



Matthew worked in his office in an unsettled state. Memories of the previous afternoon tortured him. He should have expected the inevitable meeting with Logan's mother-in-law. Any woman would want to be on hand following the birth of her grandchildren. Margaret Millerson was no different.

But why did she have to arrive in the middle of his examination? If she would have come to town when he was at his office or out on a call, he could have heard the news of her arrival and had time to prepare himself to see her again.

The way the meeting happened left him with a serious case of light-headedness that set his world spinning. He'd tried his best to cover his reaction with measured words and controlled actions before he left the house, but Margaret probably saw through them. He'd never been good at concealing his strongest feelings even though his medical profession called upon him to make the effort each day.

Meeting her again at the bakery had only prolonged his discomfort and challenged his ability to hide his feelings. How he wished he could have had a nice talk with her alone. But the store had been full of people. The Zahn's bustling bakery was

not the place to renew his precious acquaintance with Margaret Millerson.

Today was the day of his monthly visit to the children's home in Clear Book, and he must get an early start. He hitched his horse to his buggy, loaded his supplies, and followed the road out of town.

Some of his colleagues drove cars on their travels. He should probably break out of his old-fashioned ways and pay a visit to Martin Barnaveldt at Oswell City Auto, but the investment seemed risky. The spring season had been a soggy one that kept the country roads quite muddy. He couldn't take the chance on a car that might get stuck in the ruts and fail him in an emergency.

His horse and buggy had served him well for years, and he couldn't imagine why he would want to tamper with a dependable system. He tapped the horse with the whip in a gentle show of appreciation and put his best effort into enjoying the scenery.

He may have succeeded if those memories of the parsonage would leave him alone. Margaret stayed on his mind. She wasn't Mrs. Millerson to him. Her name attached itself to the comforting picture of her he carried in his thoughts. Margaret. He shouldn't think of her in such an informal manner. She was a woman of class and elegance, and therefore deserved the best treatment a gentleman could give. His thoughts strayed to her appearance. The burgundy traveling suit she wore set off her auburn hair and brown eyes with perfection.

An oncoming truck arrested Matthew's attention. He veered the horse wide to the right to avoid a collision.

"Hey, Doc!" The driver waved through his open window. The greeting sounded friendly enough, but Matthew couldn't tell. Irritation may have infused the man's words.

Snapped out of his reverie, Matthew took a few deep breaths and shook his head to fully awaken. At least he'd missed a splattering of mud from the truck's tires. Another reason why he preferred horse travel. His horse was much less messy on the

road and more respectful of fellow travelers than a heavy and speeding delivery truck.

The road to himself once more, Matthew fell back into contemplation. The bachelor life had worked just fine for twenty years. He didn't need a woman in his life. His heart probably couldn't take it anyway. He'd loved and loved well until his dear wife died during her labor bringing their first child into the world.

At a crossroads, Matthew brought the buggy to a stop. A Model T Ford and a set of work horses pulling a farm wagon passed in front of him. Looking both directions, Matthew guided his horse onto the main road heading south.

Driving failed to keep his mind off the past. Memories still tore at his heart. After laying his family to rest in the grave, he'd left the storekeeper life he'd shared with his father and went to medical school. The training taught him how to save lives so that he might spare others the anguish he'd endured.

Twenty years of a rewarding medical practice separated him from devastation. He'd done well living his life alone, safe from any more tragedy. His heart had accepted the changes in his life and given him peace until the night of Pastor Logan's wedding. Margaret looked queenly and stylish as the mother of the bride. In that moment, a fire was kindled in his heart and had burned with a steady glow ever since.

He knew where that glow came from. Love. He'd felt it before when he'd married the first time, and now after all these years, he felt it again. The pastor's mother-in-law, one of the finest women who lived, had kindled this steady burn of love.

She must not discover this secret affection he felt for her. No one must ever know. He was the town doctor, the conqueror of his own pain and the champion of others who suffered. For the sake of his profession, his well-being, and his patients, he must continue standing strong and undefeated.

As he drove through the countryside, he passed the homes of so many he'd known for years and cared about with deep

concern. If he fell to another pain like the first one, he'd fail them. He'd managed to survive and drag himself back to stability and wholeness. The next time he may not get so fortunate.

