

Désirée, A Woman of Defiance

By

Mariella Starr

©2014 by Blushing Books® and Mariella Starr

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.

Published by Blushing Books®,
a subsidiary of

ABCD Graphics and Design
977 Seminole Trail #233
Charlottesville, VA 22901

The trademark Blushing Books®
is registered in the US Patent and Trademark Office.

Starr, Mariella
Désirée, A Woman of Defiance

eBook ISBN: 978-1-62750-658-8
Cover Design by ABCD Graphics & Design

This book is intended for *adults only*. Spanking and other sexual activities represented in this book are fantasies only, intended for adults. Nothing in this book should be interpreted as Blushing Books' or the author's advocating any non-consensual spanking activity or the spanking of minors.

Table of Contents:

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Author's Note](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Ebook Offer](#)

[Blushing Books Newsletter](#)

[Blushing Books](#)

Chapter 1

Spring 1879, Carson City, Nevada

Walker Tillman leaned back in a chair on the wooden sidewalk outside the building that served as his place of business and home. He was enjoying a nice slow day. Today there was a clear blue sky. It was a warm day with the sun shining, and he did not have one dad-blamed thing that needed doing. He had been back in town three days, long enough to sort through his mail, of which there were only three letters, two bills and eighteen wanted posters. That was normal in his line of business. There was not much call for private investigators in Carson City, Nevada, but that did not bother him. Sometimes the sheriff deputized him to keep the peace when he had to leave town for one reason or another. If Walker got desperate for cash, he would go after a suspect on one of the wanted posters. Bounties paid a portion of his living, and someone had to go after the lawbreakers. He picked up a fair amount of business from the Virginia & Truckee railroad line by guarding shipments of freshly minted silver coin travelling from the Carson City Mint to the San Francisco depository. Overall, he made a decent living. His jobs were generally safer than before when he worked out of Chicago for the Pinkerton Agency or other assorted jobs he could not discuss. Walker Tillman liked working for himself.

He perked up when a woman dismounted from her horse and crossed the street heading in his direction. She was a fine-looking woman although there was not too much of her. She was not more than a couple of inches over five feet, and a stiff wind could blow her away. She was wearing one of those split-skirts women were partial to wearing in the west since it allowed them to ride astride like a man. It looked good on her, and he perked up even more as he admired the figure-hugging jacket she wore over the skirt. It showed off a trim figure without looking painfully corseted. Walker appreciated a woman endowed with enough of the right parts in the right places. She had a Stetson hat perched on her head with a row of flowers in the headband. Now, that was a shameful thing to do—ruining a man's good hat with frivolous female do-dads.

She stopped in front of him and patiently waited for him to acknowledge her.

He let his chair settle on all four legs, stood up, removed his hat and gave a nod to the woman. "Ma'am."

"Are you Mr. Tillman, sir?" she asked in a voice slightly husky and smooth as good whiskey.

"Yes, ma'am, Walker Tillman. There's no need for formality. Most folks call me Walker."

Eyes as blue as the sky he had been admiring raked over him from head to toe. She gave a slight sigh, and he saw her lower lip tremble slightly. "Mr. Tillman, I hear you are a man for hire? Is this true?"

Walker gave a nod to his head. "Yes ma'am. I am a private investigator, which is my trade of choice. How may I help you?"

"May we speak in private, sir? In your office perhaps," she asked.

"Of course." Walker opened the door and she preceded him, removing her hat and displaying light blond hair wrapped in a braid at the back of her head. She sat down in one of the two available chairs and waited for him to take his seat.

"How can I help you, ma'am?" he asked, tilting his chair back again.

The woman looked him square in the eye and then dropped her gaze to her small, gloved hands. It was as if she were trying to be bold but was not quite up to the task. "I am in need of a man for hire, Mr. Tillman. My name is Abigail Farrington." Her voice dropped to almost an inaudible whisper, "I am the widow of Mr. Hubert Burrell."

