

Sweet Sarah

The Overton Saga: Book 3

By

Mariella Starr

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Chapter 1

August 1895, Overton, Colorado

Benjamin Sawyer drove his doctor's buggy along the road into the town of Overton, Colorado. He was too tired to notice much of anything, having been awake for the last seventy-two hours. Perhaps he should have taken the offer from his patient's husband to catch some sleep in the barn, but he had wanted to go home.

He ran a hand over several days' worth of beard stubble. If his Denver colleagues could see him now, they would shake their heads in disbelief. The prideful rules of his profession had gone by the wayside sometime during the past year. He still treated his patients with every bit of medical skill he had honed during his years of training. On the other hand, his personal appearance wasn't quite as spit-polished and city slicker dandy as it had been before.

During his early medical training, a professor had explicitly told the young men in his class how personal grooming was essential for a doctor's image. Regardless of what a doctor was doing, he must present himself cleanly dressed and shaved, each and every morning. The advice had made an impression on Ben at sixteen and straight from a preparatory boarding school.

After practicing medicine for several years, Ben had learned that when a new mother was giving birth or a patient was in desperate need of a bone set or a cut sutured, they did not care if his tie was loose or he had a beard stubble on his face. It was more important how he did his job. Now, after assisting a sixty-hour labor and the final delivery of a baby, he needed a bath, a shave, and a clean suit of clothing. He would attend to those matters after he caught a few hours sleep.

The buggy jolted, and Ben jerked awake. He was making his way back by the light of the full, red moon of August, looming large and bright in the sky.

He remembered his astrology lessons from school. It was funny what came to mind when you were exhausted. The dark orange moon was also known as the sturgeon moon. Smiling to himself, Ben flicked the reins. He had waited out the last year of lunar changes with patience he had not known was in him. Month after month during his year of waiting, Ben had personally

witnessed most of the lunar changes. Babies seemed to plan their arrivals long after the moon had risen. Soon, before the harvest moon of September, Ben would finally be a married man.

The baby he had delivered several hours earlier was a girl. Mrs. Nancy Brockman's husband, Gillis, had been disappointed and angry. How a man could be angry when a perfect little miracle had been brought into the world was beyond Ben's comprehension. His patient had seen the look of dissatisfaction on her husband's face before he had turned from her and stalked out of the bedroom.

Ben's hands tightened on the reins in anger. He was a doctor, not a minister, although he was sometimes called upon to do many things he was not qualified to practice. He had talked to Mr. Brockman, trying to raise the man's spirits and make him see what a gift his long-suffering wife had given him.

Mr. Brockman's disgust was apparent. "I need a son, Doc. Girls ain't no help to me on the farm. I need the strong backs and willing hands of sons!"

Ben had been sorely tempted to curse. Instead, he had curled his hands into fists inside his trouser pockets. The sad thing was, he understood. Farming was a hard way to make a living, and this new baby was a second daughter.

"Sons tend to move on and make their own way in this world, Gillis. Your wife went through a hard labor. Labor is more pain and suffering than you or I will ever endure."

"It's a woman lot," Gillis had grumbled. "The least she could have done was give me a boy."

"You're an ungrateful fool, Gillis," Ben had snapped, losing patience with the stubborn man. "It is the man's seed and God's Providence that determines the sex of a child."

"Who says so?"

"Medical science, Gillis. There are two medical scientists doing research at Columbia University on sex determination. My sister, Dr. Hawkins, knew one of them, Dr. Nettie Stevens when she was back east."

"A woman said it?" Gillis snorted. "She probably made it up 'cause she couldn't deliver a son, either."

"Did she also make up the research done by Edmund Beecher? Stevens *and* Beecher work both independently and as a team, and they have both arrived at the same conclusions. Both

are highly respected doctors and scientists in their fields. The entire world of science and medicine accepts the validity of their research, but farmer Gillis Brockman knows better.”

The man had glared at him, which only made Ben feel compelled to dig himself in deeper. “Think about it, Gillis. If you want to blame someone, blame yourself or God. Personally, I wouldn’t presume to blame God, there are plagues, pestilence, lightning bolts and such to consider as his revenge.

