

A woman with long, wavy blonde hair is shown from the waist up, wearing a light blue lace dress with a white lace collar and cuffs. She is holding a dark book in her left hand and looking over her shoulder towards the camera. The background is a rural landscape with rolling hills, a small town with wooden buildings, and a church steeple, all under a dramatic sky with a bright sun setting behind clouds.

FORSAKING
All
OTHERS

ALLISON
PITTMAN

THE SISTER WIFE SERIES

Forsaking All Others

F O R S A K I N G

All

O T H E R S

THE SISTER WIFE SERIES

ALLISON
PITTMAN



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Forsaking All Others

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TO MY LORD AND SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST,
IN WHOM I CONTINUE TO LIVE . . .
OVERFLOWING WITH THANKFULNESS.

“Don’t let anyone capture you with empty philosophies and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the spiritual powers of this world, rather than from Christ. For in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body. So you also are complete through your union with Christ, who is the head over every ruler and authority.”

COLOSSIANS 2:8-10

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ESCAPE FROM ZION: THE SPIRITUAL
JOURNEY OF CAMILLA FOX (NÉE DEARDON)
AS WRITTEN BY HERSELF

Of all the questions I am asked—and there are many—none arise as frequently as this: How could any loving mother abandon her children? Each time I face such a query, I am reminded once again that we, God’s very children, are nowhere near capable of extending the same grace to one another as he has given us. It assumes a selfishness in my action, portraying me as a woman so determined to master her own fate that she cared little for the consequences. But there are so many other questions that beg to be answered before one could begin to understand the circumstances that led to that fateful decision.

How, I wonder, can a young woman be raised in a Christian home, yet know so little of Christ? Yet that perfectly describes my spiritual condition at the time these events began to unfold. I lived my entire childhood never missing a single Sunday service, and I

faithfully read one chapter of the Bible each night as soon as my education allowed me to do so. Perhaps I can blame the stern nature of my father or the weakness of my mother in his wake, but I knew nothing of Jesus Christ as my Savior beyond the nature of vocabulary.

My fellow Christians wonder: How could I have been so deceived by the Mormon doctrine? To that, I must reference my earlier point. If the light of Scripture is given no opportunity to pierce the most superficial layer of the heart, false teachings are bound to find purchase. The Latter-day Saints speak with a Christian vocabulary. The teachings of Joseph Smith are so intertwined with biblical truth that the latter, like cream, may rise to the top but never break free of the mire beneath it.

And so it was that when I met Nathan Fox, I did so harboring a heart untouched by love of any kind. My parents were sparing with their affection, my faith was a matter of rote exercise, and being just fifteen years old, I was a more-than-willing victim to any semblance of passion. I've often wondered, had Nathan been a nice Christian boy from my village church, would I have been so drawn to his charm? Conversely, would the Mormon doctrine have been as enticing if spoken by some dull, homely boy? But they—Nathan and the Mormons—came to me like two twisted cords, and I allowed myself to be braided within them. Such a cord is not easily broken, which is why it is best suited to anchor a boat to a shore.

Or to create a noose.

And so, bound as I was to both Nathan and his faith, I left my home. My parents had nothing to offer me; the teaching of my church fit neatly in the back of my mind. For a while, my heart blazed with new truth—or what I accepted as truth. I can hope that, had I been left to my own study, I would not have been so easily taken in. But I warmed in the glow of my husband's fire, content enough with my fellow Saints to risk such light.

Together we built a little home in a valley near the canyon

where men like my husband quarried the stone for the Temple. And it was there that I truly felt myself cast from light into shadow. I watched my husband slave, wrenching stone as was his Saintly duty to the Prophet and presenting his carpentry in a vain attempt to win the Prophet's favor. Even so, I might have been content to remain in that shadow to this very day were it not for two developments that I could not countenance: raising our two daughters in such darkness and being asked to share my husband with a second wife.

It is this—the matter of a sister wife—that brings the collective gasp of shock when I am afforded the opportunity to speak to women about the plight of polygamy. And behind the gloved hands that hide their titters, women ask, “How could you ever submit to such indignity?” To that, I have no answer, for as a woman inclined to obey what I knew of Scripture, I felt I had no recourse but to submit. Those who live outside the Mormon faith—Gentiles, as they are called—like to envision a great, lascivious nature that drives the Latter-day Saint to engage in such practice. And perhaps there is such, for some. But my Nathan was driven solely by a desire to please the only god he knew and the Prophet he worshiped.

Despite my own faithlessness, God was very gracious to me, giving me a home, two beautiful daughters, and a dear, if unlikely, friend in Kimana—an Indian woman who lived on our property. Both my daughters and I loved her as one would a mother. In his sovereignty, though, God also took away, claiming the life of my first son mere hours after his birth. This brought to me a sadness that only a Savior could comfort, and I claimed Jesus Christ as such.

