
THE UNEXPECTED WIFE

The Brides - Book Three

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vi

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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

The calendar featuring a plump, jolly penguin wearing a Santa Claus suit was staring right back at twenty-five-year-old Sybil Hill, reminding her that Christmas was soon approaching. Underneath the word December, was the year, in pretty, red cursive print, 1958. Only a month left before it became 1959, the last year of the decade.

Sybil clutched the small, navy-blue travel bag in her lap which contained everything that did not fit in the small suitcase standing next to her, which wasn't a lot. She had never been into clutter, and as a novice nun, she had been encouraged to leave the majority of her materialistic possessions behind. Her luggage was filled with modest clothing she hardly wore, sleepwear, a small bag of toiletries, a few childhood knickknacks she couldn't bear to part with, and a well-worn Bible her godmother had given her when she had completed her First Communion.

It seemed odd to Sybil that her entire twenty-five years had been carefully packaged and stored into two, small suitcases. She had had the suitcases for four years, but they were made of expensive Italian leather and looked almost new. Her grand-

mother had given them to her for her twenty-first birthday when she believed her youngest granddaughter would spend summers socializing in Europe before settling down to get married to a rich banker or the son of a promising businessman. Instead, Sybil had spent her summers in London, working with lower income families, and her winters teaching children to read in the poorest neighborhoods in Boston, much to the shock and dismay of her mother and grandmother.

Sybil Evelyn Hill had been born with a silver spoon between her pink, bow-shaped lips. As the daughter of a wealthy socialite and a successful businessman, she had never known poverty or struggle. Everything she had always wanted had been handed to her, whether it was a new doll, riding lessons, or a French poodle. She had attended the best private schools and was surrounded by the sons and daughters of Boston society. Overall, Sybil had had a lovely life, even though she had an overcritical mother, a distant father, and a self-obsessed older sister, Jane, who, with the help of her mother, vowed to make the best marriage possible.

The younger Miss Hill hadn't known when her perspective on life had changed exactly. All she knew was that once her private bubble of luxury and comfort had popped, there was no way she could have gone back to the life she once had. Perhaps it had been when her father had died on the eve of her eighteenth birthday and on the way to the funeral house, she had seen dozens of people forming lines in the local soup kitchen near Christmas. Or perhaps it had been when Jane started planning her elaborate wedding two years later and Sybil had been forced to endure the cruel treatment her older sister imposed on the poor workers. She quickly became disgusted by the vanity and snobbery present in almost all the members of her social circle.

After high school she attended a small, private Catholic college and while she obtained her degree in Elementary Education, she grew closer to God, spending her holiday breaks from

schools going on mission trips arranged by the university or helping in her local soup kitchen. When she graduated from college at twenty-two, Jane, her mother, and her grandmother had quickly wanted to arrange a marriage with the cousin of Jane's husband. Sybil had promptly refused and instead had gotten on a plane to London, where she volunteered for almost two years at a home for unwed mothers and later, an orphanage, both of which influenced Sybil's current decision.

She had decided to leave behind her privileged life and dedicate her life to God and the Catholic Church. Her mother had collapsed into dramatic sobs when she heard and had to be taken to her bed, constantly telling Sybil what a selfish daughter she was and how her poor grandmother would be rolling in her grave. Jane had promptly called her an idiot via a post card she had sent from an anniversary trip to Paris with her husband.

Despite their warnings and lack of faith, Sybil was pleased she had managed to escape their grasps and toxic, manipulative natures. They might not understand her decision, but she did. She had no desire to be married and it had been years since she enjoyed taking part in her privileged social circle. A quiet life in the church and of service to God was more than enough for her.

"Miss Hill?"

Sybil looked up and saw a plump, jolly man who reminded her of Santa Claus. He was followed by a stern looking, older woman dressed in a thick, black habit with a large wooden cross around her neck.

She smiled at the man as she awkwardly stood up, feeling the back of her long ponytail hit the small of her back as she did so. She offered her hand to both of them in greeting. "Good morning, my name is Sybil Hill, at your service. You must be Father Michael; the Reverend Mother Margaret Dane told me you would be greeting me."

