

THE DOCTOR'S CONVENIENT
MARRIAGE

SECOND CHANCES IN HARMONY SPRINGS ~ BOOK
THREE



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Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, Kings James Version.

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CHAPTER 1



BOSTON, JUNE 1889

“*I*’m sorry, Miss Mountbatten. We have no current openings for a physician.”

Tori inhaled a deep breath and counted to three, clenching her fists in her lap. She forced her voice to remain even. “There is a sign in the window that claims otherwise, Dr. Burns.”

The doctor leaned back in his chair and folded his hands over an ample belly. “We can’t help you. I’m sorry.”

Liar.

Tori bit her tongue, then winced at the metallic taste of blood. Everything about Dr. Burns—from his half smirk to his perfectly pomaded salt-and-pepper hair—sent her stomach roiling. Yet another self-satisfied man who didn’t think women capable of being in his profession.

She rose, smoothing the ruffles on her deep-green dress.

Dr. Burns stood with that blasted smirk etched on his face, casting a smug glance at her emerald earbobs. “If I may, Miss Mountbatten. A lovely society lady like yourself shouldn’t be searching for a career. One snap of those pretty fingers and

you'd have dozens of men at your door." He leaned forward. "I have a son..."

"Good day, Dr. Burns."

Spinning on her heel, Tori marched to the door, ignoring the deep chuckle behind her. She didn't stop until she pushed through the double doors onto the busy Boston sidewalk. Tori turned into an alley and pressed her back against the wall, inhaling deep breaths.

The nerve!

She put white-gloved hands against her cheeks. Warm.

Botheration. Her face likely matched her fiery red hair. She tugged on a tightly coiled curl. A color to match her temper, as her mother constantly opined.

Why did arrogant men like Dr. Burns get under her skin so easily?

Tori growled, letting the curl spring back into place. She'd never be able to open her own practice if she couldn't find a doctor to train under first. At least a year. That's what the stipulation on her medical diploma stated. She was technically a doctor but had to work under a more experienced physician before she could take on patients by herself.

But no one would hire her. She'd been looking for weeks, and not a single doctor took her seriously. Most laughed when she applied. Others said women doctors had no place in medicine.

With another growl, Tori shoved off the wall and stomped down the alley, the heels of her walking boots clicking against the cobblestone. The late-morning sun shone warm and bright. People called to one another as they hurried to and fro, going about their daily business. She kept her head ducked to avoid talking with anyone. Too soon, she reached the south slope of Beacon Hill. Tori stared at the opulent homes, her own included, and shuddered.

Fancy prisons, the lot of them.

Maybe now was a good time to visit the hospital in...

“There you are, Victoria.”

Tori groaned under her breath. That syrupy, condescending voice belonged to only one person. “Hello, Mother.”

Her mother floated down the sidewalk, parasol held over her head. Tori was certain Crystalline Mountbatten’s skin had never felt the sun. That milky white complexion wasn’t easy to accomplish as a redhead, but her mother religiously used her silly parasol no matter the season or weather.

Tori never used one and had the freckles to prove it. Freckles she was rather fond of.

“You really should use your parasol.”

Perhaps Mother was a mind reader. Tori rolled her eyes heavenward, praying for strength as she often did around Mother. “We’ve been over this.”

“Yet you refuse to take my advice.” Mother sniffed, somehow managing to look down on Tori even being several inches shorter. “No self-respecting man will want a woman with freckles.”

“Excellent.” Tori smiled wide. She lifted her chin to the sky, letting the sun hit her full force. “This feels divine. You should try it.”

Her mother gasped, one hand flying to her chest. “Victoria!”

Time to make her escape. “It was nice seeing you, Mother, but I must be going.”

“Not so fast, young lady. I’m going to tea with Mrs. Williamson. You should join us.”

The request sounded like a demand. Mrs. Williamson had a son—and the two families seemed determined to bring their children together. Kenneth Williamson was an arrogant, womanizing cad who thought himself God’s gift to the world.

With a grunt, she fisted one hand against her hip. “No, thank you. I’m still looking for a job.”

Mother’s face hardened, showing off the lines around her

eyes and mouth. “Women do not belong in medicine. It’s been over a month, Victoria. Give it up and take your place in society like a respectable lady.” She gripped Tori’s arm. “Come along. Kenneth mentioned he wanted to see you again.”

Tori laughed, pulling away. Best to ignore the Kenneth comment. “If women don’t belong in medicine, why did you and Father pay for my schooling?”

“You were supposed to get that out of your system in school,” Mother muttered. She squared her shoulders and looked Tori in the eye. “We didn’t think you’d be this determined to have a career once you knew all it entailed.”

Proof that her parents didn’t know her at all. Tori tossed her head, curls bouncing. “I’ll see you later.”

“You will never find a doctor to take you on.”

“You underestimate my abilities.”

