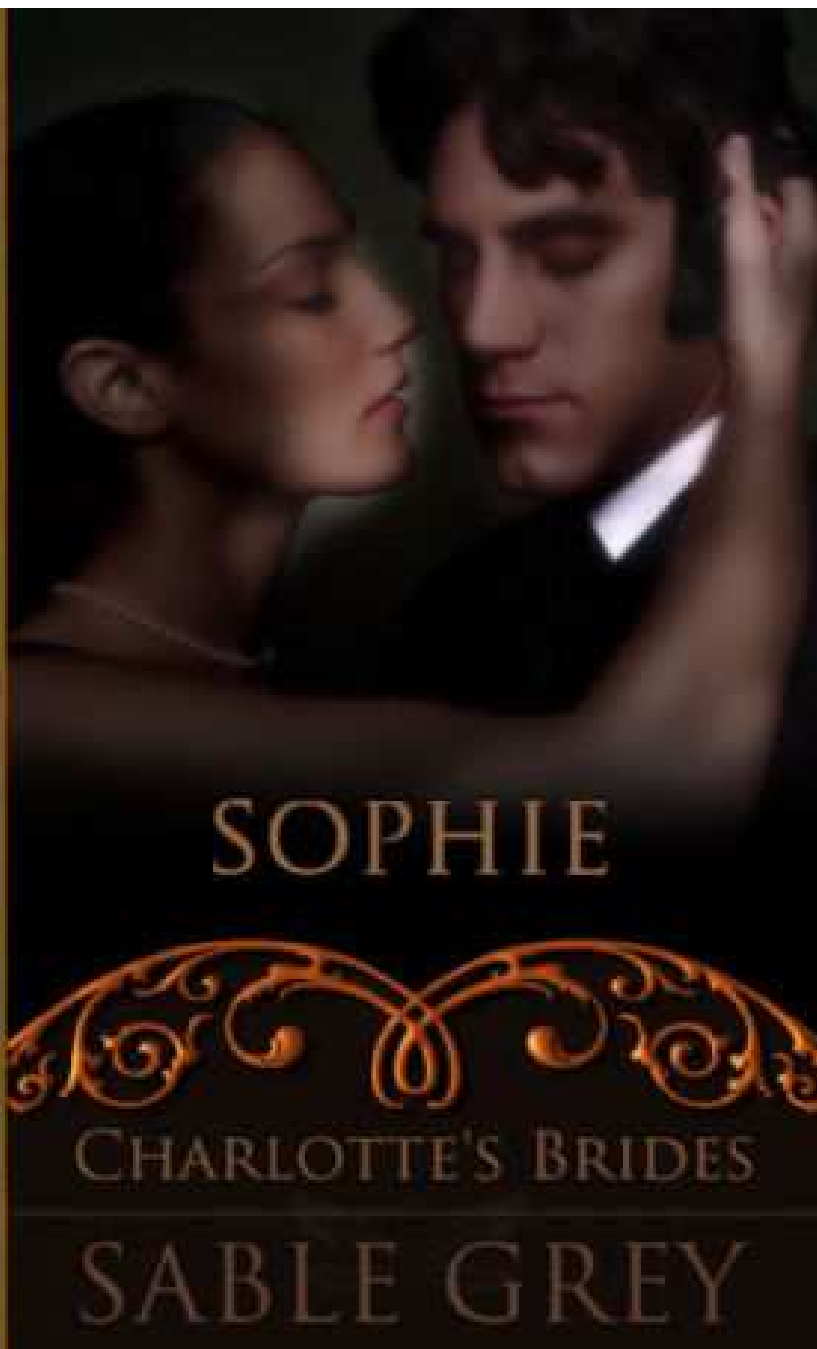


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Charlotte's Brides

Sophie

By

Sable Grey

Charlotte's Brides: Sophie by Sable Grey

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Sophie

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Chapter One

Peering through the snowy darkness of the New York winter, Sophie Rosette pulled her coat tighter and read the plaque outside the gated archway of the brick building on Mott Street. *Dr. Hagan VonAlbrecht*. She'd been wandering the unfamiliar streets for more than two hours, and fear had begun to dance on her nerves as the hour grew late. Now her gaze lifted to the two-story structure with relief as she gave her skirts a quick shake before she pulled the gate open and leaned forward to sound the knocker.

While Charlotte Oberman's business was placing women with new husbands, the request for a woman seeking employment was uncommon but not completely unheard of. Sophie was grateful for any opportunity to escape her life in Boston.

She sounded the knocker again and then stepped back when the door opened and light from a burning lamp poured into the darkness. Heat swept through the doorway to warm her. A pair of heavy lidded, dark eyes gazed out at her from beneath thick brows that rested low on a high forehead. Black sideburns framed a long face on either side of a wide jaw, accentuating the prominent nose and thick but defined lips. Wide shoulders bore a plain cotton shirt and a vest, partially unbuttoned. Dark trousers reached down a pair of long legs and ended atop shined leather shoes.

He filled the doorway with his broad build and when she said nothing, he leaned farther through the door to glance up and down the

street as if searching for whomever she might belong to. Heat rushed to her cheeks as she realized she was rudely gaping at him.

"Doctor VonAlbrecht?"

She continued when he inclined his head, "I am Sophie Rosette. I was sent by Charlotte Oberman in response to the request you sent several months ago." When he just stared at her blankly, she dug the request letter from her bag and stepped closer so the words could be read in the light from inside. "You requested a woman seeking employment to assist in your practice, someone who could read and write and had preferably received some education."

Long, warm fingers swept across hers as he reached for the request and looked it over before realization finally cleared his gaze. "Yes, yes, of course. I'd completely forgotten of my request when I received no immediate response." His voice was a deep German accent, edges softened with British influence.

"Has the position been filled?" Sophie felt her hopes start to quiver. She'd spent every evening in the last two months learning German phrases she thought might be helpful in the event the doctor did not speak English and familiarizing herself with medical terms.

"It's cold. Come inside." He stepped backward, allowing her entry, and took her bag to set it aside. "I was about to have my meal. Have you eaten?" The front room consisted of several plush chairs in floral print, the walls soft and creamy that matched the rose-and-cream rug beneath her feet. It looked like a tearoom, she realized.

Sophie faced the doctor, thinking he looked very out of place in the room they stood in, like rough wool atop silk. "No, I have travelled directly from Boston and as I am unfamiliar with New York decided it best that I find my way here before stopping for meals. I don't wish to interrupt and can wait here until..." She stiffened as he reached forward to unbutton her coat and pull it from around her shoulders. He hung the garment on a peg near the door.

"Your cheeks are reddened. Come into the dining room where it is warmer." He placed a hand on her back as he spoke, guiding her across the room through a door and into a corridor. Through another doorway

and she found herself in room with a hearth and a small wooden dining table. One setting was placed in the chair nearest the hearth, a book facedown next to the plate.