Father Michael smiled. "She is my older sister. She made us

promise to take special care of you. She told me you were very helpful to the church during your time at the university."

"She is too kind. I merely did what I could, and I would have gladly done more. The Reverend Mother and sisters taught me a lot. I am very grateful. I returned to them when I decided I wanted to enter religious service, but the Reverend Mother suggested I should spread my wings and gain experience in a smaller town," she started fumbling with her heavy suitcase, "since I've only worked in larger cities."

"It's important to experience different perspectives, especially during your novitiate period," Father Michael reassured her gently. "Roseville is one of the smaller towns in Connecticut, but I can assure you they are lovely people. You will enjoy your time here, Miss... Sister Sybil."

Sybil gave a little bow of her head. "Thank you, Father Michael. I am very grateful to be here. I promise you I will be a model novice."

"Of that, I have no doubt." Father Michael looked amused, but Sybil had no idea why. She didn't think she had said anything particularly funny. "This is the Reverend Mother Dolores Ellis. She runs St. Catherine's Abbey, where you will be residing with the other nuns."

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Reverend Mother."

"Likewise, Sister Sybil. Father Michael, we really must be going if I'm going to get Sister Sybil settled into her new quarters before the evening meal."

For the next hour, the Reverend Mother talked nonstop about the convent's rules and expectations as Sybil tried to remember everything. She had a feeling the last thing she wanted to do was upset this woman.

"This will be your room." The Reverend Mother pushed open the door of a room in the hallway. The room was small but neatly kept, with a twin bed, a small writing desk, and an ancient looking armoire. "There is a bathroom and bathtub at the end of

the hallway. Please knock before you enter. Dinner is served at six pm every day, followed by the evening prayers and rosary. Morning prayers start at six am, followed by seven am Mass and then eight o' clock breakfast. I do not tolerate lateness, Sister Sybil."

"Of course not, Reverend Mother," Sybil murmured, wondering if she would ever be able to please the dour woman in front of her.

"Each of the nuns is responsible for keeping the abbey running as smoothly as possible. You will be helping Sister Margaret with any tasks related to bringing some extra help to the community, such as preparing baskets of food for the poor or finding clothing donations for the needy. Winters in Roseville can sometimes be harsh. During your year's stay at St. Catherine's, you will work on a specific task to help integrate you into the community and help you get to know the locals. I would need to talk to Father Michael about any skills you may have. Do you have a degree or certificates I should know about?"

"I have a degree in Elementary Education."

The woman nodded. "There may be a specific position for you. I would need to speak to Father Michael. In your armoire, you will find two sets of white habits and veils. Nuns wear all white during the novice year and after the first vows, the color of their habits change. Your habit must be kept nice and pressed at all times. The laundry and ironing room is located on the opposite side of the abbey near the kitchen. Any questions?"

"No, Reverend Mother. Thank you, you have been very helpful. Who might I talk to about giving me a tour of the town?"

The Reverend Mother blinked.

"So, I can get to know the town and meet a few of the locals."

"Roseville is a very small town; believe me, Sister Sybil, you will not get lost. You should focus on settling in and getting dressed. After that, you can go find Sister Margaret in the dining

room. She needs some help organizing the Christmas baskets we give out to the children at the local orphanage."

Sybil nodded, slightly disappointed she was not going to be able to see more of her new hometown, but after all, the Reverend Mother was right. She was here for religious service, not on vacation.

It took her less than an hour to unpack and dress in her new habit and veil. For a long time, she stared at herself in the mirror, hardly believing the girl she was now seeing was once dressed in expensive designer clothes and going to elaborate parties. She was a nun now. A novice. A young woman who would be forever married to the church. The only color that stood out were her dark blue eyes on an otherwise white canvas.

"You're no longer Miss Hill," she scolded herself gently. "You're Sister Sybil now. It's time to act like it."

Minutes later, Sybil found herself in the dining room, shyly stepping inside where she saw an older nun dressed in a black habit surrounded by wooden baskets, small toys, candy, and ribbons.