“When I was at school, we had to learn Bible verses as punishments. I remember a particular Psalm, although I might not get it word for word. *Lo, daughters are the heritage of the Lord, the fruit of the womb reward. As arrows in the hand of a mighty man; so are the children. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them.*”

Ben had gotten in the last word before he left the Brockman farm. He was not a particularly religious man himself, and he had mangled and misquoted the Bible verse on purpose in an attempt to get through to the stubborn man. The chances of Gillis Brockman ever discovering Ben’s stretch of the truth were slim. He doubted the man had ever opened a book for any reason and, most likely, he could barely read. Ben hoped his words would encourage the farmer to at least treat his wife with a little more compassion.

Ben’s sister, Britannia Hawkins, had actually met Dr. Nettie Stevens, and the two women had found much in common. Both were doctors who had fought against the established prejudice against women in medicine. Men, as with most professions, dominated medicine, and those men did not want women in their ranks. Dr. Stevens was fighting prejudice against women, much as Britannia still faced. It was also true that Doctors Stevens and Beecher were conducting research on sex determination at Columbia University. However, as far as Ben knew, the results were not yet conclusive. Until they were, papers based on the research would not be published.

Mr. Brockman would have no way of knowing Ben’s words had been a bluff. Meanwhile, perhaps the man would give some thought on how disrespectful he had been to his wife. As far as Ben was concerned, the making of a baby was a shared experience. It was a blessing, regardless of the child’s sex.

Ben yawned. Maybe he could catch a couple hours sleep after breakfast. The best part of his day was seeing his sweet Sarah nearly every morning at the breakfast table. He made an effort to be at his friends, the Hutchisons’, for breakfast whenever he could. It was his first glimpse of his fiancée every day. Sarah was the light of his life. He had fallen in love with her

nearly at first sight. Ben had come to Overton, Colorado, from Denver to take over the practice of the town's elderly doctor after he had decided Sarah was the girl for him.

Overton's growth the past two decades had been based on corruption and greed. Now, in the short span of a year, the small railroad and factory town had become nearly unrecognizable. Whereas before, when Overton had been corrupted by greedy bankers, and unscrupulous factory and mining owners, it was now a small town known for offering a good living to decent people. In this last year, the town temporarily shrank as the corrupt factory and mine owners closed their doors. Fortunately, many of those businesses reopened under new management who followed the strict labor regulations set by the State of Colorado and the Overton Town Council. Overton now attracted families, and good people were finding jobs and filling church pews every Sunday morning.

In the last six months alone, significant changes had taken place. One of the largest silver mines within a hundred miles had collapsed. Miraculously, the mine had been closed and evacuated only a short time before the explosion. The closure had been over a child enslavement charge, which had sent the mine owner to prison. In the process of straightening out the legal entanglements, an orphanage for boys had been established, and a new hospital had opened.

Ben had been the only doctor in town for quite a while. Now there were four at the hospital including his sister, Britannia, who had initially come to Overton to visit Ben. She had stayed to marry a most unlikely suitor who, turned out to be the perfect match and mate for her.

Ben was very proud of his sister. A qualified doctor and a specialized surgeon, Britannia was in charge of the new hospital and held the title of Chief Surgeon. As far as Ben knew, his sister was the first woman to take on such a position. He had no idea how she managed it. She had a full plate with a new husband and two adopted boys, as well as her position at the hospital.

Most of the town's changes could be laid directly on Isabel Hutchison. She was the wife of Ben's best friend, Hutch. Isabel Piper, now Hutchison, had come to town a single woman unaware of a fortune awaiting her arrival called *The Trust*. She was behind a good portion of the town's changes, whether by accident or deliberate meddling. Isabel was equally praised and damned for her efforts.

Her husband, Sheriff "Hutch" Hutchison, stood by his wife in most of her endeavors. He was known to put his foot down, though, and sometimes his hand on her backside, if he thought she was rabble-rousing with her causes. Hutch was the peacekeeper of Overton and had been

doing his job long before Isabel had come along. Ben hoped his sweet Sarah's adoptive guardian, Isabel, was not unduly influencing her.

As he neared the Hutchison house and steered his horse into their driveway, he realized every window was ablaze with light. Ben jumped from his buggy, grabbed his doctor's bag and ran to the back door. He silently prayed that Isabel, heavy with child, had not gone into premature labor.

* * *

Sarah stared out the window, unaware of the passing scenery. Her face was turned to the window because she could not stop the flow of tears. She was doing what she thought best for everyone she loved, but she would hurt a lot of people in the process. She wiped away her tears with an already sodden handkerchief.