Mother smirked, looking far too similar to Dr. Burns. “You underestimate your father’s influence.”

Tori narrowed her eyes. A shiver slid down her spine. “What does that mean?”

“I’m late. I’ll give Mrs. Williamson and Kenneth your regards.” Mother waved a gloved hand. “Speak to your father, Victoria. It might be enlightening.”

A sick feeling settled in Tori’s stomach. Father hadn’t used his machinations on her in a couple years, ever since her sister, Ella, left for the Montana Territory to escape his tyranny and her ex-fiancé’s abuse. Tori had wanted to go with Ella, but she needed to finish medical school. Suspecting Father would turn his manipulative ways on her, she’d been surprised when he willingly paid her tuition. Now, it seemed he’d just been biding his time to flex his control over her.

Tori gritted her teeth. She bolted back the way she’d come, past building after building on the cobblestone street, not stopping until she reached her father’s office. The three-story brick structure loomed over her. It was the first Monday in June, and

Father never took clients on Mondays—which meant no interruptions. She pushed through the front door and strode down the hallway, past the receptionist, and burst into his personal office.

Father acknowledged her presence with a lift of his bushy brows. He swept back his graying brown hair and frowned, green eyes flashing with annoyance. “What are you doing here?”

No one would accuse him of beating around the bush. It was perhaps the only thing she’d inherited from him. “Looking for answers.”

He sat back in his chair and crossed his arms. “Theatrics won’t get you anywhere, Victoria. Speak plainly.”

She mimicked his position, plopping into a chair with her arms pulled in tight against her chest. “Mother insinuated you’re the reason I haven’t found a position as a doctor. Is that true?”

Father chuckled, the derision in the sound slicing through her. “For someone who thinks she’s so smart, it took far too long for you to catch on.”

Dread curled in her stomach. She stared at her father, clenching the material of her skirt. “Why did you pay for my schooling if you had no intention of me practicing medicine?”

He snorted. “The tuition was mere pennies. Your mother and I knew we’d have less of a fight from you if we indulged your little venture. Now that you’ve graduated, it’s time to take your place in society. No daughter of mine is going to have a profession.” His face twisted. “It’s bad enough your crazed sister ran off and married a rancher...”

“Ella is not crazed.” Tori stood, hands fisted at her sides. “She escaped the dysfunction of this family.”

Father’s eyes sparked, and his face became dangerously calm. “Careful.”

As if his threats ever deterred her. “Or what? You’ll block

me from becoming a physician? It seems you've already decided on that." She planted her palms on his desk, leaning forward with a sneer. "You can't cow me the way you do your clients. Unlike them, I see you for who you are. A calculating, manipulative man who cares nothing for others, who will stop at nothing to get what he wants." She straightened, burning rage pulsing through her. "You won't win. I'll find a way to fulfill my dream. Count on it."

Pushing back his chair, her father rose slowly, gaze locked on hers. "I've had enough of your rebellion. You had your time in medical school. That part of your life is now over. No doctor in Boston will take you on. I've made sure of that."

A surge of heat exploded in Tori's stomach. She slammed a hand on his desk. "How dare you!"

"I dare more." Father's lips curved in a cruel smile. "As of now, you're cut off from family funds. Until you marry a suitable man, you will have no resources. Understood?"

She stared, heart hammering an erratic pulse. "What?"

"And if you're not married within three months, you no longer have a home at our residence. You'll have to fend for yourself, though it'll be hard to do so without money."

"That's blackmail!"

"Call it what you will. My decision is made." Her father lowered back into his chair, a satisfied grin on his face. "I believe Kenneth Williamson is looking for a wife. You should consider him."

And he dared label Ella the crazed one.

"Never."

Father shrugged and riffled through papers on his desk. "It's no concern of mine who you choose, so long as he comes from wealth and status. For your sake, I hope you find a husband soon."

For her sake, indeed. Nothing about this was for her. Father craved control, and he'd never liked how Tori bucked his rule.

Now, by cutting her off from money and career hopes, he knew she'd have no choice but to follow his directive.

Spine going rigid, Tori backed out of the office and slammed the door behind her without a glance behind.

No. He wouldn't win.

She'd find a way out of this mess.



Harrison Blake stared at the calendar on his office wall. June sixth. His thirtieth birthday loomed just four months away, and with it, the requirement that he marry.

“Ridiculous stipulation for an inheritance,” he muttered. What had great-aunt Lucille been thinking? He was already set to inherit his father's wealth one day, but with the funds his aunt left him, he could finally move west and build a hospital—his life-long dream.

The one he'd never breathed to a single soul.

His parents would have a conniption if they knew their son wanted out of society life. They already lamented the fact that he'd become a doctor instead of a gentleman of leisure. If he told them he wanted to leave Boston, they'd think he'd lost his mind.

He wanted the money, but his aunt also stated his future wife must be a society lady. What socialite would want to leave Boston for the wilds of the west?