"Hello," Sybil greeted the woman shyly. "Are you Sister Margaret?"

"I am. You must be our new novice, Sister Sybil," Sister Margaret replied kindly. "Please take a seat. The Reverend Mother told me you would be helping with the Christmas baskets we take yearly to the children of St. Joseph's Orphanage."

"What a sweet thing to do." Sybil's delicate fingers touched the bright ribbons. "I love Christmas and children. I actually majored in Elementary Education when I was in college. I thought about being a teacher but then, well, before I decided to enter the convent. I'm glad I can still help children in some way."

"Children are a gift from God and very precious." Sister Margaret raised an eyebrow curiously. "Where are you from, Sister Sybil?"

"Boston. This is my first time in Connecticut, and Roseville is the first small town I've ever been in," she admitted.

"City girl, eh? Don't worry, Roseville might be a small town, but it's never boring. We have everything straight out of a Hollywood production. Marriages of convenience, kidnappings, pimps being arrested—"

"Sister Margaret!" the Reverend Mother barked, suddenly appearing in the dining room. "I hope my ears are deceiving me and you aren't corrupting young Sister Sybil with shameful gossip you picked up during your weekly trip to the grocery store."

"Never, Reverend Mother." Sister Margaret didn't even flinch. "I was just telling our newcomer that Roseville is more than meets the eye."

After asking Sybil if she had moved in properly to her room, she excused herself but not before giving Sister Margaret a weary look.

"Don't let Dolores scare you, her bark is worse than her bite. Trust me. It's stressful running an abbey and she has a heart condition." Sister Margaret opened a bag of peanuts and handed some to Sybil. "How old are you, honey?"

"I'm twenty-five."

"My, we don't normally get such pretty, young novices." Sister Margaret looked at her curiously as she wrapped a doll in blue wrapping paper. "You're such a darling young woman. Excuse me if I'm too forward, but did you ever think about marriage and children? You must have had a beau or two."

"No one worthy enough to marry," Sybil coolly responded, thinking back to the two boyfriends she'd had who had only inspired dull conversations, never marriage. Although a part of her did want children, she didn't want to have them with a man she did not love. Why did everyone seem to doubt her seriousness about her new role because of her age? Even Father Michael and the Reverend Mother seemed less than convinced that Sybil would last more than a month at the convent. Why couldn't they

have a little faith? "I am very happy with the path I've chosen, Sister Margaret, and I will try my hardest to please the Lord and to show everyone that I've found my calling."

Sister Margaret must have sensed she had hit a nerve because she quickly changed the topic to asking her how Christmases were in Boston.

The rest of the evening went smoothly, with dinner and evening prayers. Thankfully the rest of the nuns were as jolly and as friendly as Sister Margaret. They quickly accepted Sister Sybil as one of their own, calling her the "baby" of St. Catherine's Abbey. Even though everyone was kind to her, Sybil couldn't help but think back to what Sister Margaret had said. What if she wasn't cut out for this life? What if she failed? She had decided she was going to focus on the church and her community for the rest of her life. If the path wasn't for her, then what? Marriage and children were never things she thought could happen to her.

"Lord, please give me the strength to serve as a Holy Sister of St. Catherine's Abbey. Help me become a better woman for myself and to serve others, my Lord, as I help guide them in the name of our Lord and Savior. Please help me avoid any temptations and help guide me in this new journey as a novice. Amen."

"How have these first few days been for you, Sister Sybil?" Father Michael asked kindly a few days later, as she walked into his office.

"They've been great, Father. Everyone has been very welcoming."

"I'm glad to hear it. As you know, during your time as a novice before you take your first vows, you are required to serve the community along with the church. The Reverend Mother informed me you have a degree in Elementary Education. As it happens, we have an opening for a kindergarten teaching posi-

The Unexpected Wife

tion as St. Joseph's Orphanage, which the church runs. Would you be interested?"

The idea of working with children again pleased her; she had always adored children even though she never planned on having any of her own with the life she had chosen. She hoped working in a familiar setting would help her become more comfortable with her new lifestyle. "I would love to, Father Michael."