Lucas a chance to make the first move. To lead a bit and set the tone for the rest of their relationship. For that he was grateful. Lucas was no stranger to being a leader, in many areas of his life, but a powerhouse like Carolyn could have made it difficult. Maybe he had been wrong about her, he mused thoughtfully. Maybe she had a submissive side after all. Or maybe she was just nervous. Knowing Carolyn—that was the more likely scenario.

Extending his arm out for her to take, he guided her into the restaurant, setting the tone for the evening, and he hoped, for their marriage.

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Carolyn stared blankly at her soon to be husband as she chewed slowly on a piece of garlic bread. Their food had barely been delivered and the waitress hadn't even been out of earshot before he jumped straight into the hard questions.

“So when do you want to get married?” had been the first thing out of his mouth. No small talk, no niceties, just straight down to business.

“Hello, Lucas.” She responded with only a hint of sarcasm. “How was your day? How was the drive? Did you get your sermon written?”

Lucas had the decency to at least look slightly embarrassed. “I’m sorry, Carolyn, please forgive me. I just figured that since you are out here going to college, and I am busy taking care of the town, I’m not sure how much face-to-face time we will actually have before the wedding, so I was trying to make the most of the time we do have. There are a lot of things I was hoping we would get to discuss tonight. But you’re correct, I could have waited at least a few minutes, and at least asked how your day was.” Lucas smiled, mischief sparkling in his green eyes, before he continued. “So, how was your day?”

“It was fine. I studied and did laundry. Very exciting. How was yours?” she asked pointedly. After all, she had asked him first.

“Oh, um, it was good. Thankfully uneventful. I finished my sermon last night so I wouldn’t have to rush today.”

“That’s good.” Carolyn stalled, realizing she was much too nervous to continue small talk. She should have let him dive right in. What kinds of things did they need to discuss? Lucas seemed to have things in mind, but she had no idea what they were. Frantically racking her brain for possible topics, she latched onto the first one that came to mind. “So, how pissed is Rosa?”

The change in Luke's countenance was instant, setting all her senses on high alert as she took in the tightened jaw, raised brows, narrowed eyes, and the way he drummed his fingers angrily on the table top. "I believe," he began humorlessly, "that what you meant to say is 'How angry is Rosa,' or 'How upset is Rosa,' because I'm sure a smart college girl like yourself is aware that soon-to-be bishop's wives shouldn't be using swear words."

"Yeah, yeah," Carolyn muttered. "I notice you declined to answer the question," she added with a smirk.

"I did, and there are several reasons for that," Lucas said flatly. It was obvious to Carolyn that he was more than a little annoyed. "The first is that there are, as I have mentioned, a great many other things that we need to discuss, and the second is that I haven't told her yet."

"Oh, I see, ashamed of me already?" She was gearing up for an epic rant of Carolyn proportions, but Lucas cut her off before she could even take a breath.

"Knock it off, Carolyn. We've barely started talking, and you're already skating on thin ice."

"What does that even mean?" she scoffed. "What happens if the ice breaks, Lucas? What are you going to do, spank me?"

She instantly regretted the sarcastic question as dozens of hushed conversations she had heard over the years sprang to mind and she remembered that the ethos of Green Valley was one that advocated domestic discipline. What did Lucas think of that? She wanted to know, but she was afraid to ask.

"Well, Carolyn, since you brought it up, that was one of the things I wanted us to talk about tonight."

Luke's expression was one of amusement, but that didn't help make Carolyn any less nervous about what he might say next.

"I'm the head of my home. I believe that a domestic discipline dynamic is a great tool in a marriage. I believe in it more than I believe in polygamy, even. In my home, I have rules that I expect to be followed, and punishments I employ if they are not."

"I understand," Carolyn whispered, swallowing to hold back the tears that threatened to spill and the questions that she was aching to ask. She didn't want to get scared and emotional. She just wanted to keep him talking. She had heard the conversations; she knew in theory that a spanking given by your husband out of love for the sake of correction was inherently different

than a beating given by a power hungry, narcissistic sadist for no other reason than to exercise his power as a prophet. She even believed it mostly. If he could just keep talking and give more details, maybe it would be enough to ease the fears she was too afraid to voice.

“Do you, Carolyn? Do you understand that if you don’t follow my rules you are likely to find yourself over my knees for a long hard bare bottom spanking?”

The open frankness with which he casually uttered phrases like “over my knee” and “bare bottom spanking” had Carolyn squirming in her seat. She had never been bare, and she had never been over anyone's knee before. What she had been on the receiving end of had been less of a spanking and more of a beating. She was old enough to understand the difference in theory, but she had to wonder how she would feel when she was actually in that position. Desperate to keep him talking still, she posed the first question she could think of.