But he loved Margaret Millerson. If he knew what to do about it, he could go on his way and do his job with the same confidence he'd always relied on. He'd just have to keep the fire concealed the best he knew how. There was no room in his life or in his community for it to get out of hand.

A river, swollen with spring rains, flowed under the bridge he crossed. The Clear Brook Children's Home occupied the bank on the other side of the river rolling along the edge of town. Matthew turned off the road, parked his buggy, and tethered the horse in the shade of a tree where she could feed on grass while he worked.

He took the elevator up to the third floor and walked the length of the spacious, sunny wing. A cluster of children sat on a sofa and chairs near a window working on puzzles.

"Good morning, Doctor Matt," a little girl named Ruby called out.

He smiled back. His last name had too many letters and syllables for the smallest children to spit out, so his identity had been shortened to "Matt."

Matthew entered a room with a slim bed he used for examinations, a desk with a chair, and a cabinet of supplies in the corner. He went to the window and lifted the shades. Sunlight streamed into the room glowing on the white tiled floor and reflecting from the white painted metal of the furnishings. He opened his bag and organized the supplies he'd brought along.

Miss Worley, a young teacher on staff with the home, entered the room. "Dr. Kaldenberg."

"Yes?" He glanced up.

"Shall I bring in your first patient?" she asked.

"Please." He settled on the stool ready to begin the day's work.

Miss Worley left and soon returned with a girl who introduced herself to him as Jane. They had a pleasant conversation about the friends she'd made since her arrival at the children's home and about the help Miss Worley gave her with her schoolwork.

He gave Jane a routine examination, and found the girl to be in good health. "You may let Miss Worley know to send Albert in. I believe he is next on the schedule."

Jane's face fell. "Albert hasn't been feeling well. He can't come today."

Matthew drew in a deep breath. Albert had been his patient for a long while. The young boy suffered from a physical disability that affected his walking as well as a hint of a mental disability that hindered his speech. Poor Albert did not need any more difficulties.

"Where is Albert?" Matthew asked the girl.

"In the room he shares with Lance, but Lance had to move in with Bernie. Albert needs the room to stay dark, and he can't stand any noise."

Matthew rose from the stool and held a hand out to Jane to assist her from the chair. "Come with me. Let's find Miss Worley and see what she can tell me about Albert."

Jane smiled and accompanied him into the hall. A consultation with the teacher informed Matthew that Albert lay in bed in a room in the adjacent wing. She led him there and Matthew entered. The room was dark as night. Matthew went to the window and lifted a corner of the blanket keeping out the sunlight.

"Ow! Quit that." A yell sounded from the nearby bed.

Matthew looked down into the face of Albert. Pain etched lines in the boy's features. His eyes were scrunched closed.

Matthew sat on the edge of the bed. "Good morning, Albert. Tell me, what is the matter?"

"That you, Dr. Matt?" one of Albert's eyes peeked at him while he spoke with a distinct slur between his words.

“It’s me. I’m back and I want to help you. Do you have a headache?”

“Terrible.”

“How long have you had it?” Matthew felt the boy’s pulse as he talked.

“Since yesterday. One of the teachers has been lookin’ after me, but I don’t feel any better.” Albert rubbed his forehead.

“Lie still. I’ll get my bag from the other room and examine you.” Matthew left to complete his errand and called Miss Worley to join him in Albert’s room.

Matthew worked over the boy for a long while coaxing for a look in his eyes which Albert protested in the worst way and applying pressure to various places on his face. He noted the eye was red and watery. “Albert, does your eye hurt when you blink?”

The boy nodded slowly.

Satisfied that he’d found answers to Albert’s sufferings, Matthew sat on the edge of the bed, crossed his legs and settled his wrist over one knee. “It looks to me like Albert has a corneal abrasion,” he informed Miss Worley. “It can be quite painful and causes sensitivity to light.”

Albert’s brows rose indicating he’d heard the announcement too.

“Oh, my,” she whispered with a concerned glance at Albert.

“I’d like to move Albert to the examining room and apply a pressure patch to his eye.” Matthew stood and settled his hands on his waist. “Could you please help me get him out of bed?”