By the time Sister Amanda came to be my sister wife, my eyes had long been open to the falseness of the doctrine that would allow such a thing, and my heart abandoned the Mormon church. By the grace of God, I truly believe that my own soul was safe from its clutches at that point. But every day, I saw my daughters growing

more and more indoctrinated by its teaching, which forced the question I could not ignore.

How could I let my children grow up in a house where they would never be allowed to hear the truth about Jesus Christ?

And so I set out on a journey to create a better life for them. When men do the same, they are hailed as heroes, while I, in the literature of Mormons, Christians, and secularists alike, have been maligned as the woman who abandoned her children.

So to revisit the question with which I opened this missive, while I am often bombarded with questions, I do not take the luxury of a retrospective examination. I never stop to ask myself if I should have done anything different. After all, how can you look at the assembled pages of your life and decide which should be ripped out and which should remain to press the treasures of your memories? Seems to me the greatest joy comes out of the pain that nurtures it, and you cannot keep one without the other. So I am forced, here at the end of it all, to fold every leaf together and say, as God did of his early people, that I did the best I knew how. I lived according to my conscience. He alone can forget the depth and breadth of my sin, and I claim the blood of his Son, Jesus, to all others who would judge me. I have lived now nearly forty years with my choices, and sometime hence I will die in his grace. That is the hope no man can steal from me.

Not again.

Ladies' Home Journal

July 1896

CHAPTER 1

NEAR SALT LAKE CITY

January 1858

Smoke. And darkness. And warmth.

“I think she’s wakin’. Go fetch the colonel.” A man’s voice, one I didn’t know. A momentary blast of cold air, and I remembered the storm, the roaring wind and swirling snow that carried me here.

“Ma’am?” Closer now. I felt a warm hand against my cheek. “You’re going to be just fine.”

I wanted to smile, but my lips felt dry, tight. When I tried to speak, they peeled apart, grating against each other like thin, dry bark.

“Don’t you try to speak none. Just show me, can you open your eyes?”

I wanted to, if only to see where it was the Lord had brought me, but already the voice was falling away, like words being dropped down a well. Sight seemed too heavy a burden, so I contented myself with what senses I could muster—the soft sound of a crackling fire, the sweet smell of the wood burning within it, and the warmth, blessed warmth, covering my body from my toes to my chin. The weight of it pinned me down.



Time passed. How much, I couldn’t know, but enough for me to develop an unutterably powerful thirst. I pried my lips apart, worked my tongue between them. Just that little movement brought the presence to my side again. A new touch to my temple, a new voice in my ear. Deeper, stronger.

“Ma’am?”

Of their own accord, my eyes opened. I saw nothing at first, but then he moved into my sight. Long hair brushed behind his ears, a full moustache covering his top lip. His eyes were closed at first, and the moustache bobbed as he said, “Thank you, Lord.” Then they opened, and in the fire’s light they shone warm and brown.

“Where—?”

“Shh.” He held a finger to his lips. “Time enough for that later. I’m Colonel Charles Brandon of the United States Army. Outside of Jesus himself, you couldn’t be in better hands. Now, how about some water?”

I gave no response, but I didn’t need to. I tracked him with

my eyes as he reached behind himself and produced a blue tin cup. He took a sip.

“Just testing. Don’t want it too hot.”

Then my head was cradled in his hand and he placed the cup against my mouth. The first sip burned, then soothed as I swallowed.

“Little more?”

I opened my lips wider in response, and I heard him whisper, “That’s a girl,” as he gauged just when to take the cup away. He must be a father, too.

“Now,” he said, laying my head back, “if you’ll consent.” He reached into his coat pocket and took out a thin, silver flask. “I’m in no way a drinking man myself, and I don’t want to lead you down the path of evil, but if you’ll permit me to mix just a few drops of whiskey in that water, it’ll toast your blood right up.”

My first instinct should have been to say no, but speaking was still beyond my strength, and truthfully, my thoughts were still cloudy enough that his words had no impact. He took my silence as permission and twisted the lid off the flask. With caution and precision, he drizzled a bit of the amber liquid into the water remaining in the blue cup and swirled it.

“For this, you’ll need to sit up a little straighter.”

He moved behind me and, this time, put his arm beneath my shoulders. I could feel the brass of his cuff buttons against my skin, hitting me with the realization that I was fully naked beneath a pile of wool blankets and bearskin. I twisted my head, panicked, and he instantly interpreted my terror.

“I know and I’m sorry. But we couldn’t have you wearing twenty pounds of wet clothes. Now I wish we’d had some old Indian woman to help us out, but we’re just a bunch of soldiers. If it helps, I held a gun on ’em and kept ’em blindfolded.”

I didn't believe him, but I cared a little less.

"When you're ready, drink this down."