She sat when he pulled out a chair, thankful for the warmth the flames in the hearth generated and watched him stride through a narrow door across the room, leaving her alone at the table. This room, unlike the other, was very masculine, she thought to herself, her gaze sweeping over the dark wood furniture and deep green color of the walls. Her attention dropped to the place setting across from her and then to the food, and her stomach growled noisily, reminding her she'd not eaten anything since that morning. Removing the gloves Charlotte had given her, she rubbed her hands together in an attempt to chase away the chill that had settled in her fingers.

Her wait was not long, however, for moments later Doctor VonAlbrecht returned with a tray. Sophie remained quiet as he placed a second setting in front of her, mirroring the one across from her. Setting the tray aside, he filled a wineglass with the same dark red liquid as in his own. Finally, he settled across from her and nodded for her to eat.

The food was unfamiliar, but it was warm and tasted good so she ate heartily. The wine was a rich flavor that complimented the meal and when she'd consumed half of what he'd given her, he rose to refill the glass. The silence of the meal was awkward, but she did not break it until he set his napkin aside indicating he was finished eating.

"The employment, Doctor VonAlbrecht, is it still available?" she asked, as she too set her napkin aside.

He leaned back in his chair, studying her with an intense gaze. "I have not decided."

Sophie shifted uncomfortably in her chair but took a breath and then another swallow of wine. "My education is not extensive, but I learn quickly. I can read and write and have knowledge of numbers. What kind of position is it that you are seeking to fill, Doctor?" He didn't answer, only continued to scrutinize her with that unwavering gaze.

She licked her lips and pulled the small book from her pocket and thrust it forward. "I have been reading this medical journal and am

learning quickly." He took the journal from her, looked at it briefly before returning his gaze to her.

"You are very young."

Sophie blinked. She had reached her twenty-third year. Had he meant to have an older woman sent to him? She watched as he stood and retrieved a pipe from the mantle. His gaze lifted to hers as he tapped the bowl against the inside of the hearth so the contents drifted down into the flames. He said nothing as he filled the pipe from a pouch also on the mantel and then struck a match and puffed the pipe until its thick scent burned through the air. He moved, graceful for his large build, to the window and opened it. The outside chill swept into the room.

"The request said that room and board would be provided with the employment," she said after she watched him puffed on his pipe thoughtfully.

"Are you—" He waved his hand at her. "—an innocent?"

She stared at him, heat rushing to her cheeks. "I beg your pardon?"

After a moment, he turned and closed the window, set the pipe to the mantel, and lifted a hand indicating he wished her to stand as he reached for one of the oil-burning lamps. She hesitated, then rose and stepped forward. Again his hand rested on her back as he led her from the room and into the corridor, down to the end, and then turned to a second corridor, opening a door immediately to their right.

She could tell the room was a workspace by the large desk in the center of the room that resembled what a shipbuilder might use to design hulls. He set the lamp on that desk and stepped back. She was aware of his gaze following her as she looked around. She felt more self-conscious than she had ever in her entire life.

Her gaze lifted to the back wall of the room. Detailed sketches and diagrams of the female human body covered the wall above the narrow, freestanding work counter. Some of them were shocking depictions of genitalia while others looked to be diagrams of the inside anatomy. Were he not a doctor, the depictions might be considered lewd. But a doctor would have to be familiar with the human body, she reasoned, pushing away the uncomfortable shame and nervousness that rose inside of her.

She realized thankfully there were no depictions of male anatomies.

"Your expertise is exclusive to women? Perhaps reproduction and childbirth?" She looked back at the doctor to find he'd propped his shoulder in the doorframe to watch her examine his work area.

"Look closer." He spoke quietly, and she realized it was a test of some kind; that he was still trying to determine if he would hire her.

Sophie faced forward and stepped closer to the wall. "I've had no formal education if that is what you mean." When he didn't respond, she studied each of the diagrams. One in particular was not like the others, looked more like the mapping of a brain. What did one have to do with the other? She recalled a young woman who had worked in Charlotte's kitchen for a year. Agnes. She'd been slow to think in comparison to others and had been affected by seizures quite often.

"You treat women with conditions that affect both mind and bodies?" she asked.

"Clever." The doctor nodded with approval. "I specialize in inducing Paroxysm to relive women of hysteria. Are you an innocent?"

She reached up to smooth back her hair nervously. Though she wasn't making the connection, she understood his question was not meant to offend.

She licked her lips. "I am not."

There was no judgment in his expression. "In addition to my practice, I design and produce therapeutic instruments for other physicians. As the designs are complex and though I am competent and understand the female body, my research is limited. I am in need of a female subject to test my instruments, one who is capable of relaying to me which devices are most effective and comfortable." It was the longest he'd spoken in one breath since she'd arrived.

Sophie could not deny she was surprised. She'd expected a housekeeping position, hoped for bookkeeping. She'd certainly not anticipated a position that would allow her to work hands-on in the medical field. While she wasn't certain of some of the terms he'd used and would look them up later, she did understand he meant her to test new instruments that were sought after by other physicians. It sounded

important and the kind of employment that would allow her to start a new life for herself, one which didn't include long hours in a laundry house or mill.

"What type of hysteria affects these women?"

"A light madness many women suffer. Some don't even realize there is treatment that can relieve them of the symptoms." He shook his head. "This is a society of ignorance, and physicians are charged with the responsibility of using science to make what is unacceptable, acceptable."

She was completely lost at what he was talking about. "What *are* the symptoms?"

"Irritability, excessive fluid—" He reached out, causing her to start when he placed his hand firmly on her abdomen. "—a heaviness here. More advanced cases include sexual fantasies that result in insomnia and the lack of concentration to perform and complete day-to-day tasks." His hand fell away from her, and he turned back to his designs.

Sophie looked at him, ignoring the heat that remained where his hand no longer rested. He'd said *sexual* fantasies. "You treat women who suffer from...sexual hysteria?"

"Exactly." He nodded, and her cheeks felt as if they were on fire. "Come. Look." He opened a desk drawer and retrieved a mechanism that looked very much like an oversized pistol with a crank. He attached it to another mechanism and then gave the crank several spins until the instrument hummed to life.

"I have designed interchangeable vibratodes. It is powered by a battery which is much preferred by physicians for it allows for a shorter time of treatment. Depending on the type of device, a battery-operated instrument can deliver one thousand to seven thousand pulses a minute." He reached forward and grasped her hand, turning her palm upward, and placed the end of the mechanism to her skin. She started with surprise at the vibrations and then jerked her hand back when she realized what the instrument was meant to do.

This was scientific masturbation! The employment would be to test these kinds of instruments! She took a step backward, suddenly aware of how alone they were in the room, of the width of his shoulders, of the

intensity of his gaze.

"There's been a mistake." Her voice shook.