Walker furrowed his brow. He had met Hubert Burrell once, and the man was near sixty years old if he was a day. He had heard Burrell had married, but he had never seen the wife around town. The man was also the sorriest son-of-a-bitch Walker ever had the misfortune to meet. This young woman could not be too far along in her twenties. How could she be the widow of one of the wealthiest men in the county?

"How can I help you, ma'am?"

There was a long silence as she swallowed and took a deep breath. Her voice was still barely above a whisper, but determined, as she stated, "I need to engage a bodyguard – or killer, Mr. Tillman."

Walker's chair nearly unbalanced as he snapped it down to the floor. He sat forward, but the woman jumped to her feet as if frightened by his sudden movement. She went to the window putting some distance between them.

"Mrs. Burrell, I think you need to explain yourself."

"Please, do not call me that," she snapped stiffening her posture. "My legal name is Farrington, Abigail Farrington. I refuse to use my maiden name or carry my late husband's name. I have taken the name of my mother who is the only member of my family for whom I hold any respect."

Walker noted the defiance in the woman's precise speech. "All right, Miss Farrington. That was quite a request you made. Please provide some details. Who or what do you need protection from and whom do you want to kill. You do realize, ma'am, that hiring out to kill a man is illegal unless the man already has a bounty on him – dead or alive?"

She nodded but continued to look out the small window. What little he could see of her face had gone pale, and she looked – haunted.

"Mr. Tillman, I was a sheltered child, brought up by governesses and housekeepers after my mother died. My father kept me cloistered and did not even allow me to debut. I was looking forward to going to parties and meeting young men when I became of a marriageable age. A few months before my nineteenth birthday, my father announced he had contracted a marriage for me with a man named Hubert Burrell. Such an arrangement did not come as a complete surprise since within our social class arranged marriages are commonplace between young people of equivalent social and economic standing."

"I am aware of such contracts," Walker said, nodding his head.

Abigail Farrington turned and faced him. "My father's idea of a suitable marriage was vastly different from anything I could have possibly dreamed. He indicated the marriage would take place soon although I had not yet met Mr. Burrell. From the day of his pronouncement until my nineteenth birthday, he held me prisoner within our home. Three days before that birthday, my betrothed arrived to claim me at our home in the District of Columbia. To my humiliation, Mr. Burrell was an old man. I was shocked and refused marriage to him.

"My father did not acknowledge my refusal and disregarded my objections. He imprisoned me in my room while he finalized the preparations. A maid brought me meals, but fear of my father's retribution deafened her to my plea for aid. Several days later, I awoke to discover I was married to Mr. Burrell. I have no memory of taking the vows or of signing the marriage certificate. Nevertheless, I was a married woman. I have to assume my father drugged my food or drink. The facts of the matter were presented to me as a *fait d'accompli*."

"Ma'am," Walker questioned.

The woman turned from the window. "I apologize. That is a French phrase often used during times of war. It means I was trapped with no way out. Neither my father nor Mr. Burrell would listen as I implored them to annul the marriage. I even attempted escape by climbing out my window, but all that accomplished was a badly sprained ankle and a slight delay to our departure. Mr. Tillman, I continued to be a prisoner during my marriage and do not mourn Mr. Burrell. May God forgive me; I actually welcomed my husband's death. Neither have I forgiven my father for what he forced upon me."

Walker took a deep breath. "I'm very sorry to hear of your plight, Miss Farrington."

Abigail turned around to face him. "Mr. Burrell died almost a year ago, nine months ago to be exact. I am the sole heir of his estate. It was not my husband's intent, but how things ultimately resolved themselves. As his spouse and only living relative, all property transferred to me under the territorial laws of Nevada. Mr. Tillman, I recently received word that my father, Senator Edgar T. Rochester, is on his way to Carson City. I do not know how he obtained knowledge of Mr. Burrell's death since we do not correspond. I need protection from him, as I have no doubt he believes he has the right to take over my properties and finances. That cannot happen. I existed for nearly three years in a purgatory of his making. I will not allow him to control or dictate my life ever again. I will not allow him to compel me into another wretched union against my will."

Walker cleared his throat. "Miss Farrington?"

