

AMANDA'S DADDY
STAGECOACH DADDIES - BOOK TWO



PATRICIA GREEN



Published by Blushing Books
An Imprint of
ABCD Graphics and Design, Inc.
A Virginia Corporation
977 Seminole Trail #233
Charlottesville, VA 22901

©2021
All rights reserved.

No part of the book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. The trademark Blushing Books is pending in the US Patent and Trademark Office.

Patricia Green
Amanda's Daddy

eBook ISBN: 978-1-64563-846-9
Print ISBN: 978-1-64563-857-5
v2

Cover Art by ABCD Graphics & Design

This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only. Nothing in this book should be interpreted as Blushing Books' or the author's advocating any non-consensual sexual activity.

CHAPTER 1



Amanda watched as people gathered in little groups, a few peeling off to dance a polka as two volunteers happily played their tattered but well-loved instruments. She didn't come to every one of these church socials because Mami was more and more often too weak to care for herself while alone. But not today, today was a good day and there were people to watch and community to participate in. But was she actually part of the community she so longed to join? It all seemed foreign to her, like something she ought to be part of, but couldn't quite fit in. She'd been in this county her whole life and yet her friends were few and scattered.

Oh, my goodness! Who was the fellow coming into the room? He didn't smile at everyone, he looked around as though assessing a disorganized army, ready to take charge or attack depending on what side he favored. He was greeted by Lucas Trundle, one of the community's most eligible bachelors. The stranger didn't have a woman on his arm, and he appeared to be friends with Lucas; did that mean he was unmarried and a bit of a reprobate like Luke?

Did it matter? Not a whit. He must be younger than Amanda

by six or seven years. And, really, what could she possibly say to strike up a conversation? It was out of the question. She knew she was painfully shy—thus her retreat into this corner behind the potted blossoming orange tree. There was a chaise behind her, too isolated for the decent people to enjoy, but Amanda might take a seat there after a while and by scooching to the very end, she could observe without being seen. She'd taken that spot before and it worked quite well.

He was a joy to watch. So handsome and brawny. He filled out his proper jacket perfectly though the seams did strain at the biceps a bit. Not enough to draw attention to the cut of his suit, but just enough to catch her eyes and keep them on him. His light brown hair was parted on the side, and needed a bit of a trim, but was cared for and controlled. She couldn't see the color of his eyes, but they were dark, she could tell that much. And he was tall, something over six feet if she didn't miss her guess. He'd tower over her five-feet-two. But she had to quit putting herself in the picture. Especially since Jilly-June Barton had sailed over to him nearly immediately.

He bowed elegantly toward her and spoke few words, but Jilly-June nattered on as though it didn't matter that he was barely listening to her. After a couple of minutes, he smiled – oh my goodness! – and excused himself to go talk to Lucas again. Lucas was focused on a group of young gentlemen, with whom the stranger shook hands. They formed a group, looking about for the right women to chat with.

The stranger looked over toward the orange tree as he was perusing the room and his eyes stopped upon her. Amanda lowered her gaze nearly immediately, but not before she saw that his enigmatic eyes were dark blue, like an endless sea, a mysterious sea with secrets in its depths. How she'd love to explore those white-capped intensities. Instead, she turned away and pretended to examine a rather poorly done watercolor on the wall a few feet away.

It was truly an ugly picture of a little boy sitting in beachside dunes, gazing out at some small waves. It looked like it was done by someone who'd never been to the sea, because it was nothing like the drawings she'd seen in books by people who really had been to the beach. But here in the desert, it was unusual to find a person with experience at the seaside. She, herself, had never been.

She was ruminating on this situation when she felt a presence next to her. She was about to turn to see who was invading her reverie, when he spoke. "Interesting picture." Turning her head ever so slightly, she saw the stranger. He was standing right next to her, peering over her shoulder. She could reach out and touch him. Instead, she stiffened up and bit her lower lip. Was she supposed to respond to his observation? What should she say?

"Umm," she murmured, completely at a loss for words. He smelled so good, too. Like sandalwood soap. They had it in the mercantile, far too fancy and masculine for her or her mother. What did that mean about the stranger?