His lips pressed together in a line of disappointment. "I understand. My apprentice is unavailable tonight. You may stay here, and he will arrange for your return to Boston tomorrow." He stepped past her, grasping the lamp with one hand and placing the other upon her back. She started to argue but realized she had nowhere to go in New York or any means to get there if she had. Back through the corridors and in the front room, his hand fell away from her to retrieve her bag. He led her up the stairs, and she gasped when they opened into a large library with wall-to-wall bookcases that broke only for the doors and windows of the room. He led her to the door on the right, opened it, stepped inside, and set the lamp on small table and her bag at the foot of a large bed.

"Good night, Miss Rosette, and I apologize for the confusion." He inclined his head stiffly and stepped back from the room to close the door soundly.

The room was larger than any she'd ever slept in. The bed took up most of one wall as it was immense. A writing desk and reading chair were positioned atop an expensive rug in front of a small hearth. There was a wardrobe and a changing screen along the far wall, separated by a door. She walked forward and pushed it open, her breath catching at the snowy view of the city.

After a night of undisturbed rest, Sophie woke slowly, stretching her limbs. She couldn't remember when she'd slept so soundly. Turning, she stared at the dim sunshine that filtered through the windows. Before she could rise, the door opened, and a woman bustled into the room, stopping abruptly when Sophie sat up, clutching the soft bedcovering to her chest.

"Good morning, miss." The woman's broad face parted with a wide, toothy smile, and she held up the pitcher grasped in her fleshy hand. "I'm Eileen. I was coming to fill your washbasin for when you woke up. I didn't wake you, did I? The doctor told me you would be weary from your long trip yesterday and to be careful not to disturb you."

Sophie licked her lips. "What is the hour?"

"Why, it's nearly eleven, miss." Her smile widened, and her blue eyes twinkled, creasing in the corners. "The doctor sleeps in on Sundays, and that Evan St. James is out and about with his lady friends at all hours that the doctor must threaten bodily harm before he'll rouse in the mornings. Didya sleep well?"

Sophie nodded. "Yes, thank you."

"Tis a shame, it is, that you won't be stayin'." Eileen bustled to the basin and filled it, then set the pitcher aside and collected the clothes Sophie had left over the back of the chair and set to shaking out the wrinkles. "It would be nice to have another woman around to talk to. Only one to keep me comp'ny is the driver, Bohn, and he's got the personality of my left heel, he does. I get more conversation talking to the bloody walls."

"The employment is not what I expected," Sophie explained, liking Eileen immediately. She was a short, plump woman with dark hair but the gray stranded through her fashioned bun indicated that despite her youthful glow, she was well into maturity.

Eileen gave a lively laugh. "I nearly fainted dead away myself when I first learnt what the doctor's business was about."

Sophie tilted her head. "Yet, you remained."

"One like me can't be too choosy about my employ. And the doctor was right good to me. I was nearly starved to death when he found me and give me the employ. Pays me enough to afford my own apartment, he does." She moved to the bed and began straightening the bedcovers so that Sophie had to scramble out of bed to avoid being made into it. "Doesn't sound too bad to me to be paid to get your knickers off whenever you want."

"Like a common prostitute. It's deviant and scandalous," Sophie argued, shaking her head. "I'd rather go back and work in the mill."

"Is that where you got them bruises on your arm? Sounds like a right respectable place," Eileen added, sarcasm lacing the edges of her voice. Sophie quickly reached for her robe and pulled it on, covering the marks Eileen made mention of.

"Thank you, Eileen. Will you let Doctor VonAlbrecht know that I

will be dressed and ready to depart shortly?" Sophie bit her lip, regretting the sharpness in her tone when Eileen looked at her with surprise.

"I've upset you." Eileen's voice softened apologetically. "The world wasn't an easy place before I came to work here. You are a pretty miss, and I'm certain you'll do well wherever you go." Sophie watched her turn and head for the door.

The truth was that Eileen was right. The world wasn't an easy place for a woman, and Sophie had learned that early on. It was why she'd been so eager to come to New York and answer the doctor's request. A new life. A new start.

"She says she'll be dressed shortly, Doctor," Eileen said at the door, and Sophie stared at her until she disappeared from view. The doctor was there outside her door? She stepped forward and peered around the corner. He rose from his desk without looking at her and leaned down to open a drawer. Sophie darted from sight when he straightened. Stepping back, she was about to swing the door closed when his long stride brought him right in front of her room.

She clutched her robe tighter as he entered without invite, carrying a lidded jar. She stood there staring at him as he set the jar on a table and waved his hand, indicating he wanted her to come closer. When she didn't move, he lifted his gaze, and she swallowed loudly.

Seeming to understand her hesitation, he lifted the jar. "It's a salve for your injuries, Miss Rosette. I *am* a doctor." He waited, but she shook her head.

"It's nothing really."

His quick stride carried him toward her, and she retreated until she bumped against the wall behind her. He halted in front of her, and then she saw his gaze soften slightly.

"I will not send you away from here unattended. Any scandalous or deviant behavior I may possess is reserved for my personal life and not implemented between myself and a patient."

Sophie's gaze dropped. He'd heard her conversation with Eileen, apparently every word. Guilt threaded through her. Despite the nature of his business and his abruptness, he'd shown hospitality.

"Come." He took a step backward, waving her forward. She took a hesitant step and then another when he returned to the table. Setting the jar aside, he reached forward, fingers taking the ruffled lapels of her robe, but he did not part them until she finally let her hands fall to the side. Carefully, he removed the robe and folded it over his arm. Sophie looked down in an attempt to hide the sudden chuckle that threatened her lips. The pink, ruffled garment looked absolutely ridiculous against his solidity and straight lines.

"Because of the very intimate nature of my practice, I spent many years learning how to control my physical urges. During that time, I practiced as a common physician." He reached for one of her arms and gently lifted it so he could examine the bruises. She wished desperately her shift was not sleeveless. Carefully, he reached up and pushed back the thin material at her shoulder and saw the downward tug in his lips.

"It's really nothing," she repeated. "I bruise easily and..." But her breath caught when he slipped the material over each of her shoulders and moved around behind her. His fingers collected her hair and pushed it aside so it did not obstruct his view. When he tried to tug the material lower, she grasped it and held it around her breasts.

"I will see to all of your injury, Miss Rosette."

"You may be a physician, Doctor VonAlbrecht, but I am not accustomed to baring myself to anyone who passes by my doorway." Sophie didn't mean to snap. She breathed out when he moved away from her, but her chest tightened when he closed the door before returning to stand behind her. The room suddenly felt very small and before she could tighten her grip on her shift, he pulled it downward.

"How did you come by these?" His voice sounded odd, his accent thicker.

"My former employer did not appreciate my resignation." She looked up at the ceiling as she kept one hand on the shift at her waist and the other crossed over her breasts.

