
THE SHERIFF FINDS A FIANCÉE

The Stevenson Brothers - Book Three

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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

Redwood, Wisconsin. September 1882.

Peter Stevenson always thought he would be married, perhaps with a baby or two, by the time he was thirty-eight. Yet here he was, nearly forty and still living the bachelor life. Working at protecting the fine town of Redwood as the sheriff, of course, but also drinking and flirting with women. He loved women. He liked their soft skin, their curvy figures, and the way they looked at him with mischievous looks on their lovely faces.

Though, lately, Peter was feeling restless. Not unhappy per se, but certainly discontent. Almost as if something were missing. There was only so much flirting, drinking, and rolling in the hay he could do before getting bored with the process. He *was* pushing forty, after all; it wasn't like he was a young man of twenty-one anymore.

Maybe it was because he was the only Stevenson brother who wasn't married. His younger brothers Derek and Stefan had married two years ago, in 1880, and were now proud husbands and fathers. Stefan had taken over the family ranch and he and

his mail order bride, Imogene, had welcomed their first child, a daughter named Daisy, in July. His other brother, Derek, was a pastor, and he had married a young woman named Penelope who had been disowned by her parents after nearly running away with a man who did not have the best intentions. Penelope had just given birth to a baby boy they'd named Colin.

He loved his brothers, his niece and nephew, and his sisters-in-law dearly, and they had never made him feel unwelcome or unloved. But lately, whenever he looked at his brothers with their families, he felt his chest swell with jealousy. It was almost a longing; he wanted the love they shared with their wives. He wanted a family of his own. But how did one go about acquiring a wife? Stefan had ordered his, and Derek had picked his up like an abandoned kitten. Many women in town flirted with him and he was always eager to flirt back, but to be honest, he couldn't remember the last time he had courted a respectable woman—probably in his twenties. He did, however, remember he had acted like a fumbling fool.

Perhaps he would ask his sister-in-law, Imogene, to pick a bride for him. She had offered before, but he had never taken her up on it. He had always assumed there would be plenty of time to find a girl to marry, but suddenly everyone seemed to get younger, and Peter just felt *old*, even though he was stronger and more skilled than men half his age. It also didn't help that he was thirty-eight and had moved back in with his *parents*.

It's only temporary, Peter grumbled to himself as his mother, Mrs. Bonnie Stevenson, whacked him on the shoulder because he had sat down in his dirty work clothes on the expensive love seat she and Imogene had just restored.

Peter had his own house in town, but there had been some horrible winds, causing many buildings in town to be affected. His house had, unfortunately, been one of them. Three heavy tree branches had landed on the roof, causing it to cave in and making the house unlivable.

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Even though he was throwing out plenty of money to get it fixed, the workers he had hired told him the damage was extensive enough for repairs to take at least a month. Derek and Penelope had offered to let him stay with them, but they had just had a baby and he didn't want to intrude. Imogene and Stefan lived too far from town, so off to his mother's, he went.

"Wash up, dinner is ready." Mrs. Stevenson tapped him on the head, making Peter feel as if he were eleven years old again. It was only his mother and himself in the house. His father, Isaiah Stevenson, had gone to Milwaukee to visit his recently widowed brother for a month. "I just received a letter from your father. He arrived in Milwaukee all right."

"How's Uncle Timothy?"

"Sad, as you would expect; he and Gretchen were married for over twenty-five years. Hopefully, your father will be able to cheer him up a bit."

After Peter had washed up, his mother fixed him a huge plate. She was convinced that because he wasn't married, he was starving every night, even though there were plenty of cafés and restaurants in town. "I need you to go to the train station the day after tomorrow."

"Why?"

"After Miss Smith left town to marry, the school board put out an ad for a new schoolteacher. She's a young woman coming from New York. Her name is Miss Bethany Fields. She was originally going to board with the Meyer family, but after poor Mr. Meyer died in that terrible accident last month, Mrs. Meyer decided to go back to her family in Virginia. Mr. Ingalls, the head of the school board, asked your father and me if we would give Miss Fields room and board, so she didn't have to constantly stay with different families the way it's traditionally done. I need you to pick her up just in case she has heavy luggage."

"Isn't that the head of the school board's job?" He was a busy

man; he didn't have time to pick up and get the new school-teacher settled.

"Mr. Ingalls can hardly walk without his cane. Surely, you can't expect him to greet Miss Fields by himself. I promised him I would give her room and board while she stayed in Redwood."

"For an entire school year?" He raised an eyebrow. Having a guest who didn't leave, would annoy him.

"Yes. She's a city girl, so we'll see if she lasts the entire year." An amused smile played on her lips. "Now that most of you are up and married, your father and I are a bit lonely. I miss having another woman in the house like when Imogene and Penelope stayed with us briefly."

