Luanna and James

 Luanna stood face to face with James. How many years had it been she wondered. He looked completely different from the shifty eyed boy she remembered.

 “Luanna, I’ll be frank with you. I told myself that I would never come back here on account of how this town treated me. But the spirit told me to I’d find my wife here on account of how this town treated me. But the spirit told me to I’d find my wife here and I just felt it confirm that it was you. Is that same spirit speaking to you how it speaks to me?” James said.

 Luanna was speechless. She had felt a strong attraction to James ever since she was little. And she had gotten the impression years ago that James would be her one and only. She’d even prayed for it when she was younger. She never dreamed it would be so.

 “James, I’ve only had eyes for you even when we were growing up.”

 “Then you’ll marry me?”

 She nodded, “But there’s only one problem. I’m engaged to Jason.”

 He paused a long while, “That is a problem isn’t it. What should we do?”

 “I’ll talk to him.” Luanna said. “Oh no. He’ll blow himself into a tirade. He’ll tell me I’m a cheat and a flimsy.”

 “Now don’t put words in his mouth.”

 “We can’t tell him! He won’t understand!”

 “What we can’t do is be dishonest. He deserves a good answer and we can at least allow him to decide how to react. Don’t you worry. I’ll go with you.”

 “Thank you.” Luanna said and they hugged.

 “So your running off with this scoundrel to be wed. You’ll drop me like I’m nothing. You think the time we had together was nothing! I spent over $500 dollars on you! Does that mean nothing to you!”

 “That’s not it Jason.” Luanna pleaded.

 Jason took an aggressive step towards her. “You dumbbell woman. Do you even have any sense in that air filled-“

 James took his place, intercepting Luanna and Jason. “You don’t have to agree with it but you can at least respect her decision.”

 “You dirty rotten nobody. You don’t have a place in this town and you never did. Your just like your drunkard deadbeat daddy who stole from my father’s bank to pay his liquor expenses. Your not worth a pig’s feed leftovers, you lying, cheating, horse face theirs. I should shoot you and put you down like I do a lame mule!”

 “That’s not a good way to handle the situation. If you pull a gun on me I will be forced to defend myself and I have never missed a shot.

 “Your not worth my bullets you-“ Jason began to swear.

 “Jason please.” Luanna was crying, “Stop.”

 Jason stormed out angry.

 James and Luanna left. On Luanna’s porch James held her as she cried.

 “I’m so sorry about all of that Luanna.”

 “He was so awful!”

 “I’m sorry.”

 Luanna wiped her nose. “I’ll tell mother what he said. I’ll tell her what he called me. She’ll let the town know how truly awful that man is.”

 “No Luanna.” James said, “That’s not right.”

 “Why!?! He’s the one whose not right and he needs to be punished for it!”

 “No Luanna, we don’t punish people for our hurt feelings. That’s not right. Think about him. He just found out the woman he loves is going to marry someone else a week before his wedding. That someone else being the son of the man that ruined his father. He’s hurting.”

 “How could you defend him!”

 “Because no one defended me.” James said getting a bit emotional. “I was just a boy treated worthless because of a slight studded and an action my father did. Nobody trusted me, nobody cared about me.”

 “I cared…” Luanna said.

 “I had a hard time believing that when I saw you and your friends tear up the only good jacket I had.”

 “Well I…!” Luanna was shocked and flooded with guilt.

 James was crying, “It… it’s ok. I know you were young and such. But at the moment it hurt.”

 “I’m sorry.”

 “It’s ok. I’ve forgiven you. I’ve forgiven all of you. The hardest person to forgive was my father. I blamed him for all my rotten treatment. But I realize now that town was just hurt. They each were going through hard things.”

 “That’s no excuse.” Luanna said.

 “But is it?” James replied. “I too do things I regret when I’m sad or mad or scared. If I told them it is inexcusable for acting on fear then I can expect God to tell me that my acting on fear is inexcusable.” (Scripture reference)

 “That’s different,” Luanna urged.

 “No Luanna, it’s not. I thought I was the only one in the world who had it hard. After I ran away from this town and joined the military, that’s where I learned everyone has it hard. After my medical discharge I turned to God and I learned I was never too far away to be out of his reach. He taught me in the scriptures how to forgive and with the help of some good men I got to be doing the right thing. I even got myself a little store with enough income to support a wife and raise a family. God took me to this point and at the last day I want to stand before him, clear conscious knowing that I truly did love God and love my neighbor.”

 “And yourself.”

 “That too,” He smiled.

 “You’re much too good for me James.” Luanna sighed.