"If the color is any indication, I would guess that you displeased him often and your resignation was merely an excuse to beat upon you one last time before you were gone." His observations made her shift

nervously. "Does he treat all his employees with so little regard?"

"No." She chewed at her lip.

"Then you were intimately involved with him." It wasn't a question, so she did not affirm his conclusion. "I would also guess the reason you are no innocent." The jar was set a bit soundly on the surface.

"This will feel cold," he warned, but she still started as his fingers touched her skin, their tips cool and wet with the salve. It produced a slight sting on the areas where the skin had broken. He touched her gently and when his fingers neared her spine, she sucked her breath in through her teeth.

"The employment I offer is less dangerous to you than the one you left. As I said before, I keep my personal life separate from my practice. I've never struck a woman and certainly would not a woman under my employ."

Sophia found herself considering his proposal, amazed at how easily she could be convinced. But Doctor VonAlbrecht seemed powerful. Alone in with him, the world seemed to disappear, as if nothing could penetrate him. She wanted to say yes. The room she was given was far nicer than any she'd ever be able to afford herself. And despite the details of the employment, she'd felt safe from the moment she'd stepped through the door.

He carefully pulled her shift back over her shoulders and then draped her robe around her shoulders before taking up the jar of salve and walking to the door. "Dress and then find me in my workspace downstairs."

Chapter Two

Hagan looked up as Sophie knocked before entering the workspace, glancing back at Evan in time to see the look of surprise on the young man's face, followed instantly by appreciation. Sophie Rosette was an attractive, tall, young woman with large brown eyes, feminine features, and a full bow-shaped mouth. While petite—Hagan felt she would be far more attractive with an extra ten pounds—she had womanly curves. It was her hair, however, that was her best quality: red and gold woven through dark chocolate. Even bound in a loose knot as it was now, rather than curling down around her shoulders as it had been that morning, it was beautiful, and he could see Evan's interest piqued.

"Doctor VonAlbrecht." She spoke in a small and feminine voice as he turned from his desk and faced her fully. "I wish to thank you for your hospitality last night and this morning for your kindness and consideration."

He did not answer, waiting for her to continue, watching at the way she chewed at her bottom lip before stepping farther into the workroom. Her hands smoothed down the stomach of her bodice and then over her hips in nervous habit.

"I have been reconsidering the employment you offer. Before I accept or decline the position, I would like to know the details of exactly what would be expected of me."

Hagan raised his brows. She was reconsidering. She'd looked so fearful of him that morning, and he'd not guessed she might truly change

her mind.

Stepping from the desk, he reached forward and settled his hand on her lower back where he knew the bruises did not reach. "Come, I will show you—"

"Doctor, will you not introduce me?" Evan interrupted, and Hagan repressed a smile as the young man continued. "I'm Evan St. James, Miss..."

"Sophie Rosette," she supplied shyly but allowed Evan to take her hand briefly. Most women responded well to Evan, finding his classic features and quick smile easy to accept.

"Now you are introduced." Hagan urged Sophie toward the door. "If Miss Rosette accepts the position, you will have time later to become more acquainted."

"I look forward to it," Evan called as they stepped from the room and moved down the corridor.

"Here, this is the room where I tend to the patients." He opened a door to the left and stepped aside so she could enter, then followed, closing the door behind him. "Please, sit." He motioned toward the high reclined chair. She moved and sat rigidly, hands folded in her lap.

"As I explained last night, I design mechanical instruments which I and other physicians use. I would wish you to allow me to administer treatment using each new design and have you convey your opinions about their efficiency and comfort." He watched her cheeks reddened slightly. "While you may think of this as only a sexual deviancy, instruments used in the past, none of my designs, have been barbaric and uncomfortable, some leaving burns and rashes." She wrinkled her nose, and he nodded.

"In addition to the mechanical instruments, I am developing new instruments for women's personal use. These of course are not battery powered and are made for penetration." He moved across the room and retrieved one of his first smaller and less elaborate designs. Her gaze dropped to the phallic-shaped instrument, and her eyes widened slightly.

"These are made of beeswax and molded much like candlesticks. I would like these instruments tested, privately of course." He set the

instrument next to her. "And last, Evan specializes in creating lubricants for both the mechanical and inert instruments that would need testing."

He stepped backward and leaned against the wall, giving her space. He didn't want to hope. For nearly a year he'd been seeking a woman willing to work with him. While he could have paid for a prostitute, his clients were not, and he felt a woman's experience might affect the outcome of the tests. Sophie, though younger than many of his clients, had admitted she was no innocent, yet he could tell from how easily she flushed that she was neither well experienced. From the bruises he'd witnessed that morning, he could only assume she'd received no pleasure at all during what few experiences she did have.

"I've...I've never seen instruments like this," she admitted, and he could tell by the way her voice shook she was at least trying to overcome her embarrassment.

"That one is smaller than some of the others." He nodded to the instrument beside her. "It is inserted vaginally and used in a mock intercourse session."

She took a breath, one hand lifting to the collar of her dress. "I did not understand why you asked if I was...innocent. I must tell you, Doctor, I have very little experience with...men."

"Are you a virgin?" He stiffened. A virgin could offer little help in his practice.

"No, but..." she began, but he waved a hand dismissing whatever else she might want to say. It didn't matter to him, and it was obvious the topic made her more uncomfortable by the nervous way she continued to fuss with her clothes.

"With your patients, do you use this type of instrument?"

"No, no. My practices never include penetration. Penetration is reserved for the personal items, and you are to test them in private and only report to me if you found them satisfactory."

"What *kind* of women come to you for your care?"

"Many are widows or mature women who never married. Some are married, but it is obvious their husbands do not realize that their wives' conditions are due their ignorance as men." He crossed his arms. "I

have one patient who is wed, but her husband does not come to her since she became ill and lost the use of her legs."

Sadness reflected in Sophie's eyes instantly, and she looked at the instrument, then reached out tentatively and took it in her fingers. "You are helping these women?"

"Someone must lest women become distracted by their body's natural response to neglect and their symptoms misdiagnosed. Some women are labeled mad or temptresses, and their social status could be ruined if physicians do not intervene with a scientific approach to their conditions." Hagan watched her closely as she turned the instrument in her palm. Her initial shock had lessened. He could see the curiosity pushing through her embarrassment now.

"I wouldn't want anyone to know what I did here."

Hagan nodded. "No one needs to know but myself, Evan, Eileen, and the driver, Bohn, that you were not a housemaid. Two dollars a week, room and board, and the use of my carriage whenever you have need of it."

"Two dollars a week?" Her gaze lifted, eyes widened with surprise.

"Yes, for as long as you work here. You are free to terminate the employment at any time." His chest tightened as he realized she was going to accept. "I make certain my practices are administered in a professional manner without physical response or emotional complications."

