

Britannia's Blaggard  
*Overton Saga, Book Two*

By

Mariella Starr

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Published by Blushing Books®,  
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ABCD Graphics and Design  
977 Seminole Trail #233  
Charlottesville, VA 22901

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Starr, Mariella  
ABCD Graphics & Design

eBook ISBN: 978-1-62750-808-7  
Cover Design by ABCD Graphics & Design

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# Chapter One

*New York City, April 1894*

Dr. Britannia Montgomery walked briskly down the hall and away from the office of the Chief Surgeon of the Presbyterian Hospital. As she made her way out of the hospital, she heard snickers and laughter. She didn't know if the laughter was directed at her or not. She hurried to the street corner and hailed a Hanson Cab where she sat inside rigid with anger. Administrators of three different hospitals had refused to hire her simply because she was a woman. This latest doctor was the rudest by far.

Dr. Carlton Asbury had insulted her. He claimed her medical degree was useless since it came from the Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania. For this reason alone, her medical degrees were invalid in the field of medicine. She had challenged his verdict informing him that not only had she graduated from a rigorous, graded four-year curriculum, but she had also studied surgery for two years at the London School of Medicine. She had spent two years working at the Women's Hospital of Philadelphia.

"Those are all women's organizations, Mrs. Montgomery," Dr. Asbury had replied with arrogance, dismissing her education and work history. "That hardly qualifies you to practice medicine."

"Women are as capable of practicing medicine as men, Dr. Asbury," Britannia had snapped realizing after only a minute in the man's company that he would never hire her. "I would not deny your credentials, even though you graduated from a twelve-month program at the New Brunswick College of Medicine over thirty years ago."

Dr. Asbury sniffed at her boldness and offered her a position as a nurse instead. He said she was pushing his limits of credibility of what a woman was capable of achieving. He claimed women were mentally inferior. He would never believe them capable of performing the necessary duties of a physician. It would not happen in his hospital or surgery.

Britannia stood up to her full height and looked down at the man – small in both stature and, in her opinion, intelligence. "I could have offered your hospital great insight on the latest techniques in medical practice and surgery, Dr. Asbury. However, I can see you are unwilling to

bring this institution out of the dark ages. Good day."

Britannia paid the Hanson Cab driver and rang the bell at the entrance of the Wingate Mansion. The butler nodded to her as he took her coat. "Mrs. Wingate has requested your presence in the *Grand Tearoom* upon your arrival," Wilford said politely.

"Please tell her I have a headache and, please if it's not too much trouble, have a tea tray brought up to my room," Britannia said politely. She did not want to deal with her future mother-in-law, Mrs. Alberta Wingate. Mrs. Wingate was a pretentious woman who insisted that everyone refer to everything in the Wingate home as the *Grand*. There was the *Grand* entrance, the *Grand Tearoom*, the *Grand Library*, and several *Grand* parlors. Britannia had been visiting her fiancé's home for three weeks while finalizing the preparations for their wedding. The only rooms in the Wingate mansion she had not heard referred to as 'the *Grand* something' were the kitchens and the water closets.

She had nearly made it to the *Grand* staircase, when Mrs. Wingate intercepted her. "Britannia, darling, I need to see you in the *Grand Tearoom*. We need to finalize the embroidery pattern for the linen napkins for the tables."

"You must excuse me, I have a headache," Britannia said closing her eyes. "I need to lie down for a few minutes."

"Surely this is more important," Mrs. Wingate exclaimed. "We must make these decisions as soon as possible. Do we want the family crest or the family monogram?"

"You asked that same question last week," Britannia said. "The answer is still the same, Mrs. Wingate. Plain, unadorned napkins will be fine."

"No, plain is not acceptable," wailed Mrs. Wingate. "You do not seem to be capable of understanding the importance of this or any other matter I have brought to your attention. Hamilton's wedding will be a society event, one of the biggest in June. We must make these decisions now. We have very little time for preparations."

"September," Britannia said wearily. "Our date is September 19<sup>th</sup>."