 “Let me decide that.” James said holding her again. They stayed like that for a bit then they parted, he said goodnight and she went inside.

 The next day Luanna went out early to do her chores. She decided on a quick trip to the store to pick up one or two things but when she came back home she was greeted by a convention of worried women.

 “Come sit down Luanna,” Her mother said.

 “What’s all this about?” Luanna asked sitting.

 “Well Jason came by and told us what had happened between the two of you,” Her mother answered.

 “And what did he have to say then?” Luanna asked, her gaze getting critical and hard.

 “He just wants you to make the right decision. Make sure you’ve got your head on straight,” Said Luanna’s cousin, Margaret. Luanna knew that Margaret had liked Jason for years.

 “My head is just fine.” Luanna deafened.

 “Luanna just listen,” Interjected Aunt Carol, mother of Margaret, “You can’t marry that VanWinkle boy, he’s no good.”

 “Who are you to decide he’s no good!” Luanna shot back.

 “Luanna!” Her mother said and Luanna settled a bit down. She knew she had spoken out of term.

 “Luanna, we’ve been best friends for years,” Betsy said, “We’ve seen that James boy when he stated the fire at the frost barn.”

 “We both know he was framed for that. (Or an accident). The worst he ever did was curse out little Fanny Lou and make trouble for the teachers.”

 “He’s a troublemaker!” Aunt Carol declared.

 “He’s changed!” Luanna said.

 “People don’t change,” Betsy said.

 “That’s true,” Margaret said.

 “How can you say that? Have either of you changed since when you were younger? Margaret you used to wet the bed. And Betsy I know of mothe than one time when you threw weeds in Mrs. Merril’s garden because you were angry that she told you to mind yourself. “I know you would never do that now. Now tell me, who of you haven’t changed!”

 There was quiet.

 “Luanna dear, that’s not what we’re talking about.”

 “It wasn’t change, I grew up,” Margaret said.

 “Call it what you will, maybe he grew up too!” Luanna stood up.

 “We are talking about you dear. Marriage is such an important decision. We just don’t want you making the wrong one because we care about you so much. Now sit back down so we can talk about this peaceably,” Her mother said.

 Luanna did not sit down. “I got confirmation from God that James is the man I am to marry. If you have a problem with that, take it up with him.”

 Luanna left the house. Not sure of where to go, she started on her way to town. She got half-way there when she sat on a rock and burst into tears crying. Where was James?

 “Sir, I’d like permission to marry your daughter,” James sat across from Mr. Shumway at his office table.

 Mr. Shumway looked hard at James. “You come back to this town 5 years after you left to ask Luanna to marry you, are you crazy boy?”

 “I might very well be crazy Sir but I know Luanna is the woman I am to marry. I want to take her to the temple and cherish her for all time and eternity. I’ve got a little shop on the east of the valley and it’s the perfect place to start a family. It’s a good community, friendly neighbors. Please sir.”

 Mr. Shumway stared James hard in the eyes. As he did he felt his heart (softening) starting to break. He remembered this sad little boy and had felt such pity for him. Here that boy was, a man, and had a light and a strength about him that could match a man ten times his greater. Respect for this young man grew, him coming to ask for Luanna’s hand would not be easy yet here he was. What touched his heartstrings most was the sincerity in James’s voice. This man had a deep soul that truly cared about others. He would care properly for his beloved Luanna. Granting his permission was the right thing to do.

 “For whatever reason, I’ll allow it. I can see you’ve turned out to be a good man. You may marry my daughter.”

 A visible weight melted off of James and a huge smile came across James’s face, “Thank you sir.” He held out his hand and they shook enthusiastically. “Thank you, thank you.”

 “Now get a move on. I’ve got work to do.”

 “Thank you!” James said tipping his hat on the way out.

 One worker saw James clicking his heels as he all but skipped out the door.

 James knocked on the door. Luanna’s Mother answered. She looked the beaming boy up and down. He was holding his hat in his hands and he gave a slight bow as they met eyes.

 “James VanWinkle?” Mrs. Shumway said skeptically.

 “That’s me ma’am,” He said, “Is Luanna home?”

 “James, you’re not welcome here. You should leave and mind Luanna well enough alone.”

 His countenance fell, “I’m sorry ma’am. I don’t understand, why am I not welcome here?”

 Mrs. Shumway was caught back. She expected it to be obvious, “Well… uh” She tampered. This man was not like the scoundrel she had pictured. He stood confident and kind. Real genuine honesty in his eyes. She thought of Jason and what he had said. Jason was a good boy and this man here was a stranger. “I don’t trust stranger.” Then Mrs. Shumway slammed the door shut.

