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Dana Lamers

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Two Different Worlds

by Dana Lamers

Amanda looked out the small train window and stared out into the distance. It had been weeks since she had seen anything familiar to her; and her legs yearned to stand on solid ground. Yet as soon as she thought of arriving at the small town in Montana, her heart raced, and her stomach seemed to jump to her throat. Her hands began to sweat, and she clasped the railing next to her seat with the little strength she had left. Her heavy mind was filled with doubt. In a matter of days she would see the face of her husband for the first time. She would cook supper for a man she barely knew; but then she reminded herself of her past. The loneliness she had dealt with in England was unbearable and she felt sure that signing up to be a mail order bride was the right thing, if not the only thing she could do to improve her way of life.

An hour away in Rawlins, a quiet town in Montana, Bryan slowly pushed his horses on as he traveled down a dusty country road. He ran his fingers through his coarse, dark brown hair and let out a long sigh. For so long his mind had been heavy with the pressures of his ranch. He wished he had someone to talk to, to confide in; a sudden pang of loneliness shot through his heart; but in the back of his mind he felt a bit of hope. He pictured someone making the long trip over from England. When he pictured this girl, a chill ran down his spine. He still couldn’t believe he had actually signed up to order a wife! Everything he knew about her was imprinted on a small manilla card that he had been sent from the coordinator of this process. He pictured the card and his mind flashed the familiar words:

Taylor, Amanda 5'4" from: Manchester, England, 22 years old. Should arrive August 20. If delayed, you will be notified by the stagecoach office.
"Bryan and Amanda Stanford," Bryan muttered, putting his name with hers. "Lord, please help us to be right for each other."

As he tied up his horses, he realized he had gotten there forty-five minutes early. He started to walk down the streets of the small town. He stopped at Smith's General Store and walked in. He then came upon the cloth section. He realized he had nothing to give his soon-to-be wife. He picked out some pretty green fabric. A few minutes later he walked out with a package under his arm.

Bryan began to relax as he waited near the stagecoach office, but as soon as the sound of horses' hooves against the dry ground grew louder and louder, Bryan's anxiety slowly flooded back.

The black stagecoach came to an abrupt stop, and the driver jumped out to open the door for the passengers. Bryan took a few steps forward while his heart pounded faster than he thought possible. First an older man and woman came out, then a sophisticated looking businessman with a moustache and wire rimmed glasses, carrying a briefcase. Last came a young lady. She had wavy, long brown hair; she was dressed in an older blue flowered dress and had a pleasant but nervous look on her face. The small businessman stepped forward and took a piece of paper out of his pocket and announced, "Excuse me, but are you Bryan Stanford?"

"I'm Bryan," he spoke quietly.

"I'm here to fill your orders for a bride and to make sure the wedding ceremony and so forth goes as planned." The man spoke with authority and power in his voice.

Amanda smiled, but inside she was a wreck. She hated the way she was being treated like property; things were hard enough already. Let's get this uncomfortable part over with. She glanced over at the man with brown hair. He was tall and muscular. Amanda couldn't believe she was meeting the man she was waiting for.

"Amanda Taylor," he pointed at the brown haired woman, "this is Bryan Stanford." He pointed to the tall, more muscular man. The two walked toward each other and shook hands, their eyes locked, and Bryan broke the silence by saying, "It's nice to meet you, Amanda."

Amanda felt a chill go down her spine as she heard Bryan say her name for the first time. She simply said, "It's nice to meet you, too."

Now the rest of the afternoon was ahead of them. First, they would all eat lunch together at the hotel restaurant. There were arrangements made for the wedding ceremonies at 2:30. Amanda took a deep breath to prepare
herself for an unforgettable, exciting, but uncertain day.

The two strangers sat around the elegant dinner table wondering what to talk about. Although they knew almost nothing about each other and plenty of questions were flying through their heads, no one said a word. The air seemed heavy with emotions.

Finally, Bryan worked up the nerve to ask Amanda about her life in England. She didn’t know how to respond. She didn’t want him to think she was a pessimistic person or that she was fussy, but her life in England had been very difficult. England wasn’t the paradise that it was sometimes made out to be, unless one were rich. The upper class people seemed to be elegant and well-known, but the lower classes lived a poor, hard life. They seemed to work harder than the upper class, but they got less money, credit and respect. The social status had a lot to do with the family one was born into. Unfortunately, Amanda was born into a poor family. Her mother died in childbirth with her and her father of scarlet fever when she was eight. She was raised by her grandma, whom she loved very much, but because of her grandmother’s old age, Amanda was forced to leave the house every day for eight hours to work. Last year her grandma had died, and it was nearly impossible to live alone, so when she read about mail order brides she signed up immediately, not because she wanted to, but because it was her only choice. Now she felt embarrassed as she looked down at her ragged dress. How could she say all this and not make Bryan feel uncomfortable. Simple, she thought silently, keep my answer simple; I can tell him more later.

