

“Did you have any questions?” Jackson asked matter-of-factly as he walked up to their camp, waylaying Ruth who was tending the small fire he'd allowed them to have.

“What?” she blushed furiously at her own secret thoughts, imagining what he'd think of her if she voiced them out loud. She refused to look at him as he walked up next to her. “We could use some more wood,” Ruth muttered, hoping to change the subject.

Jackson ignored her comment, and the plentiful pile of wood right next to them, and continued his verbal seduction. “I asked if you had any questions — about me or what you saw earlier. You were curious enough to stay and look at my body. Don't you want to know anything else?” He inquired with the utmost calm.

*Oh, yes, everything.* The thought tumbled into Ruth's head before she could force her concentration back to putting more wood on the fire. But curiosity was no match for her mother's strict upbringing, so she kept her mouth firmly closed—and her hands busy filling the coffee pot—to avoid further temptation.

The movement didn't escape Jackson's notice. He usually made the coffee so her obvious attempt at distraction was all the encouragement he needed. “You're safe with me, you know.” He reached for her chin, lifting it up to brush the softest of kisses across her startled gasp.

“No one is here,” he reassured her. “No one will know what you ask me or what I answer back. So why not appease a little curiosity, Ruth?”

She was tempted. So tempted to ask, and even more so to touch him back. Her palms tingled with the need to stroke Jackson's bare skin. But she couldn't forget her mama's teachings or the fact that somewhere out there, she had a husband in the eyes of the law. If Jackson only knew it wasn't just one biblical sin she'd be committing but two, seeing as she was technically a married woman.

Jackson could sense the struggle within Ruth, so he retreated a few feet. He busied his hands putting on his shirt, hoping the sight of him less naked might put her more at ease.

“When I was a boy, I always wondered what all the fuss was about. I watched my older cousins commit more foolishness to get a girl just to spare a kiss and never understood all the fuss. Having watched the livestock breed for more years than I could count, I couldn't understand the difference. I know you must have witnessed a few things yourself growing up, seeing as your daddy was a sometimes animal doctor.”

Jackson lifted his brows, waiting expectantly for an answer.

Ruth's blush returned, whether from their conversation or from getting caught staring at Jackson's hands as he took his sweet time buttoning his shirt, even she didn't know. “Well, of course, I...” She turned three shades brighter the minute she locked eyes with Jackson, understanding that he knew she'd never manage the words. “I mean, I wasn't raised in a convent, now, was I?”

“So are you saying that you're not interested in knowing or that you already know?” He grinned in reply.

She wanted to strangle the man for enjoying her discomfort so much. “I don't see how that's any of your concern.”

“Since I have every intention of seducing you Ruth — whether before or after we marry being entirely up to you — I see it as my business.”

If Jackson hadn't been ready for it, she would have fallen face first into the fire, she was so surprised at his declaration.

“Hold on, Ruth, don't lose your nerve now. I wasn't planning on your fall from grace this very afternoon.” Jackson steadied her as she tried to push away more in reflex than real outrage. He sat down on a large, flat rock near the fire, pulling her down with him.

He had Ruth so off balance, both mentally and physically, she couldn't think to resist when he settled her between his legs, her back to his chest.

“Now, Miss Ruth, if I were you, I'd imagine having the same thoughts and questions as I had, but from the female perspective. I'm not sure I can manage that one just right, but I'll try. You be sure and steer me in the right direction, if once I get started, I'm not fully satisfying your curiosity. I don't want you to be surprised or nervous on our wedding night. I fully intend for us both to enjoy ourselves.”