She gave him a dismissive shake to her head. "I prefer Abigail, sir."

He gave an acknowledging nod to her request. "Abigail, are you staying in town?"

"Yes, I have taken a room at the St. Charles Hotel for a night or two," she answered. "I do not know the exact date or time of my father's arrival, but I must prepare. Circumstances delayed my procuring aid beforehand. If you will not assist in my quest for protection, I must quickly locate someone else. If I cannot find assistance here, I will depart and go into hiding."

"I understand, ma'am, but I need a little time to think about this situation. You are aware, Miss Farrington, that if you are of age, your father can not force anything on you?"

Abigail straightened proudly, but she still shivered slightly. "I know what the law states, Mr. Tillman. It states that after the age of majority, and as a widow, the property belongs to me."

Nevertheless, my father believes I am his property and therefore anything of mine would rightfully belong to him. My being of legal age nor the law will stop him."

Her slight frame stiffened, and her chin came up in defiance. "My father is an evil bastard who cares for nothing but himself, wealth, and power. He may fool his constituents, but I know him for the devil he is. His power and influence grow with each re-election, and it has turned him into a cruel tyrant. He is extremely wealthy and surrounds himself with men of authority and power. When he makes up his mind to do something, he will allow no one to stop him. That is why I might be employing you to kill. I would not purposely hire you to kill anyone, but it may come to that if you challenge my father in the course of your duties to protect me. You may think that makes me an immoral woman, Mr. Tillman, but I may not have any other choice."

* * * * *

Walker Tillman led Miss Farrington to the door. Obviously an accomplished horsewoman, she mounted her horse without assistance and rode down the dusty street. He felt sympathy for her difficulties. She was a refined woman from her manners and speech, but it did not make sense that she had been treated so cruelly – if she was telling the truth.

Walker was not a hired killer. Sometimes he brought in a dead bounty, but only because they were foolish enough to put up a fight. Hiring out as a bodyguard was not usually a difficult assignment. As he considered the information she'd given him, he decided that what Miss Farrington needed was a husband. A husband would be her best defense against her father. If she remarried, her father would have no legal standing over her or her business. That control would then belong to her husband.

He shook his head amused at the direction of his thoughts. He unquestionably did not want to be thinking along those lines. He wanted no part of marriage – no sir, not him! He might be a sucker for a beautiful woman, and Miss Farrington was certainly that, but marriage was not for him. The first thing Walker had to do was find out if she was telling the truth.

He left his office and headed over to the Carson City Miner's Bank. His friend Orion Clemens was the only lawyer remaining in Carson City. The current lack of lawyers was due to a partnership of shady lawyers who had come very close to being tarred and feathered before they left town in the dead of night. Although a newspaperman by trade, Orion had tried and failed several times in his attempts to own and run a newspaper. He made his living now by trying to farm and practicing law.

Walker had known Orion most of his life, first as a friend of his father and later after he grew to be a man himself, as his friend and advisor.

Orion did not work for the bank. He rented an office in their building and had a contract to conduct most of their legal transactions. If Miss Farrington needed a lawyer, she would most likely have hired Orion. Walker could count on Orion's opinion as to whether or not she was telling the truth.

"Client privilege," Orion said without blinking an eye.

"You won't tell me anything?" Walker complained.

Orion gave a sigh. "Why are you asking that? You know the law. I will tell you that I like and respect Miss Farrington. She is a gutsy young lady and nice on top of it."

"She thinks her father will try to take her inheritance from her," Walker said.

Orion gave a snort. "Did you ever meet Senator Rochester or Mr. Burrell?"

"Not the Senator, but I met Burrell once. I didn't think much of him."

"I have had the misfortune of meeting both of them and they are men of like character. I did not like the Senator, and neither I nor anyone else in this town liked Burrell," Orion said. "He was a coarse, rough man who did not treat his wife or his hired help with any decency or respect. From what Miss Farrington shared with me, her father based the marriage contract solely on Burrell's assets. If she spent more than five minutes in Burrell's company, she deserves everything she got from his estate. Since he died, she has legally changed her name. She also had her marriage annulled although that was strictly a religious matter and had no legal standing relating to her property. With actions like that, I would say the woman wants no link to Burrell in this life or the next. She has safeguarded her estate in an intelligent manner to protect her holdings. I cannot give you any more details on the matter."