"Oh, I have wonderful news. The Barrington wedding was canceled and since your announcements have not been sent out yet, I booked the June 14<sup>th</sup> date," Mrs. Wingate exclaimed gleefully. "It was our only chance to get a proper June wedding at the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine! What a coup de grace to Mrs. Astor and her sacred inner circle of society of 400. This is the first June of its opening. I spoke to Hamilton and he agreed."

"Did he?" Britannia calmly said. "Well, if Hamilton plans on getting married on June 14<sup>th</sup>, he had better plan on being in Colorado. I have told you a dozen times that I will be visiting my brother in Colorado during June. I have not changed my mind."

"We will see about that!" Mrs. Wingate huffed as she rushed down the hall.

Britannia made her way upstairs to another room in this pretentious house – the *Grand* guestroom. She sat down in a chair and rubbed her temples. When there was a knock on her door, she expected a maid with her tea, not Hamilton Wingate, her fiancé.

"I intercepted the tray from the maid," Hamilton said breezily while depositing the tray on the table. "Not feeling well, darling? Mother said you were rude to her."

"Rude? Hamilton, your mother, changed our wedding date without consulting me," Britannia exclaimed.

"It is not a problem, darling," Hamilton said with a smile. "We had a chance for a June date and we booked it. We will visit your brother another time."

"It is a problem, Hamilton," Britannia exclaimed. "I planned to go in June and I am going in June."

"Darling, what is more important? Visiting your brother or marrying me? Surely it is not too much to ask of you to reschedule your trip so we can be married sooner." Hamilton walked over to kiss her on the temple and then on the lips while his hands cupped her breasts.

Britannia pushed him back, "Stop."

"Stop," Hamilton snapped. He swallowed and looked away. "You are my fiancé and I should have certain privileges as such. All this silliness about waiting is ridiculous. You are not a chaste woman, Britannia. You were a married woman before. You know what I expect of you."

Britannia stepped back. "I know what will be expected as your wife, but I am not your wife, not yet."

Hamilton ran his fingers through his hair annoyed. "I find your reluctance maddening. You are a beautiful and desirable woman. I see no reason to postpone the wedding until September. The sooner we marry, the sooner you will accept your responsibilities as my wife, and in my bed."

"Hamilton!" Britannia exclaimed annoyed. "There is no reason to be uncouth."

"I apologize," he said immediately. "Darling, I love you. I want to marry you and June sounds so much better than September. After our marriage, we will visit your brother in

California. I promise."

"Colorado," Britannia corrected.

"Somewhere out in the godforsaken west," Hamilton exclaimed irritably. "You have my word. Now be a good girl and try to get along with Mother. She only wants what is best for us."

"Your mother does not listen to anything I say," Britannia said. "This is supposed to be my wedding, Hamilton, not hers. She wants me to marry in white, which is inappropriate. I am a widow, as you know because Phillip was your first cousin."

"The point is, no one knows that here in New York City," Hamilton said. "It is not as if we are planning to marry and live in Philadelphia."

Britannia frowned, "I thought you were still considering the teaching position at the Philadelphia Medical College. I am not having any luck dealing with the hospitals here in New York City. I was turned down today by an arrogant idiot who believes women have inferior minds than men. Ridiculous attitudes like that infuriate me. I am a qualified doctor, and I should be afforded the same respect as a man. I am probably more qualified than are half the physicians in Presbyterian Hospital. At least I would be assured of a position if we choose to live in Philadelphia."

"I have not made that decision yet," Hamilton hedged. "The teaching position in Philadelphia was a good offer. However, the medical school is small. I still have a few more meetings before I make my decision."

"You will discuss your decision with me, will you not?" Britannia asked. "Your decision affects both of us."

"Of course, darling," Hamilton said. "Now, you need to dress for dinner – wear the blue evening gown as it goes so well with your blond hair and blue eyes. Mother has invited Mr. Sandburg to dinner to discuss the engagement announcement in the newspapers and the coverage of our wedding in the society page."

Britannia dressed carefully for dinner selecting a silver gray gown, not the one Hamilton had requested. He had developed the annoying habit of telling her what to wear since they had arrived at his parents' home. The truth was he had developed several disturbing characteristics since their visit began. The silver gray gown was highly appropriate for a dinner party.