 James stood a bit shocked. “Could I at least leave a note for her?” He asked the door. No reply, so he left.

 James found Luanna on the rock into town.

 “Luanna!” He ran up to her and she fell into his arms crying.

 “They ambushed me James!”

 “Who?”

 “Betsy, Aunt Carol, Margaret and my Mother!”

 “Oh.” He said. Then he held her, “Tell me what happened.”

 “They thought I was disillusioned and said not good things. How could they do this? I thought they loved me.”

 James sighed and shook his head.

 “I don’t understand it James. I don’t understand.”

 “It’s because they love you that they do this. They are worried and they’ve only heard one side of the story.”

 “Even so, they didn’t think you could change. How could they think that? Betsy herself used to tell off her sister something aweful. Ang Margaret, she-“

 James cut her off, “I know you’re upset but don’t talk about those people you love like that. They’re not your enemies.”

 “Are you on my side or theirs?” Luanna puffed.

 James sighed and took off his hat. They sat for a good minute as James stared at the ground and Luanna sat arms golden on the log.

 “I don’t like how this situation is breaking up your family. You love them and they love you. I’m really just an outsider. Maybe I am a bit crazy for coming here and proposing. Perhaps it would be best for everyone if I just leave.”

 Luanna’s fueled fire fizzled. She took James’s hand. “No James, please don’t go. Ever since you’ve come I’ve felt it deep in my heart that I’m supposed to be with you. I just have fallen in love with everything you do. Ever since you’ve come I feel like I’m complete. I see you and I have joy. God has told me that you are him. I will not turn my back on that witness even if my entire family don’t agree and I don’t think you should turn your back so easy either.”

 James gave a half smile. She had just the challenging words he needed, “I love you Luanna.” Then he kissed her. “And I won’t turn my back if you won’t. I need you in my life.”

 She blushed.

 “I asked for your father’s permission.”

 Luanna’s sat up straight, “What did he say?”

 “He gave it.”

 “No way! How did you manage that?”

 James shrugged and they laughed, “Would you like to go for a walk?”

 “Sure.”

 “You won’t believe what happened today Harold!” Said Mrs. Shumway as she watched her husband open the door.

 “I’ve got quite the new too but you go first.”

 “Jason came by and warned me James was in town and he’s after Luanna’s hand for marriage. She is already engaged! Then when I bring the ladies to talk to her about it she stormed out in a fury. Then, to top it all off, James himself came to the door asking for Luanna.”

 “He did?” Mr. Shumway’s eyebrows went up, “What did you do, did you invite him in?”

 “Of course not! I don’t let shifty strangers into my home! It’s been awful today Harold.”

 “... Sue, would you like to hear about what happened in my day?” Harold asked.

(That is quite the problem as I just gave him my blesssing.)

 “Sure. Please, take my mind off of this matter Harold.” Sue said.

 “James came to the office and asked my permission to marry Luanna.”

 Sue’s eyes could have popped out of her head, “What did you say?”

 “I gave it to him.”

 Sue almost fainted.

 Luanna got home just in time for supper. She had wanted James to come inside but he said no, he didn’t want to cause anymore contention.

 Sue opened the door before Luanna came inside.

 “Is James still out there?” Sue asked. Harold was behind her, supervising the exchange.

 “He is.” Luanna said defiantly.

 “Invite him in for supper. Your father convinced me to give him a chance.”

 Luanna smiled and waved for James to come inside. He warily came to the door. Sue held it open. He paused on the doorstep, not knowing if he should come inside.

 “Well if you’re going to come in come in, or would you rather stay out there and starve?” Sue said and James hurried inside.

 To begin with the atmosphere was cold. James his best to be the perfect gentleman and Luanna stayed on the defensive ready to counter attack if her mother said even slightly off comment. Harold started up a conversation with James breaking the ice. They talked of work and James asked good questions which highlighted Harold’s vast knowledge of good business management. Then James compliments the food and asked about Mrs. Shumway’s garden. At first she was stand off-ish but soon opened right up after mention of her high quality squashes. The warmth of her mother eased Luanna and by the end everyone was laughing and jovial. James left the house later than he expected.

 “It was a pleasure Mr. VanWinkle,” Sue said, “I hope to see you tomorrow.”

 “I hope to see your tools out and ready for use. I’m excited to help out in your garden.”

 “I’ll be glad to have you.” Mrs. Shumway said.

 As the family watched him go Mrs. Shumway stood amazed, her hands on her hips. “He is something else.”

 “Isn’t he?” Luanna said with a sweet day dream attitude.