"But she has not protected herself against her father," Walker said.

"I believe that is why she contacted you," Orion said, looking at his young friend steadfastly. "My advice to Miss Farrington was to contact you or go to Europe. She can afford to travel and that way she could distance herself from Senator Rochester."

"I'm still trying to figure out if the threat is valid," Walker admitted. "Could she be a silly, excitable woman?"

Orion gave his young friend a look of impatience. "Miss Farrington has solely run the business affairs of the Flying T and the Sugar Ridge Mine for nearly a year. Both Perley Baker,

the foreman of the Flying T, and Boyd McClusky of the Sugar Ridge Mine have commended her ability to make good, sensible decisions. She treats the employees fairly at both the ranch and the mine. I see no reason to doubt her word that her father will be a problem."

Walker heaved a deep breath. "I guess I have to talk to Miss Farrington again. Has Sam left yet?"

Orion shook his head. "No, he has got some new idea about investing in silver shares while he is here. He went off to talk to a mine owner. I warned him that he was twenty years too late for that particular boon, but as usual he is not listening to me. My brother may be an excellent writer, but as a businessman, he is a walking disaster and a con man's delight. He calls me a dreamer yet his head is full of get-rich pipe dreams."

"I want him to sign my copy of *Tom Sawyer* before he leaves town," Walker said with a grin. "Sam is one hell of a writer."

Orion grinned with pride. "With that I do agree. He seems to have found his calling, and I have advised him to stick with it, but he treats writing as merely a fallback profession for when his business deals collapse, which they all inevitably do. He has our family's misfortune with investments and loses money as fast as he earns it. He has been invited to tour as a featured speaker giving talks in private men's clubs and conventions across the country. He is sharp-witted, I will give him that. We will have you over to dinner before he leaves for Boston."

"I will accept," Walker agreed as he left. He still did not know if he was going to take this assignment from Miss Farrington. She was very attractive, but he knew from experience that beautiful ladies caused him problems. As he left the bank, he looked down the street and saw Miss Farrington going into the mercantile. He moved a little faster thinking he might talk with her some more.

Abigail was leaning over the glass counter at the back of the mercantile where the guns were displayed. She directed the clerk to something in the case, and he lifted out a Derringer. She removed her gloves to pick it up, and hold it in her hand as the clerk explained how the gun operated.

"It is called a Derringer or a 'pocket pistol,' ma'am," the clerk informed her.

"Is it very difficult to shoot and load," she asked. "Would you be able to instruct me on how to do it?"

Walker Tillman walked up behind Abigail and took the Derringer out of her hand since she had the thing pointed directly at her chest. "There won't be any need for that, ma'am."

Abigail jerked around and eyed Mr. Tillman suspiciously. "That is not for you to decide, sir. I feel I have need of protection."

"If I accept your offer of employment, you won't need the additional protection of carrying a weapon, ma'am," Walker said firmly.

"Have you decided?" Abigail asked solemnly.

"I have given it considerable deliberation."

"You have not decided yet," she insisted.

"I will make my decision by morning, ma'am," Walker promised.

She turned back to the clerk. "I will purchase it. If you could please take the time to show me how to load and shoot the firearm, I would greatly appreciate it."

The male clerk looked from the man to the woman. "Ma'am, if Walker doesn't want...."

"This man has no right to make decisions for me," Abigail said firmly. "I will purchase the weapon, if you please."

The clerk gave Walker a conciliatory look and turned his attention back to his customer.

Walker Tillman turned on his heel and walked out. Whatever he had thought before about taking the case, he was steamed. How dare she counter his guidance? If he took the job, Miss Farrington would have to comply with his wishes. He could not protect her if she behaved in such a headstrong manner and did not listen to reason.