Britannia picked up the tea tray to return it to the kitchen on her way downstairs. That reminded her how thoroughly she disliked the attitude of the entire Wingate family toward the

household help. They spoke to them in a condescending manner and were snappish and rude towards them. When she had spoken to Hamilton about it, his dismissive response had been simply 'they are servants.' She found her own home much more to her liking and, although it was equivalent in size to the Wingate mansion, she did not require a staff of six as did her mother-in-law. In fact, she had no servants, only a part-time housekeeper and cook who came in four days a week, which suited her schedule. She considered Mrs. Marcus a friend.

She had moved into the Montgomery estate at eighteen when she married Phillip Montgomery. She had been a dewy-eyed bride very much in love with her twenty-five-year-old husband, confident they would have a wonderful marriage. Seven months later, she was a young widow.

A simple fever should not have taken Phillip's life. Desolate in her grief, Britannia had vowed not to marry again. Instead, she had devoted her life to becoming a doctor. She had kept her promise until a year ago when she had encountered Dr. Hamilton Wingate. He had courted her unceasingly until she accepted his proposal. Hamilton was different from most doctors she had met. He believed in her and in what she was doing. He had promised not to interfere with her practice of medicine.

Britannia took the back stairs, delivered the tray to the kitchen and then quickly made her way to the *Grand* parlor where she was sure the family awaited her. She suddenly stopped as she came around the corner of the hallway and heard her name spoken by someone in the library.

"I do not see how you can justify what you are doing to Britannia. It is wrong."

That was Bradley speaking, the nineteen-year-old brother of Hamilton.

"What do you know," Hamilton sneered. "You are a schoolboy with a childish crush on her."

"I know you are lying to her. I know you are going behind her back and talking to the administrators that are interviewing her. You're advising them not to hire her because you will not permit her to work after your marriage. She has gone through more medical training than you have – six years, two of them in surgery. You have lied to her from the beginning telling her you graduated from Harvard Medical School when you have never stepped foot on the Harvard campus. You got your training in an eighteen-month private school in New Jersey. How long do you think you can keep that from her?"

"She is a silly woman," that was Cyrus Wingate's voice, Hamilton's father. "She is an



embarrassment to Hamilton. As soon as she realizes no one will hire her, she will settle down to be a proper wife. She will take her place in society and stand by her husband. Meanwhile, she is driving Alberta to distraction with her outlandish ideas."

"Britannia will settle down soon enough after we marry," Hamilton said. "I will handle her. As soon as I pull the Montgomery fortune back into our family coffers, we will be in a better position for my run for Congress. Combining our wealth was an excellent idea, Father. I should have thought of it sooner. The idea of a woman controlling the Montgomery fortune is ridiculous. At least my stupid cousin picked a beautiful woman so I will not have a problem there. Once Britannia realizes what is expected of her, I will teach her quite a few things that are pleasing to me, providing she is not frigid."

"What about Annetta?" Bradley asked.

"What about her?" Hamilton said with a sneering tone to his voice. "Annetta has been my mistress for six years and does not expect more. As long as I provide for her, she knows her place. Britannia still has to learn her place. I will see to that in short order after our wedding, if not before."

"Britannia, darling," Mrs. Wingate's voice was loud and shrill as she came down the hall. "We have been waiting for you."

Hamilton jerked the door of the library fully open.

"Britannia!"

"Darling, please come along," Alberta exclaimed as her high-pitched voice carried down the hall.

Britannia focused on the two older Wingate men looking directly at each of them in turn. "Cyrus, you are a disgusting swindler. Hamilton, you are a liar and a cheat."

"Darling, whatever you think you heard...," Hamilton began to say while stepping forward.

She took a step back. "It is not what I *think* I heard, Hamilton. There is nothing wrong with my faculties, and I heard it all." She pulled the ruby engagement ring off her finger and threw it at him, "We are over."

"No, we are not," Hamilton said roughly.

"Are we having dinner?" asked Mr. Milton Sandburg, chief editor, and owner of the New York Journal. He was standing in the parlor doorway. "Is there a problem?"

The Wingate men froze at his question.