Just the smell of the whiskey in the water brought new life to my senses. Sharpened them, somehow, opened me up to the thought of drinking it down.

"All one drink," he said behind me. "If you sip it by half, you won't drink the rest."

I nodded, braced myself, and closed my eyes. I don't know what I was expecting, but I felt only warmth. Heat was followed by clarity, and when Colonel Brandon lowered me once again to what I now recognized as a buffalo skin-covered cot, I was fully ready to speak.

"Thank you." My voice was hoarse, and then I remembered screaming into the storm.

He cocked his head. "Doesn't sound to me like you're quite up for telling your story."

He was right. I couldn't. But it had nothing to do with my throat.

"If it's all right, though, I'd like to ask you just a couple of questions." He set the cup down on the ground next to him and took a small piece of yellow paper out of the same pocket where he kept the flask. "Can you tell me who Missy is?"

The name shot through my heart. "My daughter. Her name's Melissa. And Lottie."

He checked his paper, and the pleasant expression he'd worn since my eyes opened to him disappeared, replaced with a furrowed, worried brow. "Are they—were they traveling with you?"

I shook my head as tears gathered in my eyes.

"They're safe at home?"

"Yes."

"Well, thank God for that."

And I did as my head filled with visions of them, cozily

tucked into their bed or sitting on the braided rug in front of the stove, happily playing with their dolls at the feet of—

“Nathan? Is he your husband?”

“Yes.” I tried to sit up. “Is he here? Did he come for me?”

“Shh . . .” Again his warm hand soothed my brow, and exhausted, I lay back. “No, ma’am. Nobody’s come for you.”

“Then how do you know?”

He showed me the paper. Three words—*Missy, Lottie, Nathan*—and one letter: *K*.

“*Kimana*.”

He smiled. “Private Lambert wasn’t sure of the spelling.”

“She’s taking care of my daughters.”

“I see.” I could tell he wanted to know more, but I hadn’t the strength. It wasn’t the time. “You’ve been sleeping on and off for close to twenty hours, and that’s just since we found you. Now, for me you’ve been nice and quiet, but I guess when Private Lambert pulled his shift, you decided to talk a little bit. He picked out a few names.”

“Oh.”

“And he said you seemed to do a lot of praying.”

“Yes.”

“The way I figure, those prayers brought my scouts out to find you. Nothing but unbroken snow, they said; then there you were, hanging on to that horse. Why, that animal herself is a miracle.”

“You have to send her back. To my husband.”

“Time enough for that. We’ll get you feeling better, and then we’ll get both of you safely home.”

More tears, and now they fell, sliding straight down into my ears. “I don’t have a home.”

He leaned forward, elbows on his knees. “Now, don’t be silly. Everybody’s got a home.”

“Not me. I had one, and I left it. I had to.”

His voice dropped to a whisper, even though as far as I could tell, the two of us were quite alone. “Are you one of them, then? A Mormon?”

“Yes.” Then quickly, “No. I mean I was, for a time. But not really, not in my heart. And now—God, forgive me . . .” Whatever else I meant to say disappeared in the drought of my throat. I mustered what strength I could and turned on my side, my back to Colonel Brandon, and curled up with my regret.

Taking a liberty I could have never imagined, he put his hand on my shoulder, tugging me to face him. As I complied, he smoothed my hair from my brow and brought his face so close to mine I could feel his breath.

“Now you listen to me. I don’t want you to be frightened for one more minute. Not for yourself and not for your girls. I’m here for you. The United States Army is here for you. And as I’ve sworn my life as a sacrifice for freedom, I will make it my promise that you’ll have a home.”

“How?” I’d brought the blanket up to my face, and it muffled my question. Still, he heard.

“You leave that up to me. Another drink?”

As an answer, I sat myself up on my elbows, holding the covers nearly to my chin.

Silently, he filled the cup with water from a pot sitting on a grate by the fire and added a little from a clay pitcher. Then he lifted the flask, holding it like a question. Remembering the pleasant warmth, I nodded, and as before, he measured in a tiny stream and swirled the cup. I continued to hold the covers as he tipped the cup against my mouth, and this time I took the drink in several satisfying gulps.

“That’s the last of that for you.”

“That’s fine,” I said, lying back down.

“Now sleep. And don’t worry. When you wake up, I’ll be here.”

“And then?”

“And then, it sounds like we might have a bit of a battle on our hands.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Award-winning author Allison Pittman left a seventeen-year teaching career in 2005 to follow the Lord's calling into the world of Christian fiction, and God continues to bless her step of faith. The first book in her Sister Wife series, *For Time and Eternity*, was a finalist for the 2011 Christy Award, and her novel *Stealing Home* received the American Christian Fiction Writers' Carol Award. She heads up a successful, thriving writers group in San Antonio, Texas, where she lives with her husband, Mike, their three sons, and the canine star of the family—Stella.