Abigail returned her attention to the clerk's assistance. She purchased the small pocket pistol and a box of bullets, and followed the clerk into the alley behind the store. He instructed her on how to load the pistol, cock the hammer, hold her arm steady, aim, and squeeze the trigger. The first time she fired, she dropped the pistol as the recoil slammed into her wrist, and her fingers stung with the impact. The clerk suggested she brace her feet firmly and support her shooting arm below the elbow with her other hand. The second shot was worse as the recoil slammed not only into her wrist and fingers, but also her shoulder. Abigail refused to give up and boldly shot the Derringer five more times with little improvement. The percussion hurt, but she did not complain. She still did not feel confident about firing a weapon, but after instruction she did feel more comfortable loading and handling it. She sincerely thanked the clerk and put the pistol in her jacket pocket.

She returned to the inside of the mercantile to purchase a few more items along with another traveling valise. Carrying her things to the hotel, she locked herself in her room and allowed her stiff countenance to collapse as she took several deep breaths and tried to control her trembling. Abigail was terrified. From the moment she received a letter from an old friend with the reported gossip that her father was planning a trip out west, she knew he was coming after her.

She should have left that very day, except she could not leave. Mrs. Harper, the wife of one of the ranch hands who had always treated her kindly, had gone into a difficult labor. Abigail had been duty-bound to help. Helping to deliver a healthy baby boy, and the follow-up care of Mrs. Harper had cost Abigail precious time. She did not regret her efforts, but her efforts had cost her six crucial days.

Abigail sat on the bed or paced the floor in her hotel room. She feared she had waited too long and that Mr. Tillman was not going to accept her offer of employment as her bodyguard. The sheriff had already told her he could not get involved in a family disagreement unless her father assaulted her.

It was far too late for that. The esteemed Senator Edgar W. Rochester was responsible for three years of suffering. He would not consider it suffering, but her father deemed the value of women only slightly above his former slaves. One of the reasons he resided in the District of Columbia was that he had many businesses that relied on slave labor. He still resented the outcome of the civil war. Everyone believed his policies to be that of a northern abolitionist since he was a Senator from the State of New York, but the Senator was a hypocrite.

Both the Sheriff and Mr. Clemens had recommended Mr. Tillman. However, from what she had witnessed beyond his being an exceedingly handsome man who dressed as a lawman or a gambler, he appeared to be lazy. Most men she knew did not lounge around on a good day when there was work at hand. He did not appear to be inclined toward exertions for either pay or to help a lady in distress.

When Abigail felt tears coming, she stiffened her resolve and tried to assure herself that she could handle the situation. Her forced bravado did not stop the tremors of fear. Nevertheless she gave herself a mental scolding and considered her options. If she could not hire assistance here, she would do the next best thing and leave on the morning train going further west.

California was supposed to be full of men for hire. She would simply find one not too horribly disreputable and hire him.

* * * * *

Walker Tillman had not slept well, which made him angry. He always slept well since resigning from his father's law firm. Once he relinquished that responsibility, he no longer felt compelled to live up to his family's high expectations. He no longer worried about competing with his older brothers for clients, or working his way into a senior position. No, he was much better off running his own business doing what he wanted, when he wanted. He was not shot at – much – and for the most part he was satisfied with his life. He did not like tossing and turning all night thinking about a blond-haired gal with pleading blue eyes who had somehow wheedled her way into his head. Maybe it was those big blue eyes or that small chin that trembled while she attempted a pretense of bravery. He could not guess why she had affected him so. He knew one thing for sure. Miss Abigail Farrington was running on nerves and fear. He felt like a jackass for not relieving her mind and taking on her job offer.

He finally relinquished any thought of more sleep and went downstairs to his office where he fired up the small stove in the back room to heat water to clean up. He shaved, applied Bay Rum to his freshly shaved face and slathered Kinkead's Sage Brush Hair Tonic on his unruly wheat-shaft hair. He put on his second best clothes, his best being a going-to-court suit, which he rarely used.