She hoped she had not embarrassed herself. Earlier, a woman had changed seats moving several rows back on the train car. Sarah had looked over her shoulder, expecting to see annoyance from the woman, yet it was not the case. The woman was only taking advantage of the nearly empty passenger car. Her small son slept stretched out across one seat while her smaller daughter was asleep with her head on the woman's lap. The woman had moved because she wanted her children to be able to stretch out to sleep, not because she was uncomfortable with a girl crying in public.

Sarah had heard what people in Overton were saying behind her back. Many would never forget she was inadvertently the beginning for a lot of changes to their town.

With a single act of kindness, Isabel Piper Hutchison had become Sarah's best friend, protector and guardian. Isabel had been Sarah's staunchest defender, taking on anyone and everyone who dared mistreat her. Sarah's dearest of friends had taken on corrupt bankers and mayors who had fallen like stacked dominoes in her wake. Their crimes and cronyisms had forced them to leave town, in some cases to serve prison sentences. Isabel had even taken on the *Overton League of Women for Social Reform* with a goal of knocking the wealthy, snooty women down a peg or two.

Sarah knew people in town considered her an upstart. They would neither forget nor forgive that she had dared level charges of rape against the son of one of the town's most powerful men. That same son had later murdered his father, yet people still persisted in believing Sarah was to blame for what happened.

She was the *adopted* daughter of Isabel and Hutch Hutchison. For her to have been adopted and given the Hutchison name was an honor. It was the best show of love her friends could have bestowed on her. Sarah cherished those legal papers. She had painstakingly copied the certificate of adoption in embroidery, and had proudly framed it and hung it on her bedroom wall. Now, she carried it in her valise.

She had refused to carry her natural surname for several years prior, going only by her first name. She had chosen to tell Ben the truth of why she would not carry the name of birth parents that were a drunkard and a prostitute. He had assured her many times it did not matter, but it did.

Sarah had hoped her past was finally buried, yet it was not to be. People still whispered, talked and blamed. As much as she loved him, she would not marry Ben Sawyer. She would not drag him into her sordid world darkened by depravity. She would never live down what had happened. She had hoped and prayed it was possible. Now, she knew it was not.

Being a new person with a new family could not change Sarah's history or her parentage. Marrying Dr. Ben Sawyer would not change her history or parentage, either. She would only drag him down into her disgrace. She would not allow it. Ben was a professional man from a society background. She would not allow him to face a backlash of gossip and hostility because of her.

As the train pulled into the Union Railroad Station in Denver, Sarah stiffened her spine. A strong backbone would be necessary to become a successful businesswoman in Denver. This was her second time in the city nicknamed the Jewel of the West, but she could not allow herself to be frightened this time. She knew of a cheap boarding house for women where she had stayed before. While it was not the best of accommodations, she would be safe there. Sarah needed to make contact with dress shops in Denver as quickly as possible. She needed a job.

* * *

Ben rushed into the Hutchisons' house and in his haste, he did not even knock. He found Isabel and Hutch wrapped in each other's arms.

"Sorry," he exclaimed. His eyes roamed over Isabel's expanding belly looking for any signs of distress. "I saw all the lights and thought it was Isabel's time. What's wrong?"

"You had best sit down, Ben," Hutch said guiding his wife into a kitchen chair.

"Why?"

“Sarah’s gone,” Isabel cried. “We found a note. There’s one for you, too.”

Ben snatched the piece of paper Isabel laid on the table and read it quickly. It was not much, a short note saying she had to leave and how much she loved them.

He ripped open the envelope with his name on it and yanked out the letter.

Dear Ben,

Please know I love you, and I am doing what I think is best for you and everyone. I won’t let you ruin your name or your career because of me. I am not worthy of your love. I hope you will forgive me someday.

Sarah

Ben met the eyes of his friends. “What does this mean? She hasn’t given a reason or told us where she’s going? What’s this about? Where’s Sarah?”

Hutch poured himself and Ben a cup of coffee. “I think I know, but I’m only guessing. Has Sarah said anything to you about the recent gossip around town?”

“Good grief,” Isabel exclaimed, her eyes instantly flashing with anger. “Who’s talking about Sarah, now? I’ll squash them like a bug!”

Hutch smiled. “The gossip’s not about Sarah, honey.”

“What’s going on?” Ben demanded. “I know she’s sensitive about people talking behind her back. If someone is spreading gossip, I want to know who’s behind it. I’ll give them a piece of my mind they won’t soon forget! What could be so bad to make her run away?”