"Your patients are placed here?" She patted the cot, and Hagan nodded. "What are the straps for?"

"Sometimes the patient flails as she finds release from her condition. The straps are for her protection and mine. I do not wish to be hit in the face, even by accident." He saw the quick smile flit around the corners of her mouth. "It is not uncomfortable. Recline."

He took the instrument from her, set it aside, and placed a hand on her shoulder, urging her to lay back. She did so, and he reached for a stool so he could sit beside her, hoping to ease any intimidation she might feel with him standing over her.

"The straps on the arms are not pulled tightly, though the ankles

are required to keep the legs in a position that will not make it difficult for me to do my work." He watched her move her hands to the side and then settle her ankles atop the straps.

"Is there pain?" Her gaze finally met his.

"Of course not." He shook his head and then frowned. He'd guessed correctly. The man she'd been with had been cruel and inconsiderate. It was not foreign to him. He'd seen to her type of bruises and worse many times during his practice. But having seen the fear in Sophie's eyes the night before in his workroom, he could not imagine how a man could raise his hand against the young woman. He himself had felt guilt, though none was his to bear, for frightening her.

"I will give you a demonstration now, before you decide, so you will know with clarity what to expect." He rose and retrieved a mechanical device. He slanted a glance at her when she turned so she could watch him attach it to the battery. He set it aside, pulled on a pair of thin gloves, and moved to gently lift her legs so he could buckle the straps around her ankles. She looked fearful but did not object.

"Please, not my arms." Her voice shook, so he inclined his head and saw her breathe out with relief, as if she'd expected him to insist. Her entire body tensed when he lifted her skirts, but he did it quickly, bringing the hem up to her waist and exposing her stockings, ribbon garters, and underpants.

"I shall not bare you completely, Miss Rosette, though it is the normal procedure. You will want to unbutton your dress however, so that you will not feel constricted." He reached for the mechanism, slipped one of the vibratodes on the head, and set the vibration on the lowest level as she began working the buttons of her dress with trembling fingers. Once she'd unbuttoned down to her waist, her hands settled back atop the wrist straps. He noticed she only wore a thin chemise beneath her dress and no corset, but then she was of a thin build and did not require such a constrictive garment. And he imagined she'd not come from wealth and most likely couldn't afford the garment even if she were inclined to wear one.

He gave the crank several turns. "I will place it against your sex

now." She caught her lip between her teeth but nodded. He could see her pulse racing in the vein that travelled the length of her neck, just beneath her ear. She wouldn't be frightened for long. He gently placed the mechanism against her.

Her reaction to the vibrations was one of complete shock, and her whole body jumped as he pressed it against the material between her thighs. "There are various vibratode caps that will each make the vibrations feel differently," he explained. "You understand now? There is no pain."

"No," she said on a breath. "It's an amazing sensation."

"Good. Just breathe in and out and explore those sensations," he coaxed, watching her cheeks flush. She closed her eyes and hummed softly. He waited for her breathing to deepen before increasing the pulse. Her eyes flew open to look at him, wonder and realization filling those brown depths.

"Oh my," she rasped, her hand reaching out to grasp his free arm. Her other hand clutched the edge of the cot. A soft whimper carried on one release of breath. Gently, he began to stroke the pulsating vibratodes against her, and her lips parted. It wouldn't take her long. Because it was a new sensation to her, she would find release quickly. When he increased the pulse, her fingers tightened on his arm. Her breaths came quickly, and she half-moaned, half-whimpered on each one. She arched slightly, and his gaze drew to her nipples pressing out against the material of her under shift.

Her legs pulled against the restraints, and her hips lifted. "Oh God." She released the cot to thread her trembling fingers through her hair, pulling it loose from its pins. Her lips parted for her breath, drawing deep gulps into her chest.

"There are four levels that determine the number of pulses." He increased the pulse, and her reaction was violent. Her fingers fisted into his shirt sleeve, pulling at him. She whimpered, then thrust her hips up against the mechanism.

"Oh God, Doctor." She arched her body as her voice lifted into cries. "Yes!" She gave over to trembling release. He waited until she stilled

before slowly decreasing the pulses, then pulled the device away from her.

"There you see? There is no pain," he soothed as he pulled the hem of her dress back down, covering her undergarments and her legs.

"You do not lie," she spoke between breaths. "I feel weakened."

"It will pass," he told her and reached to push her hair from her face, then blinked, shocked he would do that. Stiffly, he turned to his table where he disconnected the device from the battery. He removed his gloves and ran a hand along his brow, surprised to find slight perspiration at his fingertips. He'd spent years training himself not to react to the orgasms of the women that lay in his chair. Now this woman had him sweating like a mule after just one session of a few minutes. Collecting himself and forcing control back into his veins, he turned and faced her again.

"That is what you do to the women that come to you?" She pointed the toe of her boot as she stretched her limbs when he moved to release her from the straps. "I would imagine some of them might feign conditions to do so."

Hagan could not suppress his chuckle and saw her look at him with a strange expression when he straightened. "Now that you know what my practice is about, that I am not a deviant who means to prey upon my patients, will you accept employment?"

She pushed her hair back from her face and sat up, then offered a little nod.

Chapter Three

Sophie, as instructed, brought in the new stack of parchment and set it on the table where Hagan was working. Across the room Evan was entering new mixtures into the ledger. She'd learned in her first three days that it was Evan St. James, Hagan's apprentice, who made most of the salves and lubricants and that they sold almost as well as the devices to both patients and doctors. He'd even taken her down to the indoor herb garden and shared his notes about which scents evoked which emotions. Hagan was not as generous with his work which of course made her all the more interested.

She leaned closer to look at the drawings the doctor was working on and then frowned at the sweeping lines he charcoaled across the paper. "Why is there a hump there at the base?"

"I do not need an audience or critique from one who does not know the shape of her own body." Hagan's clipped tone held irritation and impatience, but he didn't look up. She was surprised at how quickly she became accustomed to his abrupt way of speaking. While Evan avoided his darker moods, she found herself amused and fascinated by the doctor.

"My body needs no hump," Sophie argued.

"An error I would expect from virgins," Hagan snapped, throwing his large hands up in the air. "Do I waste my time with this on creatures that don't even know their own anatomies?"

"Come and look, Sophie. Leave him to his charcoal." Evan waved

for her to look at the diagram on the wall. "A woman has a place inside of her that if stimulated correctly can produce intense sexual pleasure."

Sophie left the doctor's side to peer up at the diagram. "I think you are mistaken. I know many women who are married and have never reported any such pleasure."

"That is because men are sometimes too distracted by finding their own pleasure that they do not consider a woman's." Evan held up his finger and then crooked it. "This shape rubs against that spot, but a shape that curved forward would stimulate much easier. The doctor is attempting to design a device that could offer that kind of stimulation."