"Yes, Mr. Sandburg, there is, although it is not with your dinner plans," Britannia said calmly. She turned to the man she had met many times before and found to be rather old-fashioned, and sweetly chivalrous. "I have an issue with transportation. I have been called back to Philadelphia rather suddenly. Would you be so kind as to lend me your carriage and driver to take me to the train station? Your driver could take me while you are having dinner. I must leave immediately."

"Of course, my dear, though I will be sorry to lose your company this evening," Mr. Sandburg said as he quickly sized up the situation. Mr. Sandburg was a very shrewd man, which was why he owned the largest newspaper syndicate in the state of New York. He had heard her assessment of the Wingate men and agreed with her. He also noticed that the young woman he had come to admire was no longer wearing the overly large ruby engagement ring and that Hamilton Wingate was furious.

He offered his arm and escorted Britannia down the hall to the bottom of the *Grand* stairway. "Cyrus, will you offer one of your maids to assist Mrs. Montgomery with the packing of her belongings? As soon as you are ready, my dear, come down and I will accompany you to the railroad station myself."

"I will accompany Britannia," Hamilton exclaimed, "if she decides to leave."

Mr. Sandburg shook his head. "I think not. In fact, if you do not mind, Mrs. Montgomery, I will accompany you upstairs and wait for you outside your room."

"Thank you, Mr. Sandburg, I would very much appreciate that," Britannia said, her voice a bit wobbly.

Hamilton grabbed Britannia's arm. "I mind, and I object to your interference between my fiancé and myself."

Mr. Sandburg removed Hamilton's hand from her arm and looked him straight in the eyes. "I think I have correctly deduced what is going on here, Mr. Wingate. If Mrs. Montgomery chooses to break her engagement, that is her right. I will accompany her to make sure she gets safely to her destination."

"You have no right to interfere in our family business," Cyrus Wingate exclaimed.

"Unless you want to be social and political pariahs of New York City in the morning edition, I think you should reconsider your views," Mr. Sandburg said quietly. His voice was low,

but it was threaded with pure steel. "I am not unaware of your ambitions, Cyrus, or those of your son. You have no right to stop Mrs. Montgomery if she wishes to leave your home. I suggest you go have your dinner while I assist Mrs. Montgomery."

Mr. Sandburg accompanied Britannia up the stairs. She was reassured when he gave her shaking hand a pat and winked at her while he stood politely outside her door as his gentlemanly manners decreed was proper.

Mr. Sandburg was faithful to his word. He delivered Britannia to the train station and accompanied her inside while she purchased her ticket to Philadelphia. He then waited with her for two hours until the train arrived. They discussed recent articles he had published in his paper and they spoke of other subjects. They did not speak of what had happened at the Wingate estate.

Mr. Sandburg gave the young woman some advice upon the arrival of her train. "It might be a good time to visit some friends or relatives, my dear. If you ever return to New York City, you may call upon me for friendship and assistance."

Britannia arrived in Philadelphia in the middle of the night. She had a porter hail a Hanson Cab for her, not to go to her residence, but to the small cottage of her housekeeper, Mrs. Marcus. She explained her situation to her long-time employee, whom she also considered a friend.

Britannia suspected that Hamilton would not give up that easily. From the overheard conversation earlier in the evening, she realized he was not the man she had thought him to be. He was arrogant and dishonest. He would not have an issue with giving her up, although it might put a nick in his male ego. Giving up the Montgomery fortune, on the other hand, was something altogether different.

She had not married Phillip for his money as she had been too naive at the time to think of such things. Phillip was alone, the only son of parents who died of influenza. She was alone, as her mother died a slow death from what they thought to be cancer. She and Phillip had been young and carefree, both independent and well provided for by their respective parents. Without undue influence from parents or family, they had met, fallen in love, and quickly married. Britannia had married for love and lost him a short seven months later.

It was only after her husband's death that she became truly knowledgeable of the depth of his wealth. Until then, she had only been peripherally aware of the Wingate family. When they came to Phillip's funeral, they had advised her to move to New York City so they could look

after her. When she told them of her plans, she had immediately recognized their disapproval.