Hutch sat down at the table and placed his hand over Isabel’s. “Word is floating around town that Jenny Mae is selling her saloon to Calhoun Bentley. Calhoun doesn’t have working girls in his saloon; he never has. He told me he’s turning one of the saloons into a new hardware store and the other into a Theatre Hall. He wants to bring in a better kind of entertainment, song and dance people, minstrel shows, lectures for the ladies, and maybe some boxing tournaments for the men.”

“What do Calhoun’s businesses have to do with Sarah?”

“Well part of that rumor is that Jenny Mae is selling her girls to another madame,” Hutch said.

“Oh,” Isabel exclaimed shocked. “Goodness! I like Jenny Mae, but she can’t *sell* her girls. Isn’t that slavery?”

“Isabel, this isn’t fit talk in front of a lady,” Hutch admonished. “You should go into the other room.”

“I’m not leaving this chair!” she fired back. “If it involves Sarah, I want to know what is going on! I know full well what kind of a saloon and business Jenny Mae operates.”

“Honey...”

“Hutch!” Ben interrupted. “Please, what is going on?”

Sheriff, friend and husband, Hutch scratched his head thinking. “The writing has been on the wall for a while. Overton is changing. It isn’t a town of single men anymore. There have been several petitions presented to the Town Council to outlaw...excuse me, honey...*bawdy* houses. Those petitions are fronted by the League of Women and most of the preachers in town. During the last Town Council meeting, they voted to make prostitution within the town limits illegal.”

“Good!” Isabel exclaimed.

“Maybe, maybe not,” Hutch said. “Jenny Mae bought the old Bishop farm a while back. It’s outside the town limits, and she was planning to move her girls out there if the Council outlawed... her businesses. She must have changed her mind. I heard she’s selling the Bishop property and her girls.”

He turned to his wife. “I know you don’t like to think of her this way, but Jenny Mae is a madame. Her girls work for her and she takes a cut of what they are paid for their...uh...*services*. From what I understand, a thirty-five percent cut is the standard for working girls. In return, the girls have private rooms, along with board, and some protection from their customers.”

“How would you know the specifics of her business?” Isabel demanded as her face turned a bright pink.

“Later, please,” Ben snapped. “What does any of this have to do with my Sarah? Good God! Jenny Mae didn’t offer Sarah a job, did she?”

“No!” Hutch growled. “Jenny Mae is planning on selling out to a well-known madame from Cripple Creek who goes by the name of Goldie Diamond. She’s famous for having a diamond in one of her front teeth. Her real name is...Arvilla Gray.”

Ben's head snapped up in interest. "Is this Arvilla Gray a relative of Sarah's?"

Hutch nodded reluctantly. "Her mother."

"Dear heaven!" Isabel exclaimed.

"Sarah told me her mother was dead," Ben said slowly. "She died when Sarah was eight years old."

"Ruby Gray was Sarah's *stepmother*," Hutch explained. "I didn't know much about the Gray family until after Sarah was hurt. All I knew was Ray Gray was a drinking man. He was a regular in my Saturday night lock-ups and plenty of other times. I didn't even know he had kids for a long time. His boy, Johnny, was killed in a holdup at sixteen, leaving Sarah alone to deal with Ray. She was only twelve at the time.

"When Sarah accused Floyd Keller of assaulting her, I went to Old Toby, down at the livery. He was the one who told me about the family. Ray was a drunk and a mean one. Even when he wasn't drunk, he was beating up on his wife and kids. Arvilla had her fill of it one day and took off. She left Ray and the kids about fifteen years ago.

"Ruby showed up a few months later. Ray claimed he had divorced Arvilla and married Ruby. Who knows? At this point, it doesn't matter. What does matter is Arvilla has returned and she plans on buying out Jenny Mae's interest in the girls. She's going to be the local whorehouse madame. I think someone told Sarah."

Isabel's eyes filled with tears. "Oh, my poor Sarah. She couldn't take the embarrassment of it. We have to find her."

Ben shoved back his chair. "I'll find her. First, I have to talk to Britannia to make sure one of her hospital doctors can cover my patient load."

"Where do you plan on looking?" Hutch asked.

"Denver," Isabel interrupted. "It's the only place she's ever been outside of Overton. Sarah is much more confident than she was before, but she still frightens and gets her feelings hurt easily. She wouldn't try to run somewhere she had never been before. She would go to Denver."

"I'll find her," Ben promised. "If I have to chase her all over the country, I will find her and bring her back where she belongs."