"Perhaps not all women have this mysterious spot," Sophie suggested and smiled at Hagan's frustrated release of breath. She knew very well the spot they spoke of. Over the last three days, the doctor had given her several books to read, and she'd become fairly educated on the female anatomy, sexual desire and pleasure, and intercourse.

"God smiles only on the few?" Hagan growled.

Sophie walked back the workspace and peered over Hagan's shoulder, knowing it would irritate him even more. "Perhaps you should draw a wishbone for the handle. Men could use it on their wives as if they were searching for the hidden watering hole."

Evan laughed loudly from his own workstation, then cleared his throat when Hagan shot a glare over his shoulder at him. In turn and with much haste, Evan collected some containers and made a quick escape. She noticed that the housekeeper, Eileen, also often made a quick escape when Hagan's mood soured. Perhaps they did not understand the man. He was not violent, only became testy when working on new designs.

"I am curious of this secret spot, Doctor. How can one be certain it exists?" She tilted her head, but he seemed to ignore her completely. "Just because you say it is there does not make it so. Why, you could come up with any design and tell people that it was to stimulate a thousand different spots they knew nothing about if you wanted."

She saw the slight lift in the corners of his mouth, but he still didn't look up at her. Her gaze dropped to his large fingers as they created the lines of the sketch of the design. His hands moved quickly, she observed,

the shapes forming so easily. She wondered if his artistic skills went beyond diagrams and design sketches.

"Do you mean to stand there breathing over me while I work?"

"You've given me nothing else to do," she responded pointedly. She'd hoped for another session with him in his chair. His little mechanism had made her feel like she'd never felt before. It had seemed to awaken her body so that she craved more. It also seemed to awaken her awareness of the opposite sex, more specifically of him. Even now, standing so close to the doctor, she was aware of his spicy, masculine scent mixed with the faint whisper of tobacco, of the breadth of his shoulders, and of his breathing. He didn't wear a coat, and his vest was unbuttoned so that it fell open around his shirt; the top buttons of the shirt were also free so that just a bit of black hair peeked out. His sleeves were rolled up, almost to his elbows, revealing the cords of his arms and the dark hair that dusted his skin. He was so male. She let her gaze drop to his thick waist before winding lazily up to his shoulder. She wondered what he would look like without his shirt.

And then suddenly he was gazing at her with eyes so dark a shade of blue they almost looked black. "Perhaps you could go to the library and educate yourself from some of the books there."

"I'm waiting to see if you'll take my suggestions and draw a wishbone or if you mean to embed a compass in the butt of it instead." She failed miserably at keeping a straight face. And then he chuckled, shaking his head as he returned his attention back to his design.

"Your gawking is distracting." But the bite was gone from his voice.

"I'm not gawking," she argued, turning her attention back to his hands. "I'm watching. Evan told me that you had trained yourself for years so you were not affected by procedures of your practice, but I fear he might have lied if you are so easily distracted."

He said nothing.

She licked her lips and grinned. "Didn't you say the symptoms you treat include distraction from doing the most common of daily tasks?" She waved toward his design, and his heavy lids dropped momentarily before

lifting again when his gaze slanted at her.

"You are diagnosing me now, Miss Rosette?"

She lifted a hand to cover her giggle. "Perhaps I am. There might be a practice for me making instruments for men who suffer the same conditions you relieve in women." She giggled again at the absurdity of that idea, then shook her head. "No, that is a terrible idea. The moment I had a man strapped in a chair like that I might take a poker to his head instead. I haven't met one yet who didn't deserve it."

It was the first time she'd heard him laugh outright, and the deep, full-bodied sound filled her with warmth. She stared as lines curled around his parted mouth, at the straightness of his teeth, and the way his eyes lightened. Her heartbeat accelerated. Dear God. She'd thought him handsome when serious and somber but like this, she felt like leaping on him.

"Doctor, there is a man here asking for Sophie," Evan called from the doorway, causing Sophie to step back from Hagan quickly. She didn't know when she'd moved so close. When she looked at Evan, he had an odd expression on his face, and she felt her cheeks burn slightly as if caught doing something wrong.

"A man?" Sophie echoed. "What man?"

"Sophie," her visitor stepped forward, pushing past Evan's shoulder. In an instant, Sophie forgot her attraction to Hagan and her embarrassment, and her stomach dropped. Owen Daughtry stood just inside the room, looking as handsome as the first day she'd laid eyes on him, a big smile pulled across his face, his cap in his hand so that the length of his blond hair swept across his forehead.

"O...Owen." She pressed herself back against the doctor's worktable. "What are you doing here?" She looked up quickly at Hagan to find his gaze sliding from her to Owen.

"Sophie, girl, you know why I'm here," Owen said softly. "I've come to bring you back to Boston."

"I...I have a new life here now." She bit her lip but when he moved closer, she retracted the step she took away from Hagan. Owen's attention rose to Hagan momentarily, and he grinned, shrugging his big shoulders.

"Who are you?" Hagan finally asked.

"Owen. Owen Daughtry." Owen held out a hand. Hagan didn't take it but faced him fully. "Are you the doctor here?"

"I am."

"Women, you know. One little disagreement and off they run." Owen looked at Sophie. "You know I've been miserable without you. Enough of this, Sophie. Come on home now."

"How did you find me?" she blurted. She'd not told him anything but that she was going to New York.

"Oh come on now." He took another step forward. "You know I'll always be able to find you, love. Ms. Oberman told me you'd come to New York to a doctor fellow. I just knocked on doors till I got to this one."

Her nerves felt like they were crawling under her skin. That soft voice, the big smile—none of it was real. She knew all too well his true nature. The moment they were alone, he would strike at her.

"Let's go, Sophie. Enough of this. I don't want to fight with you anymore. You know I love you." He held out hand, but she didn't take it. Instead she shook her head.

"I won't go with you. I won't, Owen. You don't love me." She swallowed when his eyes hardened, but his laugh was deceptively easy.

"You know that's not true. Come on now, girl." He waved his hand. "Let's go outside and talk about it."

"I have a new life here." She shook her head again and when he reached forward, she found herself grasping Hagan's arm. The doctor's head jerked to the side to look down at her, then slowly he turned and slipped an arm around her, resting his hand first on her back, then around her waist. To her surprise, he pulled her against his side.

"I'm afraid, sir, that there has been some kind of mistake. Sophie was sent to *me* by Charlotte Oberman." Sophie was struck by how much power Hagan exuded. She wondered how she'd forgotten in the few moments since Owen had entered the room. But now, he seemed to take up the entire space of the workroom leaving the rest of them very little air to breathe.

Owen's gaze hardened into shards of green ice. "You haven't

married her yet, have you?"

"No."

"But she's already been fitted for the dress he's having made for her," Evan said and then smiled when Owen looked back at him. "She shall make a beautiful bride." Sophie could have kissed Evan for the lie he told so convincingly.