"You know," he said, his voice low and smooth, "it looks like the boy has two left eyes."

It was true! The watercolor was so bad that the eyes were wrong! She giggled, then laughed, some of the tension broken. "I think," she said, her voice a soft whisper between laughs, "he does." He chuckled right along with her.

Then he did an extraordinary thing. He actually turned toward her and spoke in a conversational manner. "I'm Rocky Pascal," he said. "I don't believe we've met."

Now, she really had to turn to look him right in the face. It would be incredibly impolite not to, even though it was difficult to do. What would he think of her—her oval face with freckles across the nose, her red hair – so unfashionable – and her undesirable green eyes? Oh, why couldn't she be a blonde, with blue eyes, a heart-shaped face and perfectly pale skin! But then... he'd

come over here, knowing she was a redhead, knowing she was unfashionable and a bit tatty with her best dress not sporting a train or broad and fulsome ruffle around the skirt. Jilly-June, with whom he'd spoken just a few minutes ago, was the picture of perfect femininity. Amanda was a drudge in comparison. And yet... here he was, talking to her and not to Jilly-June. Why?

"No, sir, we have not met," she replied softly.

"What is your name?" He was patient, not showing a hint of frustration with her succinct answer.

"Miss Amanda Locke."

"And what is Miss Amanda Locke doing hiding behind a tree while all these lovely folks are cavorting on the dance floor?"

"I-I-I'm—it's where I feel comfortable."

He tilted his head slightly, assessing her. Those dark blue eyes roamed over her face and she felt a blush coming on. To her surprise, he took her hand and pulled her toward the nearby chaise, plunking down behind the tree and patting the place next to him.

She didn't know quite what to do. It seemed indecent to hide behind a tree with a gentleman. And yet, it was *him* and she was so attracted and so otherwise lonely in the room full of people. Amanda sat down.

"Very good. Now tell me about yourself. If you're over here alone by a tree, there must be something going on with you. Are you just shy?"

She looked away and nodded.

Rocky patted her hand where it lay in her lap. "So beautiful and yet so distant. I'm intrigued."

"There's nothing special about me," she told him, though she was absolutely thrilled by this attractive man calling her beautiful.

"No? I find that hard to believe."

"I'm quite ordinary. There are much more attractive girls here. Why aren't you talking to them?"

She caught his smile from the corner of her eye. "Because I'd rather talk to the prettiest girl in the room." He took her hand in his and peered at it. "What happened to your hands?"

Withdrawing her fingers from his, she answered a bit defensively. "I run a chicken farm, Mr. Pascal. I have chores to do."

"My apologies. You have a chicken farm?"

"Yes."

"How enterprising. Are there many chickens?"

This conversation must be boring him to distraction. But it seemed like he wanted to talk.

"Yes, sir. A few over one hundred."

"That's quite a few! You must need a lot of help with that. I'm the assistant foreman at the Bar 2 ranch about half an hour east of here. We have a lot of steers to tend; it takes quite a few hands."

"My labors are simple. I can manage them."

He nodded toward her reddish, ragged hands. "I see."

"My mother is sick. She can't help anymore." She made to stand. Maybe this was a bad idea. "I should be going home, in fact. My chickens need looking after. Please excuse me."

"Very well," he said, helping her to stand, though she didn't need help. "I'll accompany you."

"Please don't. I'll be fine."

"Are you sure?"

She nodded, her eyes not meeting his, though she could feel his gaze on her face. "Please enjoy the social. You have friends here with whom you should commune."

"Fiddlesticks on my friends. This is my first social and my acquaintances are limited to those few ranch hands who are churchgoers, and Lucas Trundle. Lucas and I were neighbors when I was younger. I see those men all the time. But I don't want to frighten you with my attentions. I realize I may have been too forward."

Wouldn't it be grand if he was just a little more forward and

took her hand again? He did! He took it and bent over it with a small bow.

“It’s been my pleasure, Miss Amanda Locke.”

“Thank you, sir. Good day to you.”