“When’s the wedding?” Harold asked Luanna.

”We haven’t talked about it yet.”

”How about Friday?”

Luanna rolled her eyes, “We can’t do it in three days.”

“Can’t we? What would James say?”

“Three days?” James walked into the house brushing sweat from off his brow, “For what?”

Sue trailed in behind. “This boy is a good hard worker. He ran me for my money.”

”That’s what I like to hear,” Harold said, “How about Friday for the wedding?”

”Friday? Well I think,” He paused then looked at Luanna, “What do you think?”

“It’s not nearly enough time for a wedding. We wouldn’t be able to do it in three days.”

“Well we have most of the wedding things that we were preparing for you and Jason. All we’d need is the buildings reserved and a wedding cake, oh, we can bake that real easy.”

“What if we could Luanna? What would you say?” James said taking her hands.

Luanna huffed, “Well I suppose.”

“By this time next week you could be starting your life on newlyweds,” Harold said.

”I’d like that. I’d really like that.” James said.

Luanna thought about that for a minute and a smile drew across her face, “I suppose I would like that too.”

The next few days were a flurry of activity. Women coming in and out, decorations, fabric, and flowers. Betsy set up a fun Bridal shower, except for the part where Sue kicked half the women out for voicing their opinion on the marriage and Jason matter. And the cake was to be baked by one of those kicked out women so they had to bake a much simpilar cake. But the dress was beautiful and James was amazing. Luanna decided not to overreact over every time someone said a slight about James or about her change of mind. She needed to stop crying and be strong for James. It was hard at the store when all the women and men ganged up on her. But she walked out of there, head high and strong willed. James was proud. During this time Jason skipped town. Rumors spread he was planning to do something at the wedding but Luanna didn’t bother herself with pathertic gossip like that. Besides, she was too busy.

The day of the wedding was the happiest day of Luanna’s life. Who would have known Luanna Shumway would marry James VanWinkle, perhaps, only God.

It was the day of the wedding.

“Jason is a much better choice.” Margaret told her.

”The wedding won’t be as nice. It could be so much better if you’d just wait till next week,” Betsy told her.

“No good can come by being related to that man’s father,” said Aunt Carol.

Finally Luanna broke, “Just stop all of you. I don’t want to hear it. This is MY wedding day and I get to make the decision to say yes, not all of you. Stop trying to assume how much better my life could be if I did it your way.

The women were offended.

“You’d do well to watch your tounges,” Luanna said.

The women left.

“Where is Betsy, Aunt Carol and Margaret?” James asked.

Luanna opened her mouth. Then closed it. “I’ve made a mistake. James, I’ll be back.”

Luanna rushed to where the women were. “I am so sorry. I was so rude to all of you. I know you all care about me deeply and that is why you say what you say and do what you do. I know you each have your own feelings and such. I am sorry that I did not respect that I love James but this day wouldn’t be the same without each one of you there. I love you and I’m sorry.”

The women forgave her.

At the reception Jason came in drunk and started yelling and causing a disturbance. Some men caught him and drug him out.

“So this is what he’s actually like, I knew there was something off about Jason,” said Aunt Carol.

“I had thoughts he was such a good man, he deceived us all.” Margaret said.’

“No,” Luanna said, “He is a good man.”

“Wait,” Luanna said before they rode him off.

“Dirty Rotten Cheat!” Jason’s words slurred.

“I’m sorry Jason. You are a good man and I really hurt you. That wasn’t right and I know it but I also know that me and you are not meant to be together. You are a good man. I know you’ll find yourself one beautiful amazing woman and you’ll be happy. Once your sober you might try calling on Margaret. She’s got eyes for you, she’s said so before. You are a good man, I know you’ll come around and maybe even we can become friends again.”

Then Luanna said goodbye to Jason and she went back inside.

…

“Look what I found in the mail James.” Luanna showed James the engagement letter.

“Margaret Jenson and Jason Brown. This is wonderful!” James said reading the announcement.

“I know! I do wish I could go.”

“Why not?”

“I don’t think a trip like that would be good for little David.”

“He’s a strong boy, he’ll make it just fine. And I’ll take a week off. We’ll go as a family.”

“But the shop!?!”

“I’ll have the Pearce boys watch it while we go. I know I can trust them. It’ll be good for you to see family. It will be good for your parents to see how much their grandson has grown.”

“It would be nice.” Luanna sighed.

“It will be nice.” James said kissing his wife on the forehead. Small cries came from the baby’s room, “I’ll get David.”

The cries were replaced by James’s singing.

“Margaret and Jason. I’m so happy for them”

It really was wonderful.

Then end.