She didn't need her husband's relatives approval. She singularly focused on her goal and went her own way, enrolling in medical school and later moving to London for additional training. She spent the years following Phillip's death studying and working in medicine. It was what she wanted and needed to do. Now she realized that Hamilton's pursuit of her had only been for the Montgomery fortune. His feelings were those of avarice, not affection. Britannia hated that he had played her for a fool.

Mrs. Marcus went to Britannia's home to pack several trunks with day dresses and traveling suits. The housekeeper also went through her employer's personal things to find and bring to her a box of letters and other remembrances of her mother. Britannia especially cherished the letters because they had all come from her brother.

Britannia went to her bank in person where she had a face-to-face meeting with her banker and financial advisor. She advised him of her difficulties with the Wingates.

Several days later, Britannia left her housekeeper's small cottage in a hired carriage that took her out of Philadelphia to a remote train station where she purchased a ticket to Overton, Colorado. She would be a couple of months early, but she was keeping a promise to her younger brother, Dr. Benjamin Sawyer.

\* \* \* \*

Sarah Hutchinson sat down on the edge of a fancy brocade chair and bit down on her lower lip. The dinner she had fixed for her boyfriend was growing cold, but she did not care about that little inconvenience. Her eyes softened as she looked over at Dr. Benjamin Sawyer. He was her beau and she was very proud of him. Ben was handsome with his dark chestnut hair and his blue eyes – not that she could see his eyes since he was sound asleep.

There was a knock on the back door and she jumped up quickly to answer it. She knew who it would be, and knew she was probably in trouble again. She opened the door to Sheriff Hutchinson, the husband of her best friend and adopted sister. He was also the man who considered himself her stand-in older brother and sometimes father.

"Sarah, it's after ten," Hutch said sternly.

"I know," she whispered. "I was waiting for Ben to get home, and it got later and later. I'm sorry, Hutch."

"Where is Ben?" he demanded.

"In the parlor. He fell asleep on the sofa. He's so tired. There have been all these cases of measles and mumps for months now. He's exhausted." Sarah tagged along behind Hutch and almost bumped into the back of him when he stopped abruptly at the doorway. He looked over at the young doctor who was sound asleep while sitting straight up against the back of the sofa.

Hutch shook his head and spoke to Sarah. "Put his dinner away in the icebox while I unhitch his buggy and take care of his horse." He turned on his heel and walked back outside. When he came back inside, he went straight into the parlor where he gave the young man a push so he would lie down, and then lifted his feet up onto the sofa. He pointed his forefinger towards the back door and Sarah walked outside ahead of him. He gave her a boost up behind his saddle and then mounted in front of her. It took only a few minutes to ride home where he lifted her down and followed her inside.

Isabel Hutchinson looked up as Sarah and her husband came into the house, "Is everything all right?"

"Seems to be," said Hutch gruffly.

"I'm sorry," Sarah exclaimed. "I was waiting for Ben and it got dark. I didn't want to walk back in the dark."

"You know better," Hutch warned sternly at the same time as Isabel exclaimed, "Of course not."

Hutch gave his wife a stern look and turned his attention back to his errant charge. "Sarah, I won't have it. We have been through a lot together and you know better. A decent girl does not wait for her boyfriend at his home after dark. Now, go on up to your room. I will talk to Ben about this in the morning."

"We didn't do anything wrong, Hutch," Sarah pleaded.

"Upstairs," Hutch ordered gruffly and he followed his command with a whack of his hand across her backside. "Like I said, I will talk to Ben."

Sarah ran upstairs in tears.

Isabel frowned up at her unusually tall husband. "You know they are not doing anything improper!"

"I do know," Hutch agreed, pulling his wife in for a kiss on the lips. "I also know that all it would take is one old biddy looking through the windows and seeing them together, and Sarah's reputation would be back in the crapper. You two have spent the last year repairing her

reputation in this town and I do not want it dragged through the mud again. She cannot be over at his place after dark. I really don't want her there during the day either."

"She is only seventeen, Hutch," Isabel said. "She makes good decisions most of the time. Although, I do agree she should have left and come home before it got dark. I will talk to her."

"You do that and I will hash it out with young Ben," Hutch promised. "I'll be back after I get the town closed down for the night, around one I reckon. Lock this door and do not wait up for me. You need your rest. You are not only eating for two, but you are also sleeping for two."