He stood there as she walked away, kicking herself for cutting their conversation short, boring him. But what could a simple chicken farmer have to say to a sophisticated man like Rocky Pascal? He seemed far too sure of himself. And he was definitely younger. It made no sense. Perhaps he was a scoundrel and she should beware of him. She knew about scoundrels.



THE NEXT SATURDAY was a hot day in Northern Nevada, but there were chickens to attend to and a fox had been roaming around the night before. She’d gone out with her shotgun but had been unsuccessful in finding him. She did find a place in the chicken wire fence that needed to be mended before the fox found it and stole one of her birds and scared the others out of laying eggs. “Locke’s Chicken & Eggs” supplied the town of Stagecoach with their eggs every day, and she didn’t want to run short.

She’d taken up her tools and was heading toward the broken fencing when she heard a thudding ahead of her. What could be producing that noise? Whatever it was, the noise was loud. It couldn’t be good. She ran back into the house and got her shotgun. Mami was sound asleep, and hopefully would be all right even through a shotgun blast.

Approaching the rhythmic thuds cautiously, Amanda was amazed at a shirtless man pounding a fencepost into the ground. She’d known it was loose, but it was hard work getting those posts into the earth, so she’d put off seeing to them. She approached within shouting range. Pointing the shotgun would be pointless at this distance, and besides, the two-barreled

weapon was heavy. "Stop there! Who are you and what are you doing?"

The brawny man turned toward her and reached for his shirt where it hung on the fence next to him. "Sorry, Miss Locke," he shouted, donning his shirt, but leaving the buttons undone. His smooth chest was sheened with sweat and clearly he was used to hard work. His muscles attested to his strength.

But what she saw, looking into his face, stole her breath away. It was Rocky Pascal! What was he doing here mending her fence posts?

"Mr. Pascal! What are you doing? Why are you here?"

"I want your hands to mend, ma'am. I thought a little help might do the trick."

He was still distant, so she didn't feel threatened. "I don't need help!"

"Yes, you do. Your farm is downtrodden. I can see your father or brothers are in need of assistance. I'm here to help."

Should she tell him that her efforts were solitary? Probably not. "We'll manage, thank you."

He took a few steps toward her and she raised the shotgun. She was practically shaking with both a thrill that he cared to help, and some fear he'd come to do her harm. But then, if he meant ill, why would he be out here, so far from the house, pounding in fence posts? It did seem like an act of charity rather than a threat.

He held up his hands in a calming gesture. "Whoa there, Miss Locke. I mean you no harm. If you want me to leave, just say so. But it's clear something needs to be done to help here."

It was true; the farm was needing a man's strength to do some of the chores. When her sisters had been here, it had taken the three of them together to do the things Amanda was now struggling to do alone. She lowered the shotgun. He took a few steps forward, but still kept a safe distance.

"Let me take this up with your menfolk. I'm sure we can

come to some agreement. I don't expect to get paid, but I would insist you stop working at men's tasks."

"Well... umm..."

"You don't mean to tell me it's just you and your mother?"

"Well... umm..."

"God damn, woman!"

"Mr. Pascal!"

"Excuse my language, but damn. I can't believe you're trying to do this alone. Why don't you hire a hand to help?"

"Well... I-I- It's just... My sisters helped before they got married."

"You can't afford help?"

She shook her head, feeling very stupid for not admitting it sooner.

"So they just left you here alone with your sick mother?"

Nodding, she lowered her eyes. It made her feel very vulnerable to admit it, but it was true. She had been made the *de facto* caregiver for her mother and the farm. She didn't know what she was going to do when she got too old to do the chores. She was already thirty-two.

"Where's your daddy?"

"He died when I was four. I don't have a daddy and haven't had for quite a while."

"Well, from now on I will be your daddy. You'll have to deal with me helping and making sure those hands of yours heal."

"But—"

"No buts. We will do this. I can help and I'm going to."

She put her free hand on her hip, feeling a bit overwhelmed by the strength of his personality. "Are you always so forceful?"

"Yes. I grew up in a home where the man was the one you reported to, even if you didn't particularly like it or him. Do you agree to my terms? You get help, so long as you behave."

"Behave? What does that mean?"