"Is that right, Sophie? You're gonna marry *this* man?" Owen pointed at Hagan when he looked at Sophie again.

"Hagan VonAlbrecht is a good and decent man and a phenomenal doctor. Any woman would be fortunate to call him her own." Sophie lifted her chin, a bit of bravery finding her. But it dispersed when Owen laughed.

"Sir, I don't know what Ms. Oberman told you about this woman, but Sophie is no blushing virgin. I know this myself as only a man *could* know."

Heat stung Sophie's cheeks, but Hagan showed no reaction at all to Owen's revelation. "Sophie has been honest with me about her experience. My needs do not require her to be an innocent."

"Do *your needs* require a whore?" Owen pointed a finger at her.

"Owen, don't," Sophie whispered, and his eyes glittered cruelly at her, his next words meant to hurt her.

"My eager little whore." Owen thumped his chest.

Sophie felt her cheeks heat, but her veins burned with something hotter than embarrassment. Without stopping to think, she stepped forward, hand itching to slap the smirk off of his face. Instead she lifted her chin and met his glare directly.

"I was never *yours*. You cannot own people."

"Calm yourself, Sophie," Hagan commanded from behind her.

"Screamed like a banshee," Owen pressed in that deceiving soft voice.

She drew back her hand, but Owen was quicker, and she should have expected him to be. He grasped her arm and jerked her forward so he could grit down at her. "Get to the carriage *now*."

"You will release her." Hagan spoke before she had a chance.

Owen's gaze darted up to Hagan. "She's coming with me, Doctor. Trust me; I'm saving you a lot of heartache."

"Sir," Evan said from the door as Sophie tried to jerk free of his grasp. "It would be a grave error of judgment to cross Doctor VonAlbrecht and even graver if you think I'm going to allow you through this door without releasing his fiancé." Sophie forgot her struggle, staring at Evan. Gone was his boyish smile, his flirtatious charm. His voice was dangerously quiet, his eyes hard blue steel.

For a moment, Owen looked between them, then roughly pushed Sophie backward into Hagan's chest. "Take her. She's used up anyway."

"I am instructing you to remove yourself from this facility." Hagan's warning rumbled through his chest against Sophie's back, and one arm slid protectively over her, across her breasts, holding her to him.

"You'll regret this, Sophie. You know I don't like to be trifled with." He turned and stormed to the door, then stopped when Evan didn't move aside. Slowly, his gaze never leaving Owen's, Evan smiled and took a lazy step to the side. When Owen left the building, he slammed the door so hard it vibrated through the floors.

"Nice company you keep, Sophie," Evan drawled sarcastically.

Sophie tried to inhale, but her chest tightened and she coughed, unable to catch her breath. Her hands started to tremble, and the room seemed to spinning around her, closing in on her. Lights danced in the corner of her eyes as she coughed again. She was vaguely aware of Hagan's hands on her shoulders as he turned her to face him.

"Slow down. Deep breaths," he instructed. She didn't realize he'd unbuttoned the front of her dress, nearly to her waist, until the feeling of being constricted within her clothes lessened. He guided her to a chair.

"Long, deep breaths," his voice found her, and she did as he commanded.

"Is she going to faint?" Evan asked, concern lacing his words.

"It's a bout of anxiety. It will pass." Hagan nodded when she looked up at him helplessly as she dragged another breath.

"I was not his who...whore," she rasped, concerned about what the doctor thought of her. "I was not...he..."

"It doesn't matter to me. Just breathe," Hagan interrupted.

Chapter Four

Hagan sat at his desk, unable to concentrate on the book he was attempting to read. Try as he might, his thoughts continued to drift back to Sophie. She'd be absolutely terrified of Owen Daughtry from the moment he'd walked through the door that afternoon. Her fear had broken when the man had pushed her, but it was then Hagan had seen in the man's eyes exactly why she feared him so much.

While he'd not asked the details of her relationship with Daughtry before she came to New York, he had a pretty good idea just from what he'd witnessed. Daughtry was cruel and had used her, most likely the one responsible for the bruises on her arms and back. If he hadn't raped her, he'd given her no pleasure of her own when they'd lain together.

He'd been close to striking the man when he'd grabbed Sophie. Evan had obviously seen the break of his calm and had quickly spoken a threat that was convincing enough to make Daughtry realize his mistake. Had Evan not reacted so quickly, Hagan wasn't certain what might have transpired.

Pushing away from his desk, he stood and walked to Sophie's door. He lifted his knuckles, and then stopped. Sounds of sobbing found him. Without knocking, he pushed open the door and stepped inside the lamp-illuminated room. His throat closed.

Sophie lay across the bed on her stomach, the hem of her sleeveless sleeping gown around her thighs where it had landed when she'd obviously flung herself into the coverlets. Her hair was unbound in waves

of brown, red, and gold, splayed about her even as she lifted her tear-streaked face to look at him with surprise.

"I saw the light beneath your door." When he stepped farther into the room, she scrambled from the bed to stand, swiping at her tears quickly. "I have need of you. I've finished my newest design and am eager to know what you think of it." And he had a protective desire to chase away whatever memories of cruelty Daughtry's presence had unearthed.

"Now?"

"Unless you meant to sleep." He watched her reach for her robe. "You will not need that, and no one will see you. The place is warm. Come as you are." He watched the flush rise quickly to her cheeks, but she stepped forward. Settling his hand on her back, he led her from the room and downstairs.

"The concept was to create an instrument that would offer the physician more mobility during his sessions." He spoke once she was seated on the chair. "I am calling it the rodule." He retrieved the new instrument and held it out for her inspection.

Her eyes widened with obvious surprise. "Is it meant for penetration?"

"Recline," he told her. It was natural she would ask the question. The wand had a grip that resembled the end of a rolling pin; the body of it was long and had been molded into seven waved raises. The instrument did look rather phallic at the rounded end.

He strapped her arms and legs to the chair and then pulled on his gloves. He applied a lubricant to his fingers and then lifted the hem of her gown, revealing that she wore nothing beneath. When his fingers touched her sensitive flesh, her gaze darted to his face.

"Trust me." But he wasn't sure she should. His chest tightened as he ran his fingers across the folds of her flesh, and she sucked in her breath. No, he told himself firmly but silently. This wasn't for him. It was for her. Turning, he reached for the rodule and slid one of the vibratode sleeves over the narrow end.

"It is heavier than the others, but the benefits outweigh that fact." He spoke more for himself than for her as he attached the rodule to the

battery, then worked the crank until it hummed to life. "I will allow you to feel the vibrations first then I will demonstrate why it is shaped differently." He pressed the device against her sex, and she sucked in her breath deeply as the vibrations pulsed on the first setting. He increased the vibrations and waited for her breathing to deepen.

"And now..." He dragged the length of the wand upward, every knot of the vibrator hitting her clitoris. A cry pulled from her lips, and her body shook.