Peter narrowed his eyes at her. "This isn't a matchmaking scheme, is it?"

Mrs. Stevenson snorted. "Don't be silly. You and your brothers made it perfectly clear you didn't want me to meddle in your love lives. Besides, she's barely twenty-one, I believe, much too young for you. Anyway, you've said it yourself, you're not interested in marriage."

He took a sip of his tea, wondering if he should be relieved or disappointed at his mother's comment. "All right, I suppose I could pick up Miss Fields the day after tomorrow."

The next morning while Peter was shopping for his weekly box of cigars, he recognized a long, thick braid pulled back in a messy bun at the nape of her neck—his sister-in-law, Imogene. She was holding her baby daughter, Daisy, and cooing to her while Daisy moved her little fingers in the air.

"You're a sight for sore eyes." Peter kissed Imogene on the cheek before picking up Daisy. "You haven't been to town in a while. I was about to send my deputies out to look for you two."

"You can blame this little one." Imogene pinched Daisy's cheek lovingly. "She has not let her father or me sleep for weeks."

Daisy gave both of them an innocent face. Peter quirked an eyebrow in Imogene's direction. "I only see an angel before me."

Imogene laughed. "She's only an angel for you and her father. We came to visit Penny and baby Colin. We just stopped by to get some sugar." She tilted her head to the side, where her husband was speaking to the town's blacksmith.

"How's Penny?" Peter gave a sympathetic nod. Men didn't discuss the nature of childbirth, but Derek had admitted Penelope's labor had been a hard one and she had lost a lot of blood. Thankfully, baby Colin had been born healthy. He hadn't had a chance to visit his other sister-in-law because she had been on strict bed rest, and it didn't seem proper.

"Much better." Imogene smiled. "Her cheeks are rosy again and Derek told us the midwife and the maid he hired are leaving this week. She misses you."

"I miss her too. I'll visit her next week, I promise." Peter shifted from foot to foot, feeling like a bashful schoolboy instead of a grown man nearing forty. Was it pathetic to ask Imogene for help in wooing a woman to be his bride? Perhaps he should ask Penelope. He shook his head. No, she was blunt, and she would probably spend the day giving him snarky replies. No, it would have to be Imogene. She had offered two years ago to get him to the altar.

"Is there something else?" Imogene asked kindly.

"Yes." He cleared his throat. "I thought... I believe it is time I look for a wife. I was hoping you would be able to assist in, just a suggestion, mind you, a proper woman. It seems more of your expertise after all."

Imogene's blue eyes flashed with joy as she squeezed his hand and squealed as if he had told her the Lord was coming to Sunday supper. "Oh, of course, I will help you! How exciting, Peter. Well, there is the kind widow, Mrs. Brown, though her husband did die only six months ago. She might not even be out of mourning yet, or there is Miss Paulette Crenshaw. I heard—"

"We'll discuss this later." Peter noticed Stefan was

approaching his wife and daughter. "Not a word to anyone about this, Imogene. I mean it."

Imogene nodded like a proud soldier. Peter smiled. He knew he could count on her. If his brothers ever found out what he was doing, they would laugh in his face.

Bethany Fields was a rich city girl. Rich city girls did not leave New York for the middle of nowhere, Wisconsin. Rich city girls married before the age of twenty-one, and she was turning that age the day after tomorrow. Rich city girls did not give up a life of luxury to become a dowdy schoolteacher when she had barely passed school herself and hadn't dealt with a child under the age of twelve in years.

Yet here she was, in Redwood, Wisconsin. As she stepped out of the stagecoach, Bethany looked around. She supposed as far as small towns went, it wasn't completely unfortunate looking. It was even kind of cute, like it belonged in a fairytale. Now, it only needed a princess. With her long, dark blonde hair, lovely green eyes, and cute button nose, she certainly looked like she could play the part of a princess. However, the unfortunate reality was she was as penniless as a poor pauper.

Her father, Edwin Fields II, had promptly cut her off the second she received her teaching certificate. By some divine intervention—well, plenty of her pin money at least—she had accepted a yearlong teaching job in rural Wisconsin. Mr. Fields had sworn she wouldn't last six months away from home and promised to dress her once again like a queen once she came to her senses.

Despite the obstacles her father had placed in her way, the endless pleading and the terribly long journey, Bethany had arrived in Wisconsin. If anyone had told Miss Fields a year ago she would be traveling to Wisconsin to become a schoolteacher,

she would have laughed and practically made sure every worthwhile person in New York City shut their doors in their faces.

In fact, this hare-brained scheme had started just six months back, in her lavish bedroom in the townhouse she and her father shared, while her longtime nanny arranged her hair for a party instead of her clumsy lady's maid.