Miss Worley bent over Albert. “Did you hear what the doctor said? He’d like to move you.”

“I heard.” Albert kept his eyes scrunched shut. “Will it hurt?”

Matthew patted Albert on the shoulder. “Not long. And your eye will feel much better in a few days.”

“Just wrap your arm around my neck. The doctor and I will help you walk so that you can keep your eyes closed.” Miss Worley scooped Albert’s head off of his pillow.

“All right.” The boy’s voice shook but he allowed Miss Worley to help him.

“Steady. Take it slow.” Matthew helped Albert to his feet.

Albert hobbled out of the dark room and with the assistance of his helpers, worked his way down the hall to the examination room.

“Just help him lie down up there.” Matthew pointed to the bed.

Miss Worley nodded and followed Matthew’s instruction.

When Albert was settled, Matthew laid a towel over his eyes. “That will keep the light out until I’m ready to place the patch.” He glanced at Miss Worley. “I’ll need your assistance. Could you please stay?”

She nodded.

“Good. Thank you.” Matthew moved to the cabinet to collect a supply of sterile gauze and tape.

Miss Worley stood at Albert’s side, talking to him in quiet tones. Albert appeared relaxed as he held the towel over his eyes.

“We need to move the towel from your eyes, Albert. Just keep them closed. You won’t feel a thing.” Matthew organized his supplies as he talked.

Miss Worley followed Matthew’s instructions as they worked together to apply the pressure patch to Albert’s eye.

“That should make him feel better.” Matthew reached for a roll of bandage.

“Will he go blind, Doctor?” Miss Worley asked.

“I don’t think so. The cornea should heal in a few days.” Matthew cut a strip of bandage and wrapped it around Albert’s head to secure the patch.

“The patch needs to remain on the eye for 72 hours. Thank you for your help.” He smiled at Miss Worley.

“You’re welcome. We all care about Albert and want him to succeed. I will see to it that the patch stays in place.” She left the room.

Matthew checked the clock. He had enough time to eat

some lunch. After washing his hands, he went to the dining room, asked for a sandwich, and brought it back to the little desk in the examination room. If he ate his lunch here, he could watch Albert.

The boy stirred as Matthew ate his last bite. Matthew went to him.

“Do you have any pain?” Matthew asked.

“Not too bad,” Albert murmured.

“Lean on me, and I’ll help you back to your room.” Matthew slipped his arm under Albert’s head.

The boy pulled himself up and allowed Matthew to take him back to his bed. Once he was settled, Matthew drew a blanket over him.

“You did well, Albert. I’ll give Miss Worley the medication that will help with headaches and then come back to check on you tomorrow. How does that sound?”

“Fine.” Albert sounded sleepy, so Matthew made sure the curtains were doing their duty of keeping light out of the room and went in search of the young teacher.

The remainder of the afternoon he spent with the children on his examination schedule, but Albert stayed on his mind. He couldn’t resist another peek at the boy before he left, so he went to Albert’s room and found him resting very comfortably.

He finished with his last appointment of the day and went to a café for his evening meal. A flier for Saturday’s exhibition hung from the bulletin board near the door. It told the details of the show. Flying machines of all makes and models would be flown by experts from the Wright Company in Dayton, Ohio. Matthew’s breath streamed from his lungs and a smile tugged at his mouth.

The dream of flying had helped him function in these years following the death of his wife and child. He’d learned about the mechanics of flight in a science class he’d taken in college. From hot air balloons and parachutes to airships and the Wright



brothers' experiment at Kitty Hawk, the excitement of lifting into the air had taken hold of him.

With no family to support, he'd saved his money for the day when he could afford his own flying machine. A biplane or a monoplane or a glider, it didn't matter which model he bought. He was in the market for anything that could lift him up above the trees where he might fly free in the endless blue sky.

Matthew ordered his meal and took the flier with him to his table. While he ate he studied the information in the announcement and meditated on what it might mean to fly. His years of saving, of waiting, and of dreaming were nearly at an end. Tomorrow he'd get to watch airplanes take to the sky and make the decision of which set of wings would make this dream come true.