"England is a very busy place right now; everyone is caught up in business."

"Was that your occupation?" Bryan asked.

Amanda looked down as she spoke, "I sold goods and food on the streets of Manchester; I was a peddler."

"Oh." Now Bryan didn’t know how to respond. His fiancee was poor, maybe even homeless. He looked at her faded clothes. She probably wanted to come here for my money, not to find love. Another girl probably would have been better for me. She came for wealth, not for companionship. A sudden wave of frustration swept over him.

On the other side of the table, Amanda cried inside. I should have known that no one would accept me. I thought I could start a new life in America, but I was wrong. I’m still as poor and unimportant as I was in England.

As the two walked down the streets of the small town of Rawlins,
Amanda looked around. The small farm town fit her better than Manchester’s busy city. The streets were less crowded in Rawlins, and everyone seemed to be friendly. While Amanda checked out the town she would reside in, Bryan walked down the streets with his hat tilted down a little lower than usual. Although he would never admit it, he was embarrassed by Amanda. He wasn’t embarrassed by the kind of person she was, but by her appearance. He walked a bit faster to escape his anxiety.

The professional man they had met earlier was standing near the front of the church next to the pastor. "Well, are you ready?" he asked as the two walked into the small country church together.

"Sure," Bryan responded unenthusiastically. They were introduced to the pastor, and then the simple service began. It was definitely not the wedding Bryan or Amanda had dreamed of. There were no special dresses or suits, no family members or friends watching, no special music, and no special meaning to the couple except for the promises of loyalty they were exchanging.

After the wedding Bryan brought around the team of horses with all of Amanda’s belongings already packed in the back. They then began their ride home through the countryside.

The ride home was very quiet; their minds, heavy. Amanda had dreamed before she came what her new home might look like. Her mind was buzzing with images of the house. Bryan wondered what Amanda thought of him so far. Amanda’s curiosity finally got to her. "What do you do for a living?" she asked.

Bryan smiled; his farm was one thing he could never stop talking about. He was proud of his ranch and he didn’t hide that very well. He began to tell about his cattle ranch, and everything involved with it. When he was finished talking Amanda smiled and said, "It sounds like you’ve been quite successful."

Bryan began to smile but stopped abruptly. So that’s what she’s getting at, he thought, she’s after money again. His eyes became distant, and he burned with anger. He quickly turned his horses down one last quick drive and then curved into the driveway of his cabin. It was a small house with two bedrooms, with a kitchen and a parlor connected. The house was almost surrounded with pine trees. There was a nice sized barn to the west of the house. Far in the distance the tips of a few mountains were visible; with the sun setting, it was a beautiful sight. "How beautiful!" Amanda gasped quietly.
When the horses came to a stop, Bryan jumped down and helped Amanda off her seat. After they walked up to the door, Bryan quickly showed her around the house. He told her to make herself comfortable while he brought in her bags. As Bryan walked out of the house, Amanda looked around, not knowing how to make herself comfortable. She was feeling better. The ride home seemed better, and she liked the house and the beautiful setting around it, but still in the back of her mind Amanda sensed something was wrong. She saw the hurt look on Bryan’s face at the end of their conversation on the way to the house. She tried to push those puzzled feelings out of her mind as Bryan walked back into the house with her luggage.

The couple spent the rest of the night settling into the house. Although some moments seemed uncomfortable and most conversation was impersonal, everything went all right.

The next morning Amanda woke up wondering if she was supposed to make breakfast. She stood up slowly, first setting her small feet on the cold, hard floor. She stood up, sliding her thin robe on, wishing she had a warmer one; the years of wear had taken their toll on the fading white robe.

She stepped into the kitchen, finding a note on the table.