"Oh, my sweet, you are the loveliest rose in all of New York," Nanny whispered in her ear while Bethany shrugged her shoulders in fake modesty. She knew she was pretty. "If only your mother could see you now, she would die of shame and regret over the fact she chose lying with different men instead of becoming a respectable woman."

The comment had stopped her dead in her tracks. According to her father, her mother had died of childbed fever just mere days after giving birth to Bethany. Yet, Nanny was acting as if Bethany's mother had purposely abandoned her and her father. No sane woman would, of course. Her father was rich and handsome. Bethany was the belle of the ball and had so many suitors, she didn't know which one to choose. She knew her nanny was advancing in age. She sometimes called her "Betty", a childhood nickname she hated, instead of her Christian name, but for some reason, this time Nanny sounded quite clear.

"What did you say, Nanny?"

Nanny didn't seem to notice the quivering in her voice or the shock on her face.

Could it be true? Bethany couldn't help but think as Nanny finished arranging fresh flowers in her hair. Her father hadn't mentioned her mother in years, and they'd never gone to visit her gravestone. Mr. Fields had said she had died when the young couple had been traveling and been buried somewhere else.

Bethany stared at the elderly woman who had raised her instead of her own mother. She didn't seem like she was lying or confused. But as she thought back to her own childhood, when-

ever she'd asked about her mother, her nanny didn't feed her the story her mother had died in childbirth; she simply didn't answer.

That night, Bethany didn't attend the party. Instead, she waited for her father to come home. When he did, she did everything she could to wrestle the truth from him. She cried, she screamed, she threatened a hunger strike like a spoiled child, until her father, who could never refuse her, finally broke down and told her the truth. Yes, Bethany was the product of a whirlwind romance with a young, beautiful prostitute, in a small town called Plentville, Wisconsin. Mr. Fields had begged the young prostitute named Ruth to marry him after she had the child. He told her his father would die soon, he would be the heir and Ruth could have everything if she just married him. Ruth said no. She didn't care about riches and wouldn't travel east. So, Edwin Fields II had baptized Bethany by himself and returned to New York, claiming to everyone that he had a short marriage during his travels, which had ended in his wife's death. No one had been the wiser. Not even Bethany.

Mr. Fields had hoped Bethany would soon forget the conversation and return to her usual shallow state of endless parties and appointments at the dressmaker. But something grew inside of Bethany. An obsession. She started wondering more and more about her mother, Ruth. Did she look like Bethany? Did Ruth also like the rain? Was she also terribly fond of chocolate? Was she still working as a lady of the night?

These were all the questions she wanted answers to, and unfortunately, her father didn't have much in terms of answers. Bethany had begged him for money to go to Plentville to see if her mother was there, but he had refused, saying Wisconsin was not a proper place for a gentle bred young lady. He said it was filled with cowboys, delinquents, and gunmen. Truth be told, cowboys and robbers sounded more interesting than plain New York.

Her father warned her if she insisted on going to Wisconsin,

he would cut her off financially and she would not receive a penny. The idea of losing her money, shockingly, did not stop her. She wanted to see her mother badly and ask her why she had abandoned her. Not even the thought of never attending an elegant dinner party or never again wearing pretty slippers, was enough to stop her.

Bethany obtained a teaching certificate and later received a job offer to become a schoolteacher for the Redwood School. There was no open position in the school in Plentville and it was only a few hours away from Redwood. She was an excellent horsewoman, so she could ride to Plentville. Now, six months later, she was only hours away from her true destination.

"Have a good day, pretty lady."

The comment woke Bethany from her thoughts as the thin man with the two missing teeth who had driven the stagecoach waved goodbye at her. Bethany let out a silent huff. Who knew mid-western people had such bad manners?

Bethany grabbed her suitcase, nearly dragging it beside her. Perhaps, she shouldn't have packed the three extra pairs of shoes, the heavy winter coat, and the two silk shawls. From the letter she received from the head of the school board, she would be staying with the Meyer family and later on, boarding with the rest of her students' families. Truthfully, the idea of living in a new place every few weeks did not appeal to her, but beggars couldn't be choosers. With any luck, she would find her mother, convince her to come back to New York with her, and she would find herself back again in her goose feathers-filled bed before she knew it. Her father couldn't cut her off forever; she was his only heiress after all.

Miss Fields frowned, silently wishing she had come via train instead of a stagecoach, switching at the last minute. At least, on the train, she could get someone to help her with her bags, but riding on a train was so expensive. She was already low on funds as it was.

The Meyer family wouldn't be expecting her until tomorrow. She had arrived a day early after all, and it would be rude to show up unannounced. Besides, she didn't even know where they lived. A Mr. Ingalls was supposed to pick her up from the train station tomorrow.