"Do what's good for you and tell me when there's some-

thing I can help with. I can't help if you resist. I can leave now if that's what you want. But I'll tell you, your farm is going to go to rack and ruin before long and you'll be left with nothing."

He was right. But she'd been totally on her own for a number of years. Her mother had bossed her around for her whole life, so she knew what "behave" meant. But from a man? That would be a totally new experience. And what would it be like to have someone she looked up to like a father? A man who brought security, safety, and whom she could trust. Would he ask more than she could give? Would he be a tyrant?

"And I can quit this... um... relationship anytime I want?"

"Absolutely. I'll stop helping when you say so. But be warned, once I stop, there will be no changing your mind. I will not come back."

Did she trust him to do as he said? Why should she? Her instincts told her he was a gentleman. He spoke well and didn't press her when she questioned his motives several times. "What do you know about chickens?"

"Virtually nothing," he admitted. "I grew up in a city, and work on a cattle ranch. Chickens are something you eat."

Well, he seemed honest. Maybe she'd have to teach him everything, but his brawn would be awfully helpful. She considered that brawn for a few moments. His shirt was still open, the sheen on his skin still persisted on the hot day. He was awfully attractive. How much was that influencing her consideration of his proposal?

Her sisters would be upset, but then, Amanda didn't see either of them sending over their husbands to help around the farm. They were miles away. Still, once in a while it would be nice for them to visit just to put in fence posts and fix the chicken wire which always scratched up her hands because she was forever forgetting her gloves.

"Very well. I agree."

“Good. I’ll finish this post and then address the ruined chicken wire over there.”

“I was just about to fix that.”

“Without gloves?”

It was a stupid excuse, but she tried it anyway. “I forgot them?”

“What else needs to be done?”

She gave him a short list, leaving out a few minor things she could do herself.

“And?”

“I don’t know what you mean.”

“Considering the state of this place, I’m guessing there’s more than what you just told me.”

“Nothing I can’t do alone.”

“I’ll be the judge of that.”

“You are awfully demanding.”

“Yes, I know I am. It’s what you need right now. Daddy, remember?”

“I remember.” And she’d dwell on it tonight while alone. It was quite the intriguing idea. “Very well, *Daddy*, there are a few more things, but really, I can do them alone.”

“What are they?”

Her list was short, but she knew a few of the things would be things that might hurt her hands and scratch up her arms, like repairing the roof of the coop which had been deteriorating steadily. But she’d repaired it before and didn’t get too scratched up or find too many splinters later. Her repairs had been somewhat clumsy though, and that’s why it needed to be dealt with again.

“Very well. I agree that a few of those things you can do yourself. There are daily chores which I can’t be here to do. That’s just the way it has to be. But I’ll be here every Sunday and Monday.”

“You will? Are those your days off?”

"Yes, I get two because I'm the assistant foreman. The foreman has other days off."

It would be a lot to ask to have him come by on his only days off. When would he get time to rabble-rouse like the ranch hands did every payday? "It's too much. You deserve some time to be with your friends."

"I won't be staying the nights, Amanda."

Her face went hot. "Of course not," she whispered, embarrassed to the core.

"All right, let's get to this. Avert your eyes. I'm going to remove my shirt again. It's damn hot out here."

"Mr. Pascal, I'm not accustomed to coarse language."

"I'm a ranch hand, Amanda. Believe me, I've gentled my language considerably for you. However, I'll try harder. All right?"

She nodded. Her ears were afire from all the swearing, but so long as he was cognizant of her upbringing, there was little more she could demand.

"And would you please call me Rocky? That's my name and I plan to call you Amanda. You may also call me Daddy, if you wish. It would remind you of the hierarchy you agreed to."

It was so personal, but if he was to be her Daddy – at least in some respects – then this was reasonable. Why he wanted to forge this relationship she didn't know, but it was set now. Maybe it would come to light later as they got to know each other better. This was so crazy. Oh my goodness! Her mother would be stricken dead at the thought of a strange man roaming around the farm. Of course, the woman was so ill she rarely went out of the house, but there were the windows and she did peer out of them on good days. Well, Amanda would have to deal with the discovery if it happened.

No, *when* it happened. Damn.