“Bare bottom? Isn’t that terribly improper?”

“It won’t be once we are married. You’re not planning on doing anything to earn a spanking before your wedding day, are you, Carolyn?”

“No, Sir! I mean, no.” Carolyn quickly corrected herself.

“ ‘No, Sir’, is just fine,” Lucas smirked. “In fact, when you are being disciplined I will expect it, so you may as well get used to it now.”

If anyone but Lucas had said such a thing to her, she would have instantly gone on the defensive, but Luke’s easy smile, and twinkling eyes made it easier to take. It almost looked like he was joking, except he wasn’t.

“Anyway,” he continued, “just try not to get into any trouble before we are married and there won’t be a problem. But if there is, I won’t hesitate to deal with it. I’ll just spank harder over your clothes. It won’t be the first time.”

Carolyn’s eyes narrowed suspiciously as she took in the meaning behind his veiled comment. “Yeah right!” she scoffed in disbelief. “You expect me to believe that you spanked Rosa before you were married or even now? Perfect little Rosa who never does anything wrong?”

“Nobody is perfect, Carolyn. Especially not Rosa. Remember that time she shoved us both into the mud puddle?”

“Oh!” Carolyn laughed at the memory. It had been the first time she had even seen Rosa behave badly or sound angry. Secretly, she had enjoyed the moment, and had respected Rosa

more afterwards. Carolyn liked people who stood up for themselves, and she really liked people with flaws. After all, she had so many of them herself. “Wait! You spanked her for that? Lucas! I was awful to her. I totally deserved it. I would have pushed me in the mud, too! Or worse!”

“I’m not arguing that Rosa was not the only one at fault. However, she was the only one whose discipline was my responsibility.”

“Hmmm, well I guess I got lucky,” Carolyn teased.

“I guess so,” Lukas agreed. “That time.”

“What do you mean?” Carolyn had a sinking suspicion that she knew exactly what turn this conversation was about to take.

“You and Rosa must try to get along as sister wives. I will not live in an unhappy home, with my wives fighting all the time, understand? If I see it happening, I will put a swift end to it.”

Carolyn caught his intent quickly and nodded. “Yes, Sir. I will do my best not to make any trouble, but I can’t force her to like me, and I can’t change the things I have done in the past.”

“No, but you can be sure not to do any new ones.”

“Yes, Sir. Anything else?”

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Lucas had to admit that he was very pleased with how the night was going so far. Carolyn had been funny and agreeable, and as always, easy on the eyes. He liked it immensely when she responded to his questions and edicts, with a shy but firm, “Yes, Sir.” He had expected her to scoff at that, but she hadn’t. It must be her southern upbringing, he mused, anger pooling in his stomach as he remembered his brief stay in Filmore, Georgia, the polygamist commune in the south where Carolyn’s family had moved from only three years ago. He knew he needed to ask her about her experiences there, but tonight was going so well, and discussing Filmore would put a fast damper on the mood if his instincts were correct.

Besides that, Carolyn was waving a hand in front of his face and gazing at him expectantly. “Earth to Lucas! Where did you go? I asked if there was anything else, and you just spaced out for a bit.”

Picking up his water, he took a long sip as he mentally gathered his bearings before speaking. “Rules will probably change from time to time as we grow and find our groove as a family. That’s what happens. For now, I will just say to remember that your place in the

community will be as the bishop's wife and act and dress accordingly. Be respectful. Obey if I ask you to do or not do things. Keep yourself safe. Lock your doors, keep your phone charged, and follow laws, things like that."

"That does seem pretty reasonable," Carolyn agreed. "Except you mentioned dressing like a bishop's wife, and I need to know exactly what you mean by that." She winced and Luke noted that she looked and sounded nearly frantic. "I can't wear long skirts and high necklines, Lucas, I can't."

She looked genuinely distressed at the thought, and a memory of the high neck, ankle length dresses that were a requirement in Filmore danced across Lucas' memory. The same dark heavy fabrics every day, even in the sweltering heat of a southern summer. He had always felt sorry for those ladies. Filled with compassion for Carolyn and the girl she once was, he took her hand across the table.

"Carolyn, I'm not asking you to become something you're not, or to do anything other than be mindful of who I am. Cover your shoulders, keep your necklines modest, and your skirts knee length. That's all I ask."

Relief shone all over Carolyn's delicate features, and she squeezed his hand happily. "Oh thank you, Lucas!" I can do that!"

The way the anxiety instantly melted off her features at his words was both telling and heartbreaking, and made him angry at her past, and more than a little nauseous. It was time to turn the conversation to lighter things. Like wedding themes and colors. Women liked to talk about that kind of thing, Lucas figured, and it wouldn't kill him to get to know the lighter side of Carolyn.