

“Mrs. Pearson is doing quite well after her caesarian section,” Lydia said to Dr. Lightner as they and the hospital’s nurse stood in the hall. They were perusing the woman’s chart.

“I agree.” Dr. Lightner gave his protégé an approving smile. “No sign of infection around the incision. Washing our hands before her surgery is a wise protocol.”

Lydia nodded. “I saw that my hands were washed when I operated in Gettysburg. Miss Edler and I also washed our hands when attending a birth, and we had only one case of puerperal fever out of ten births. She was quite knowledgeable about Dr. Semmelweiss’ work on cleanliness in lying in hospitals.”

At the sound of footsteps, all three looked up to find Capt. Frost striding toward them.

“Captain...” Lydia stammered.

“Doctor,” he corrected. Stopping in front of her, he made a courtly bow. “How have you been, Dr. Lape?”

“I’m well...” And she was flustered, which she wasn’t hiding one bit.

Dr. Lightner’s graying mustache lifted around his smile. “Nurse Van Sleet, I believe these two doctors need to have a consultation. Shall we continue on our rounds?”

The slim, brunette grinned knowingly. “By all means, Doctor Lightner.”

As they disappeared into another patient’s room, Lydia slipped her arm through Philip’s and led him in the opposite direction. “What are you doing here?” she whispered.

“Looking for you. Isn’t it obvious?”

“Yes, but... I have heard nothing about your arrival save your last letter and had no idea...”

Philip laughed. “Oh, Lydia! Of course, you didn’t. I got delayed leaving the hospital and arrived at the train station just in time to catch the next train out. Had you given me a moment to speak –”

They had entered the atrium, where they paused. Construction was going on across the way to repair the door to what had once been the men’s wing of the Hospital for the Insane. The door had been damaged when some of the patients had staged a riot. They had caused damage throughout the wing. Fortunately, the trouble behind the riot was later addressed. The poor management was ousted, and Dr. Winston Stanley was re-installed as Superintendent. It was at that point Dr. Stanley decided to split the massive Kirkbride-style building in two: one side for the hospital for the insane and the other for the hospital for physical maladies and injuries. The hospital for the insane, however, would not be re-opened for another few weeks.

Since the pounding and loud voices of the workmen was not conducive to a conversation, Lydia led Philip outside, where they perched on the steps of the marble portico.

Philip said, “May we start over again?”

Lydia nodded.

“It’s good to see you, Dr. Lape.”

“It’s good to see you, too, Dr. Frost. Aren’t your family anxious to see you?”

His sad smile told her the story even before he opened his mouth to speak. “Alas, both my parents are deceased. My sister lives in the state of New York. Albany to be exact. She is married with five children and, as you can imagine has a busy life. One of my brothers lives in Ohio and the other is in the New York Cavalry. So, while I am sure they would love to see me, and I have every intention of doing so sometime in the future...” He took a breath. “I simply wanted to see you first.”

Lydia swallowed. “I see.”

“I hope I am not being too forward.”

Lydia glanced down at her hands for a moment. Then she looked up. “No, Dr. Frost, you are not being too forward.”

He thought her eyes were the most beautiful he’d ever seen on a woman: dark brown pools that were earnest and yet held a spark of humor. “Philip,” he murmured. “Call me Philip, please. Remember we agreed to use our first names.”

“Philip. Yes.”

“I do not have a position yet as a doctor. But when I do get one, I would be able to entertain the notion of settling down.”

“Indeed?” Lydia suppressed a smile.

“I know you are a widow, Lydia, and perhaps it is too soon for you to begin to consider... I mean, that is...” He trailed off.

She slipped an arm through his. “Philip, I still miss Edgar terribly. But I believe I am ready to consider a courtship.”

His expression – one of combined delight and love – warmed her. So much so that Lydia boldly leaned over and kissed him on the mouth. “I think perhaps we are good for each other,” she said.

“Oh, Lydia,” he whispered, kissing her tenderly in return.