No matter, she would have to dip into her nearly empty satin drawstring purse and pay for an inn. Bethany found a cheap inn at the edge of town near the brothel named The Palace and the local saloon. The inn was run by an angry-looking man and his equally cross-looking wife. It was certainly not a decent place for Miss Fields to stay, but then again, in Wisconsin, no one knew who Edwin Fields II was.

The dingy little room she had paid for, for the night, was located at the end of a long, dark hallway that smelled like horses. When she pushed open the door of room nine, she frowned when she saw the plain room with the sad looking bed in the corner and dust bunnies on the floor. It was a far cry from the elegant bedroom she had left behind in New York, but it would have to do. There was no way she was going to go back to complain to the sour-looking couple. She was no longer in a position to argue.

Besides, it wouldn't kill her to do some light cleaning; even she knew how to sweep. Somewhat at least. Thankfully, there was a dustpan and a broom in the room. Bethany had barely gripped the broom handle when she heard noises coming from the paper-thin walls of the room next door.

It was the bubbly laughter of a woman, followed by a moan and then the low chuckle of a man. Bethany blushed as she realized what was going on next door. She might be a sheltered girl, but she wasn't a complete idiot. After all, servants talked more than they let on and she was perfectly aware of what happened between a man and a woman behind closed doors. She had never thought she would be expected to overhear.

Bethany hoped the moaning would stop, but it didn't. In fact,

it seemed to grow even louder, and the woman had even started panting. She rested the end of the broom handle on her womanhood then started moving her hips slightly, causing the bundle of nerves between her legs to rub against the handle of the broom. The friction felt just heavenly. It made Bethany feel as if she were pushing a button that caused her instant happiness.

She moved the broom handle against her mound, almost desperately eager for more friction. She wanted more. She needed more. Bethany knew what she was doing was a nasty, sinful habit, but she hadn't done it in months. After the trip she'd had, she deserved some compensation. She gripped the handle and pushed it in almost slightly. Her damn dress was in the way.

Bethany concentrated on the man's deep rumbling. He sounded older. Manly. Handsome. Confident. By the way the woman was begging for him, he certainly seemed well informed on female pleasure.

"Oh, Peter," the woman murmured. "Please don't stop. I love having you lie on top of me. This allows me to feel your chest against my hands and I can stroke every muscle."

The man in question, whom she now knew was named Peter, slapped her. Or at least it sounded like flesh against a hardened palm, causing Bethany to awaken from her own activities. Much to her surprise, the woman didn't seem angry or shocked she had been slapped by the brute.

In fact, she only giggled and ordered, "More!" Which, quite frankly, caused Bethany to be quite confused.

Finally awake and once again properly ashamed on what she had done to pleasure herself, Bethany decided to put a stop to the moans and groans which were happening next door. She was getting up early after all, and she couldn't sleep properly if Peter and the laughing woman kept moaning and causing the bed to squeak at all hours.

She pushed the broom aside and smoothed down her dress, hiding all shameful remnants that she had just pleased herself

while the couple next door engaged in carnal desire. When she stood in front of the door, she raised her chin shrewdly like she had often done when addressing servants or people she disliked. She knocked on the door. No answer. She knocked again. Once again, no one opened the door.

When she was ignored again, Bethany lost her patience and pushed the door open. They were going to hear her one way or another. She froze in her steps. She hadn't heard noise in quite some time, so she'd believed they had been asleep or, at the very least, had put their clothes on. But she was very wrong indeed.

Both Peter and the unknown woman were still draped over the bed. The woman, a curvy redhead, didn't bother hiding her large breasts from Bethany's gaze. For a brief second, Bethany felt jealous. She wished her breasts looked as nice as hers instead of the handful she barely had. Her gaze traveled to the man draped over the redhead who looked more annoyed than embarrassed about being interrupted.

He was a large man, with a wide back and inky black hair. As the woman had mentioned, the muscles of his chest were clearly defined, and Bethany fought the urge to feel them as the woman had. His buttocks were firm and his thighs quite large. He was completely naked and didn't seem at all bothered that he was naked in front of two women.

He arched one dark eyebrow. It seemed he was almost laughing at her. What a scoundrel. He was not a gentleman. He was surely a man of ill repute. He was, as Bethany studied him, quite devilishly handsome.

"Yes?" his voice rumbled. Strong. Masculine. A voice that commanded respect and made Bethany shiver in her slippers.

Bethany stumbled a reply. She wasn't even sure if it was coherent because the redhead was staring at her as if she were an idiot. Bethany should have apologized or complained to the owners, but instead, she ran all the way back to her room like a coward.