Walker thought he would go to the hotel and invite Miss Farrington to join him in the dining room since they served the best breakfast in town. He would accept the job as her bodyguard and set his rules of the assignment.

Women needed to live by rules. He knew that from watching his father control his headstrong mother and bossy older sister. He would establish the rules if he were taking on the job of her protection. He would also put a stop to that nonsense of her carrying a pistol on her person. If he did not, more than likely that little gal would hurt herself and he would have none of that.

Walker Tillman nodded his head in self-satisfaction. He had made up his mind, and he knew what he was going to do. He strapped on his Colt six-shooter and headed over to the St. Charles Hotel.

The previous evening Abigail had gone downstairs and requested the hotel clerk to have someone go to the train station and purchase a ticket for her for the first westbound train leaving in the morning. He readily agreed to this common request from genteel women since it was after dark. Only women of ill repute walked the streets alone after dark, and they were fair game for rough men.

Abigail waited until she heard the train come into the station. She remained in her hotel room all night waiting for daylight, waiting for the early train to arrive. She was dressed for traveling in a dark-blue day dress with a small overlay of a lighter blue draped from the front to the back. The dress was simple without a bustle so she would be comfortable while sitting for a long time. She wore a summer straw hat with blue and pink flowers on the headband. She also had a duster coat draped over her arm, as she would need it to protect her clothing if the windows were open allowing the dirty smoke and cinders from the coal stack into the passenger cars. When she heard the train whistle and saw the billowing black smoke from the locomotive stack, she picked up her valises and went downstairs.

Abigail checked out of the hotel, tucked her change purse back in her reticule, thanked the clerk with a smile and turned with her valises in hand. She froze in terror staring at the man standing in the hotel doorway.

"Abigail!" Senator Edgar Rochester exclaimed loudly with a broad smile. "I see you are waiting for me. Good, we will leave as soon as the next eastbound train arrives."

Abigail looked into the cold blue eyes of her father, a man she had not seen or heard from in nearly four years and shook her head. "No, I will not go anywhere with you."

"Abigail, you are my daughter, I am here to help you," Edgar Rochester said in a coaxing, sickeningly false voice. "I know you have had a rough time of it, my dear, but I am here now to assist and take care of you!"

Abigail shook her head vehemently. "No, not now! Not ever again!"

Senator Edgar Rochester was not a man to allow himself to be challenged. In four steps, he had his daughter by the arms, and he shook her hard. He grabbed her hand and dragged her toward the front door expecting compliance. "We need to talk," he snapped.

Abigail pulled back and swung one of her valises at her father slamming him in the crotch and yanking her hand out of his. "Never!" she screamed.

Edgar Rochester went down on one knee in pain as the door opened again. "How dare you!" he groaned.

"Oh, I dare!" Abigail yelled not caring that people were beginning to crowd the doorway to the dining area and the lobby.

"Miss Farrington, do you need me get the sheriff?" Mr. Briddle, the hotel manager, demanded.

"Yes," Abigail screamed.

"I am Senator Edgar W. Rochester. Abigail is my daughter who is out of her mind with grief over the loss of her husband. I am taking her back to our family home in Washington to recover from her loss."

"I don't think so," a voice said from the doorway. All eyes shifted to the main door where Walker Tillman stood with a Colt 6-shooter in his hand – cocked and aimed at the man on the floor.

"Come to me, Abigail," Walker said softly and was pleased when she skirted around the man on the floor and slipped behind him for safety.

"What have you done?" Edgar Rochester demanded angrily, getting to his feet. "How dare you be with this man! It is indecent, disgraceful! You have not been widowed for a year. Have you allowed some fortune hunter to make advances toward you? I will put a stop to this right now. Abigail, you need medical care!"

"Oh, stop it, Father!" Abigail exclaimed. "You are not here for me. You are here because you think you can get your hands on Hubert Burrell's money. I will not allow that to happen!"

"What's going on here?" a voice interjected.

Senator Rochester turned around to see a tall, barrel-chested man with a badge. "Arrest that man," he demanded pointing at Walker.