* * *

Ben crossed the back yard and went into the guesthouse. It was a little place. Not quite a miniature of the big Hutchison mansion with all its fancy details, but it was complementary to the big house. Ben had initially bought a large house of his own down the street. His original plan was to use it partially for his medical practice and to live in the rest of it. The house had turned out to be a giant, ugly mistake.

Neither he nor Sarah could face living in a mausoleum dedicated to ghoulish bad taste. He had recently sold the house to Isabel for her use in *The Trust* she controlled. He suspected the dwelling would end up housing orphans, elderly people, or something of the same ilk.

Ben and Sarah had decided to live in the guest cottage at the end of the Hutchison property after they married. It was a much smaller house with only five rooms, but it was still bigger than either of them needed to be happy. Although Sarah was marrying Ben, she was not quite ready to leave *home*, yet. The only stability his fiancée had ever known in her short eighteen years was during the past year and a half under the guidance of Isabel and Hutch, her surrogate parents, along with a few others who had taken her under their wings.

Sarah and her newfound women friends had spent many hours during the last several months planning, painting, wallpapering and making the small cottage livable. Everyone had pitched in to help, and then Ben had moved in waiting the time when Sarah would join him there permanently.

Ben was grateful that he and his sister Britannia, along with several others, had been invited into the inner circle of friends who were responsible for much of the good works done in and around town. Hutch was the law, and Isabel was a powerful force, due to her control of an inheritance everyone called *The Trust*. They were an unlikely group of people, their friendships formed more out of expanding romances and marriages, rather than having much in common. They were the business owners, the law and the mayor. Several of the new doctors were also thrown into the mix. All were loyal, good friends to each other.

After Ben had finished packing his valise, he headed to the office of Blackie Hawkins. A mine owner and fierce advocate for the Workingman's Party, Ben's brother-in-law was more knowledgeable about the law than most practicing lawyers or politicians. Blackie listened carefully and offered a little advice to his younger contemporary. They shook hands, with Blackie promising he would take care of everything during Ben's absence. He walked with Ben

to Baxter Memorial Hospital where he took a seat outside his wife's office to wait until Ben finished talking with Britannia.

"Good luck," Britannia exclaimed kissing Ben on the cheek as they came out of her office.

"I might need luck to find Sarah," Ben said. "We'll work it out." He nodded to his brother-in-law, "Thanks." With one hand on his valise and the other on his medical bag he walked out to meet the young doctor who was taking over his practice until Ben could return.

Britannia laid her head on her husband's strong shoulder. "Why was Ben thanking you?"

"I'm taking care of a little bit of business for him before he gets back."

"What kind of business?"

"Well, I'm starting with Jenny," Blackie said with a teasing grin. His wife narrowed her eyes at him. She knew of his past association with the saloon madame and her *girls*. "Now, honey, Ben told me to stop Goldie Diamond from coming back to town. Making it happen starts with Jenny."

"I heard she was Sarah's real mother," Britannia whispered.

"I'd like to know who appointed themselves town crier," Blackie growled.

"Don't change the subject. Whatever errand you are running for Ben, make sure you steer clear of Jenny Mae and her business," Britannia warned, poking him in the ribs.

"Now, Brit," he said with a tease in his voice. "It was always a strictly business relationship."

"We should stop by the Hutchisons' place before we go home tonight," Britannia offered. "Isabel will be distraught. Anything bad that happens to Sarah upsets Isabel. I want to keep a close eye on her. She doesn't need this kind of worry only a few weeks from her due date. We'll need to lend our support because both Isabel and Hutch are going to worry. Sarah is as much their child as the one Isabel is carrying."

"Ben had better find Sarah first," Blackie mused. "If she comes back sitting easy, Hutch will tan her hide for worrying Isabel."

Britannia made a rude sound. "What is it with the men in this town? She needs understanding and compassion, not a sore rear end!"

"I'm sure she'll get both before things settle," Blackie said chuckling. He glanced around to make sure no doctors or nurses were in sight before hauling his wife into his arms and giving

her a thumping good kiss. He gave her a light swat on her bottom and sauntered off, not missing the misty gleam in her eyes or the deep heave of her breasts.

* * *

Ben took the 4:40 train to Denver. He had paced a groove into the wooden station platform while he waited. Dr. Wells would take over his patients in his absence, but he needed to get out of town first.