Isabel Hutchinson dutifully followed her husband to the door, locked it, and watched him ride away through the window. Fridays and Saturdays were her husband's busiest nights. Miners and cowboys flooded into the town of Overton to spend their earnings on drinking, cards, and visits to the women who worked in the saloons. Her husband, Sheriff Hutchinson, kept the town safe.

She rubbed her hand over the little bump she carried and smiled. It was only a little over a year since she left her hometown in Pennsylvania to come west to gain some independence. She'd lost some of that independence when she'd married, but she had found love and she found herself. She went upstairs, knocked on Sarah's bedroom door, and found the younger girl sprawled across her bed crying.

"Honey, it will be all right," Isabel crooned.

"We weren't doing anything wrong. Ben was asleep!" Sarah wailed.

"I know that and so does Hutch," Isabel said. "After everything that happened last year, you know he's overprotective. He knows you are a good girl and that Ben is a good man. Now stop worrying, you need to get some sleep. You have a big day coming up, and you still have drawings and watercolors to finish. The fashion show at the Grange Hall for the *Overton League of Women for Social Reform* Luncheon is only two days away." Isabel crinkled up her nose at the highfalutin name of the Overton socialite women's club.

Sarah sat up and burst into tears again. "I don't know how I let you and Mrs. Mallery talk me into this showing. Those women will never think my designs are any good."

"Nonsense," Isabel exclaimed. "Those women have been begging for your dress designs for months. They just don't know who is really designing their gowns. Mrs. Mallery and I have plotted this out very carefully. Every single one of those snooty women will be wearing one of your dresses. I will wear that incredible spring-green print dress with the russet trim you

designed for me that matches my eyes and my hair. I still have not figured how you managed that without it being a mess. As usual, you pulled off a miracle. When Mrs. Emerson asked if Mrs. Mallery would come to the luncheon as the special guest and do a showing of her designs, she agreed."

"Those women think Mrs. Mallery is the designer," Sarah said. "When I walk in, all they will see is the daughter of the town drunk. When they realize they are wearing dresses I designed, they are liable to rip them off and run out screaming!"

"I would pay to see that!" Isabel laughed, her eyes lighting up with mischief. "Can you imagine Mrs. Byrd or that awful Gertrude Quincy walking down the street in their corsets and bloomers?"

"No, and I don't think I want to," Sarah admitted, ducking her head in embarrassment. "Isabel, what if this backfires. Mrs. Mallery has been such a wonderful friend and I don't want her to lose business. When those women get angry, they get mean. That's why I asked her to keep quiet about my being the designer."

Isabel laughed. "Sarah, those snooty women still have not figured out they no longer run this town. I thought after the Keller and Brubaker families left town, all that snobbery would go away. Instead, the remaining women regrouped and now are pretending they are part of a highbrow society register. We live in Overton, not Denver. Just because their husbands made money does not make them any better than anyone else. The whole purpose of our plan is to teach those snobby women a lesson. Your designs are incredible and every single one of those women will be wearing a dress you designed. They picked out the designs themselves and paid good money to have the gowns made. In fact, they have been fighting with each other over who gets which design. Now, if they suddenly decide those designs are not good enough for them, we will make them eat their words."

"Does Hutch know what we are doing?" Sarah asked, looking worried.

Isabel shook her head looking unconcerned, "No, but he doesn't like those snooty old biddies either."

Dr. Ben Sawyer rolled over, landed on the floor, and woke up with a start. It was light outside, but his brain was foggy. He sat up, looked around and realized it was six am. He groaned and got to his feet, then staggered into the kitchen. Sarah was not there, although she had been there the evening before. She had been waiting for him and had told him to sit down

while she set his dinner on the table. He must have gone to sleep. That meant Hutch, the Sheriff of Overton and one of her surrogate parents, had come to take her home or she had walked. Neither of those options was a good one. He went back to the kitchen to go upstairs to clean up and shave before heading to the Hutchinson's for breakfast. He started nearly every day at his friend's breakfast table, but he was not sure his face would be welcome this morning.

Ben pulled his doctor buggy beside the hitching post where he tied his horse. Sarah must have been watching for him because she came out on the back porch to greet him.