"What for," Sheriff Howell asked.

"He is holding me and my daughter at gunpoint!"

Sheriff Tom Howell did not blink an eye at the fancy dressed man with easterner written all over him. "It don't look to me like he's holding her at gunpoint. Only one I see with a gun pointed at him is you."

"Arrest him!" the Senator ordered.

"Hell man, holding a gun on someone ain't against the law as far as I know unless he shoots you." He turned to his friend. "Walker, are you planning on shooting this eastern yahoo?"

"Not unless he tries to hurt the lady," Walker said with a sharp gleam in his eyes.

"I demand—"

"Shut yer trap!" Sheriff Howell said bluntly turning his attention back to his friend and sometimes duly appointed deputy. "Do you mind telling me why are you holding a gun on this man?"

"He is trying to kidnap Miss Abigail Farrington, who obviously does not want to go with him."

"My daughter is ill and she is not Miss Farrington. She is the widow of Hubert Burrell. That she denies her identify is proof enough she is not right in the head."

"That is not true," another voice said from the dining room doorway as Orion Clemens stepped into the lobby. "The former Mrs. Burrell petitioned the State of Nevada for a change of name, which was granted. That is about as legal as it gets. Farrington is her name."

"Why don't we take this over to my office," Sheriff Howell said, pulling his Colt and pointing it at the entire group. "Walker, holster your gun. I'll take care of this matter."

Sputtering and bitterly complaining, Senator Rochester led the group out of the hotel and down the street to the jail with an occasional nudge from the barrel of the Sheriff's gun in his back.

Abigail was trailing behind the sheriff and hesitated in the street when she heard the train whistle indicating it was leaving the station. Walker put his arm around her shoulders and bent his head down to speak to her. "Don't worry, I will get you out of here and protect you from him. I have witnessed the kind of man he is, and I have a clearer picture of what you are up against."

Abigail looked up into his gentle brown eyes and nodded. "Thank you, Mr. Tillman."

Sheriff Howell listened as Edgar W. Rochester tried to throw his considerable weight around his office. The man's puffed-up ego rubbed the Sheriff the wrong way, as did most easterners, politicians and dang near anybody that did not respect his authority or his badge. Each time Miss Farrington opened her mouth to speak, the man berated his daughter making sure he was heard and not her. The Sheriff listened to the blowhard for a while and decided he had heard enough. The sheriff pulled his friend Walker aside, taking notice that the young woman was not allowing herself to be detached too far from him, and followed along.

"Walker, what do you want me to do with this yahoo?"

"Lock him up for at least a week," Walker said.

"On what charges," Sheriff Howell asked although he did not seem opposed to the idea.

"Find a charge. Being an obnoxious ass should suffice. You have done it before with less reason," Walker said grinning. "I need time to get Miss Abigail away."

The Sheriff's eyebrows lifted as his eyes went to the obviously frightened woman standing behind his friend. "The Senator will be pissed. He is already threatening my job, not that a bureaucrat from Washington holds much weight out here. Some would shoot him for that alone. The train to San Francisco comes through in a couple of hours. Get on it, but don't stay on it. Switch to another line going south or north or even back east. Find some place real quiet and hole up for a while. I will give you five days while I keep this eastern dude locked up tight with no visitors unless the circuit judge comes poking around. Does that work for you?"

Walker looked to Abigail, and she nodded yes.

Sheriff Howell walked away to pick up his rifle and aim it at Edgar W. Rochester. He ordered him towards the back room into the one and only jail cell.

Hearing the still loud and threatening voice of the Senator, Abigail turned to the wall leaning her head against it. Walker Tillman pulled her gently away from the wall turning her towards him and leaned her against the solid support of his chest. He let her lean there for a minute and then he lifted her chin looking down into her eyes.

"Come along, Miss Abigail, we have a few busy hours ahead of us and then I will get you to someplace safe. I apologize for not realizing the urgency of your request yesterday."

"He will not give up easily," Abigail said shakily.

"He has never tangled with me before," Walker said, offering the lady his arm with a confident smile.