With a sigh, Harrison left the office. He had patients to see, and thinking of his aunt's requirements for his future gave him a headache.

He passed through the lobby. A young couple sat with their infant on one of the settees. They spoke in low tones, but he caught their whispered words in Italian. The woman bit her lip as he walked by, her gaze darting to the floor. Harrison paused.

The immigrants in Boston were not treated well by the general population. If only he could ease the woman's fear, but trust took time to develop.

The door of the clinic opened as he passed, drawing his gaze up from the young couple. Victoria Mountbatten, daughter of Boston's most influential business mogul, marched inside. Her red hair gleamed under her hat, and he tried to ignore the slight hitch in his breath. They'd formed something of a friendship over the past few years, and he admired her spirit and determination to do good. "Good afternoon, Dr. Mountbatten."

She rolled her eyes. "What good is the title if I can't find work as one?"

"You've not found someone to train under?"

She stiffened, brown eyes glittering with...rage? "No."

The word was clipped and harsh. Harrison frowned, moving closer. "Is something wrong, Victoria?"

"Yes." She plunked her hands on her hips and glared at him. "Why are men determined to control women's lives?"

"Uh—"

A bit of the fight faded from her eyes. "Not you personally. You're actually one of the few men I find somewhat trustworthy."

His brows lifted. "Somewhat? You've volunteered here for three years, helping me with patients, and I'm only *somewhat* trustworthy?"

She waved a hand. "Don't take offense. I don't trust easily, as you might have noticed."

He had but wasn't about to confirm it.

"Anyway..." Victoria released a deep sigh. "I don't suppose your superior will change his mind about letting me train under him?"

"I'm afraid not. He claims he's already got his hands full training me."

She eyed him. "Haven't you been a physician for six years?"

"I have." He'd been one of the youngest men to gain that honor, but his age also meant people didn't easily take to him as a doctor. They preferred his mentor, Dr. Carrington, who'd been practicing for over forty years.

"You're fully trained, then."

"Yes."

"Could I train under you?"

With a smile, Harrison motioned toward the examination room. "You know I'd need my own practice."

She fell into step beside him. "Do you intend to have one?"

"I hope to, but I doubt you'd be interested in helping with that."

"Oh?" One perfect eyebrow rose. Two stray red curls brushed her cheeks as she spun toward him. "Why do you say that?"

Might as well tell someone. "Because I hope to go west. Boston holds no appeal for me. I want to establish and run a hospital in a place that needs one."

Victoria froze. She grabbed his arm.

Harrison stopped walking, his brow furrowing. "What?"

She stared at him, pink lips hanging open. He shuffled his feet and cleared his throat. Maybe it hadn't been the best idea to share his dream. "Did I shock you?"

"N-no." Her eyes narrowed, the look almost calculating. Harrison started to ask what was on her mind, but she tugged him toward the examination room. "Let's see our patient."

They went through their familiar routine—him doing the bulk of the examination but allowing Victoria time to practice her own skills. She was a talented doctor. In truth, if he had been the head doctor of this clinic, she'd have easily gotten the hours needed learning under him to open her own practice.

Unfortunately, that wasn't the case. And he'd heard rumors that her father threatened any doctor who took her under his

care with financial ruin. He wasn't sure how the man would accomplish that, but Archibald Mountbatten had a reputation not to be crossed.

Victoria was feisty, yes but how had such a manipulative father produced a daughter as kind-hearted as she was?

"That's all for today," Harrison said to her once their final patient left. "Thanks for your help. As usual, you did great."

She regarded him with a little frown, chewing her bottom lip. Harrison's gaze tracked the motion but quickly snapped back up to her eyes. The calculating look was back. He—a grown man—wanted to squirm under her intense scrutiny.

"You said you wanted to move west. Where, exactly?"

He blinked at the abrupt words. "Uh—well, there were a few places I considered, but the one that calls to me is Montana Territory."

Her mouth fell open again.

Before she could speak, Harrison rushed on. "It's nothing but a dream, Victoria. I have no funds of my own, and I can't just move to Montana and build a hospital without money."

"I thought your great-aunt recently left you a fortune."

He grimaced. So Boston society knew of his inheritance. "She did, but there was a stipulation to receiving it."

Victoria gave him an expectant look.

Harrison sighed. "I have to get married to a society lady before I turn thirty in October."

"That's four months away."

He barked a bleak laugh. "I'm aware. It's a hopeless situation. I can't ask a woman to marry me for money, then turn around and take her from her family and home to the unknown in the west. It's unfair."

Victoria drew in a long breath. She stepped closer to him. "What if the woman gained something from the marriage as well?"

He frowned. "I'm not sure what she could possibly gain..."

“I do.”

“Oh?”

She nodded, taking another step toward him, so close he could smell her jasmine perfume. “Freedom, Harrison.” She grasped his hands, her next words nearly knocking him over. “Marry me.”