It had taken Ben a lot longer than expected to settle his business with Dr. Wells. Then there had been an accident at the gristmill. It was one thing to walk away from his practice for a few days once he had arranged for someone to cover his duties. It was another to walk away in the middle of an emergency.

It had taken a while for the townspeople to put their trust in his skills and he could not betray their faith in him. Britannia and her new hospital staff were experiencing the same breaking in period themselves. Patients were slow to change their allegiance from one doctor to another.

His sister, Britannia, had offered Dr. Well's services on loan from the hospital until Ben returned. Although Dr. Wells was older and supposedly more experienced, Ben had still spent several hours reviewing his cases to make sure the doctor was well versed on Ben's patient's needs and treatments.

The train was late, and all excuses aside, the trip was still going to take several hours. It would be dark before Ben arrived in Denver. The new ticket master at the train platform knew Sarah and confirmed she had bought an early morning ticket.

Ben had met Sarah at St. Joseph's Hospital in Denver, although she would have no reason to go there this time. He had been impressed then by her quiet bravery and loyalty when Isabel had been brought to the hospital. Sarah had become a faithful watchdog, protecting and caring for her friend.

He was worried. Denver was an elegant city in some parts, slum settlements in others. An unprotected young woman was an easy target in most large cities. This time, Sarah would not be under the protection of Isabel or Hutch.

He tried to read a medical journal, finally gave up the pretense and put it back in his bag. Ben could not imagine his life or his future without Sarah. She was the shyest and most unassuming girl he had ever met. Nevertheless, she had also shown courage and fearlessness

even as she trembled in fright. He had been captivated by her big doe brown eyes and gentle disposition. He had feared she was too young for a relationship. Not quite seventeen to his twenty-two, Ben had known from the beginning he would have to be patient and wait for her to come of age.

His sweet Sarah had grown so much in the last year. Not in height or stature. She was a small girl with a trim waistline, one he was glad did not require corseting. He disapproved of women binding themselves for fashion. As a doctor, Ben had seen cases where women had severely damaged themselves for vanity. He only knew Sarah did not wear corsets because sometimes he liked to span her waistline with his hands. He took no liberties, of course. When he had asked for Sarah's hand, Ben had made a promise to Sheriff Hutch to wait until she was seventeen to court her, and eighteen before he married her. Ben kept his promises.

Still, Sarah had grown up before his eyes. Working with Isabel in her bookshop, and later at Mrs. Mallery's dressmaker shop, Sarah had become an accomplished young businesswoman. She could handle the bookshop by herself, and did so whenever Isabel was unable to tend to it. Where Sarah had really blossomed was in dressmaking and designing fashionable women's costumes. She was growing up, but Isabel and Hutch watched over and guided her. Ben wanted to be there to help ease her into adulthood.

Sarah was becoming stronger, her own person. Yet, she could still be a frightened, little girl at times. His heart ached for what she had survived in her young life. She had suffered an abusive, alcoholic father, and then been assaulted and raped at sixteen by the son of a prominent businessman in Overton. The resulting scandal had labeled Sarah a bad girl until Isabel and Hutch had rescued her. Over time, the people of Overton had been forced to change their minds and attitudes about her.

Ben knew many men of his station and affluence considered a betrothal as binding as a marriage. Upon acceptance of an engagement ring, men expected, and some demanded, their fiancées allow them access to their bodies. Intimacies of this nature were not spoken of openly, but should the young woman become pregnant, a wedding was imminent. Any child born of the premature intimacy was deemed *early* even if it was a healthy nine-pound baby.

Ben had not pushed Sarah for an intimate relationship. He would abide by his promise to Hutch to wait until her eighteenth birthday for marriage. Also, Ben worried about Sarah's

reaction to any advances by him. She had been assaulted and abused, so he was moving slowly and not pushing her.

Sometimes it had been difficult for them not to go beyond a certain point. Ben had waited for over a year since he had spoken for her. He had often wondered if her mistreatment would cause her to be frigid, but he had seen no signs of it. Sarah was shy and a bit embarrassed, yet she had never seemed frightened by his attentions. He considered Sarah's modest deportment one of her dearest qualities.

Ben realized there were scars she was hiding. Sarah was still being affected by her past traumas. She had spoken to him several times in a blunt, factual manner, telling him about her childhood and what had happened to her. She had done it deliberately to see if he would turn from her. He had not and he would not, but Sarah would have to open up to him more. He could not help her if she did not open her heart to him.