_Thought you were probably tired, let you sleep. Food on the counter, you can warm coffee. Make yourself at home, use anything you want. I’ll be home at 12:30 for lunch._

_Bryan_

Amanda felt her stomach sink. She had hoped she could have breakfast with the man she married; instead she was spending her first morning alone in an unfamiliar house. She looked through the cupboards for plates, silverware, and cups. Although it was her house now, she felt as if she were prying. As she ate her breakfast, she tried to decide what to do with herself until 12:30. It seemed as if Bryan expected dinner, so she could make that, but she didn’t want to seem to be trying to take over. After she finished eating, she washed the dishes with what she could find. Walking outside she felt the warmth of the sunshine against her back. In the distance she saw a figure working in the barn. Looking on the side of the house for more wood, she added more wood to the fire that Bryan must have left burning. All morning she tried to stay busy, cleaning around the house and making lunch. She decided to take Bryan’s advice and use any food she wanted. She fried some leftover ham and used some homemade bread. She
started to make some coffee, wondering what kind or how much food he usually made for himself. Finding some apples in a barrel, she began to cut them up. As she worked, she heard the stomp of work boots hitting the hard, dusty ground, getting louder and louder. Suddenly, her stomach seemed to tighten up, and she felt nervous all over again. "What am I doing to myself?" she mumbled. The door slowly opened and Amanda turned her head and uttered a quiet "hello."

"Good morning," said the voice Amanda had memorized already. Bryan walked over to the wash tub and began to wash his soiled hands. Amanda finished cutting up the apples and added them to the table, which was already set. She quickly put the ham on a plate and turned to see Bryan making his way to the table.

"Hungry?" Amanda tried to sound as cheerful as she could. She hoped she could talk to Bryan during dinner.

"Sure," he answered bluntly. He was beginning to wish he had never met Amanda. She wasn’t what he expected and he felt hopeless about his future. He was feeling sorry for himself and wasn’t trying to make things better.

After they had sat down and given thanks for the food, Amanda began handing it to Bryan. She hoped he approved of what she had made.

Bryan thought of the past few days as he ate. First he felt hopeful and optimistic, then nervous, and finally disappointed. He wished he could change the past few days and make them go smoother. Wondering why it bothered him so much that Amanda came from a poor family, he began to wish he could just close his eyes and ignore everything going on around him.

After dinner Amanda started cleaning up. She knew something was amiss while they ate. Bryan seemed almost disgusted with her. She reviewed the past few days and tried to think if she had done or said anything offensive. Her heart seemed heavy, and she thought she might cry, but no tears came.

Amanda worked the rest of the afternoon washing, cleaning, and cooking. She tried not to think about the problems she knew were happening, but her mind wandered all afternoon.

At supper it was again a quiet meal. They both dreaded the rest of the evening, which could be equally quiet. After Amanda had finished cleaning up, she had nothing else to do. Bryan sat in a chair next to the fireplace. She went and sat down in the other rocking chair across the room from him, not knowing what to do with herself. She began to rock back and
forth. "How was your day?" Amanda asked, trying to start a conversation.

"Good," Bryan said quickly, not even looking up from his book.

Well, if he's not going to talk, I will, she thought, becoming frustrated. "What did you do?"

"Fed and took care of the cattle, fixed some equipment and stuff." Why am I being questioned, he thought. I'm not in the mood for this.

"By the way, should I do anything special tomorrow?" she persisted. "Whatever," Bryan replied with a hint of disgust.

Amanda burned with anger. Why was she being treated like this? She felt like yelling, like screaming! She wanted answers to all the questions flying through her head, but she couldn't fight like that, it just wasn't the way she did things. Taking a deep breath, Amanda began speaking calmly.

"Bryan, may I ask you something?"

"Yeah," he said, still reading his book.


"I know there is something wrong, and if you're unhappy, I really would feel better if I knew."

"There's nothing to worry about," Bryan said firmly.

"Well, I'm worried," Amanda persisted.

Bryan got up and walked over to the window. "I guess I am a little concerned over your past. I don't know why you came, but I was hoping for companionship."

"Well, why do you think I would ask you all this if I didn't want the same?"

Bryan shrugged, "I don't know; when you said you were poor in England I just figured you came for money, 'cause you were so poor before and...."

Amanda looked down. "I thought this might have something to do with that. Bryan, I signed up because of that, but there is more to it." Amanda began to explain about Manchester. She told him how signing up to be a mail order bride was her only choice. She explained how she was interested in more than money though. "I just wanted to make a new life for myself here."

Bryan walked over to Amanda. "I'm so sorry, I don't know what to... Oh, wait just a minute." Bryan ran into the bedroom and grabbed the package he had bought the day before. He came back into the room and handed her the package. "I know this doesn't make up for what I said, but
open it anyway."

She slowly opened the paper and picked up the beautiful fabric. "I know this isn’t much," he began to say, "but I noticed your dress was kind of old, and this is a way to start anew."

"Bryan, this means more to me than you realize," Amanda said through tearing eyes. "I really love it!" She gave Bryan a warm embrace.

"Thank you," she said, knowing that Bryan accepted her now. The differences of the past wouldn’t be a problem anymore. She smiled knowing the long trip and all her insecurities were worth all the trouble.