"Did you walk home last night?" Ben demanded.

She shook her head. "No, Hutch came and got me," Sarah said.

"Is he going to kill me?" Ben asked.

"Ben, Sarah, get your butts in here," Hutch said gruffly from the open door.

Ben snatched his hat off, took Sarah's hand, and they walked in together. "It was my fault, Hutch. I should have brought Sarah home immediately...."

"No, it was my fault," Sarah interrupted. "I should have come home before it got dark. Once Ben fell asleep, though, I didn't want to wake him up. He's been up several nights this week with patients."

"Sit, both of you," Isabel said, setting a platter of eggs and sausage on the table. "Coffee, Ben?"

"Thank you," Ben said, taking his chair at their table. "I really am sorry. I will not let it happen again. I would never disrespect Sarah that way."

Isabel sat down beside her husband and gave him a meaningful look. He raised his eyebrows at her and turned his attention to the young doctor. "Ben, you cannot keep up this pace. Old Doc Wiley warned you before he left that you cannot be everywhere, all the time. It is too much for one man. You need to do what you can and not worry about what you cannot do."

"It doesn't work that way, Hutch. I am dedicated to my job, and I am the only doctor in town." Ben took a long drink of coffee. "I don't have a choice."

"Maybe we need another doctor," Isabel said.

Ben gave a sigh. "With the Silver Run Mine operating a second shift now, my patient load has doubled. We probably could use another doctor."

"What are you doing clear over there?" Hutch demanded. "Silver Run is four hours away."



"Not if I catch the train and hire a horse in Caligh. I tried to talk Haskins into hiring a doctor for his miners, but he told me to mind my own business. They have dysentery up there and sick kids. Even so, many of the miners won't allow me to see their children. Haskins controls them with an iron fist."

"Don't you know of a doctor who needs a position?" Hutch asked. "You came here looking for a job."

"My situation is different from most," Ben admitted, looking over at his girlfriend. "I came more for Sarah than the job and I don't rely on getting paid for my services. I'm paid more in chickens, eggs and garden produce than in actual spending money. Most doctors want a guaranteed livable wage."

Isabel was picking at her breakfast. "What if Overton had a hospital?"

Ben blinked in surprise and then brightened at the idea. "I think our patient load would support one. It would have to be on a small scale, but having the patients in one place would make the job much easier. I would be able to spend my time with patients instead of traipsing up and down the roads so much. If we had a hospital, we would definitely need more than one doctor, as well as a staff to run it."

"Maybe we could advertise for another doctor," Hutch said. "There are a lot of hospitals back east; maybe someone is sick of living in the city."

"We could put ads in some medical journals," Ben agreed. "But, that takes us back to the problem of a guaranteed salary."

"I don't think that would be much of a problem, especially if we had a hospital," Isabel said. "Ben, I know you have a private income, but you are too generous with your time and services. It is true that some people cannot afford to pay. However, it is also true that some people are taking advantage of you."

"It is something to think about," Hutch said, finishing his breakfast. Then he sat back and pointed his finger at the seventeen-year-old at his table. "Sarah Jane, I do not want you at Ben's place unless someone else is there with you. Ben, if you want three squares a day, you know you have boot space under this table. Most of the eggs and produce you are paid, ends up on this table or Mrs. Halloway's. If you want to see Sarah, you do it here or at Mrs. Mallery's place. I will not have any tongues wagging about you two. I know you've been officially courting for seven months, but you still have a ways to go before the wedding. Am I understood?"

"Uh, uh," Isabel said interrupting her stern husband.

"Oh, yeah. If you want to escort Sarah to church socials or Grange dances, or out to dinner or to the bakery for ice cream, that is okay, too. As long as it is out in public, " Hutch added and looked over to his wife with one raised eyebrow. "Did I forget anything?"

Isabel shook her head and smiled at him indulgently. "I think that covers it. We are not trying to spoil your courtship, Ben, but we need to guard Sarah's reputation."

"I know," said Ben with a grin. "I agreed from the beginning to go by your rules and we still have six months until Sarah's birthday in September." He picked up her hand and kissed it. "I sure am glad we are on the downhill side of waiting now."