"Oh my God, Doctor, that...that..." Her words turned to another cry as he repeated the movement. Her legs jerked against the straps, and her hips lifted.

"Wait...wait..." she gasped, and the rodule left her.

"Is there pain?" He leaned closer, concerned, but when she looked at him, he could see there was none. Those brown depths were darkened with arousal beneath heavy lids. She laughed shakily and shook her head.

"No. It's just very intense."

Satisfied, he reapplied the rodule and dragged it against her. She whimpered and closed her eyes. He increased the pulse and began to slide the rodule up and down against her deliberately. She bucked, jerking against all four straps, cries bouncing off the walls of the room. He could not deny that her reaction affected him. Were she more aware of anything around her, she might guess the truth as well. His cock hardened and pressed out against his trousers. His breathing deepened as he watched her body shake, her fingers clenched at her sides.

When he increased the pulses to the fourth level, his movements increased, and he allowed no break between strokes. Sophie thrashed with no control, screaming out between ragged breaths. Tension tightened within him, and an ache knotted in his groin. Damn him, but he wanted to crawl atop of her and show her there was more to be felt than any machine he could design.

She found her release fast, with a scream and tears pushing from between her closed lids. He removed the rodule, and he turned away from her quickly, turning the mechanism off so he could detach it from the battery. When he glanced at her, however, she remained, eyes closed,

dragging deep breaths. He took one of his own in an attempt to settle his reaction to her.

Quickly he removed the gloves and wiped at his brow, removing the evidence of his own condition. Once he had regained his composure, he turned back to her and leaned forward.

"Miss Rosette?" He waited until she opened her eyes. "Are you hurt?" He touched her cheek, glistening with her drying tears.

She sniffed, shook her head, and licked her lips. "No." Her voice was weak. Quietly, he removed the straps and allowed her to lay there taking deep breaths, the only sound in the room for several minutes.

Later, closer to morning, Hagan sat again at his desk, staring down at its wood grain. He'd always prided himself on his control but earlier when Sophie had screamed out in release, it had been around his name. It would be a lie, if he tried to tell himself he hadn't been affected by her, that he was not affected still. It was absurd. He'd tended to many women and never lost his composure. She'd only been there less than a week. He was not a man who neglected himself the attention of women. He shouldn't find himself in such a state of frustration.

Standing, he turned and walked to the window, running both hands through his hair. It wasn't just the session in the chair. Earlier, before that bastard of a man paid his visit, she had been teasing him about his work, and he'd very nearly kissed her. It was *her*. But why? She was nothing like the women he entertained. He preferred women of experience, the kind that already knew well enough how to find pleasure and release with or without a man. He liked women who were not broken, who were independent.

That wasn't fair, he decided quickly. Sophie had traveled alone and found her way through a strange city to his door. And unlike others who had ugly pasts that included abusive men, she didn't look at him with fear. She hadn't been afraid to be alone with him in either of the sessions or in his workroom.

The sound of a door opening made him turn and as if summoned by his very thoughts, Sophie appeared from her room, clad in only that damnable gown. He stopped himself before he could groan. Instead, he

moved back to his chair and sat.

"I can't sleep," she directed at him as she swept through the room and fell into one of the chairs across from his desk, blowing out a breath. "Tossing and turning."

"Sometimes reading has a calming effect," he suggested.

"It's not a book I want for." She crossed her arms beneath her breasts, her lips pouting slightly.

"Ah—" He shifted in his chair. "—then your condition is sexual."

"And it's your fault," she added as she leaned her head back against the chair, imitating his accent in her next sentence. "*I em calleen it see rodule.*"

He laughed abruptly. "I do not sound like that, and you cannot blame *me* for your condition."

She straightened and pointed a finger at him. "Oh, I do most certainly blame you, Doctor. My whole body *aches*."

He leaned back in his chair, noting the flush in her cheeks that indicated she was telling the truth of her condition. "My suggestion would be to relieve yourself of your tension."

She made a noise of disbelief. "I have *tried*." That flush deepened as if she realized what she'd just said, and her gaze dropped to her hands. "I suspect that is how you have so many patients. They come to you the first time out of curiosity and once you lay your instruments on them, they come back because they have no choice." She was teasing him again, so he said nothing. When her gaze lifted, he saw that slight mischievous glitter he'd seen earlier that day.

She was obviously attempting to remain somber, but the slight lift in the corners of her lips gave her away as she said, "I think you are more deviant than I thought before." He took a deep breath and reached for his journal and charcoals. It was easier to refrain from reacting to her if he focused on work. She stood, moving close to the desk.

"I remain professional because no one wants a man leering at them like a wolf when they are being relieved of their conditions." He looked up when she moved around the desk so she could look down at the blank page of his journal. "I worked many years to make certain I would feel

nothing as I tended to these women."

"I believe you like it," she accused. "I believe you like very much what you do to the women that come to you. I believe you thrive off of controlling their pleasure."

"You are merely frustrated and attempting to pick a fight to relieve yourself of the tension."

"That may be true, but I don't care. I cannot sleep." She pouted again, and he smiled.

"Very well. What do you wish to fight about?"

She sighed. "I don't want to fight."

"Good. I suggest sleeping during the hours left of the dark." He looked back at his journal and began to sketch the outline of one of his recent ideas.

"Maybe I should have a journal too to jot down my experiment ideas."

He shouldn't have looked at her again. The little curl in her lips let him know she wasn't serious. More of her teasing.

"What experiments?"

She caught her bottom lip between her teeth momentarily before leaning forward. She was bent beside him, elbows resting on the surface of his desk. "Control and impulse, mainly yours."

"I see."

"Your sessions change me, Doctor." She looked down at the desk, seeming nervous to look him in the eyes, her next words spoken shyly. "I like being bound in that chair."

Dark lust stabbed into his gut, and abruptly he stood. "I've not patience for your jesting tonight."

She straightened and reached for his arm when he started to turn away from her. "No, Doctor, I mean what I say. It isn't easy to admit that I like being bound by you, my body manipulated by you. I thought at first it was just because it was something that was new to me. But I think of you when I touch myself at night."

"Go to bed, Sophie." Hagan's voice shook. Her words were poison.

"I can't sleep. I lay in the dark and wonder what you would be like

with a woman. I do not think you would be like Owen..."

"I have never *forced* a woman." Hagan faced her fully, and she shook her head.

"No, you would be gentle and kind. Damn your devices and professionalism. I want more."

He could tell she'd most likely never spoken like that before in her life. "Go to bed, Sophie," he repeated.

"No." Her hand tightened on his arm. "I want *you*. Do you feel nothing at all?"

"You push too far," he growled and stood rigidly as she moved closer, sliding her hand up his arm to his shoulder. The other lifted to the opposite shoulder.

"Please," she begged. "Stop this damning ache inside of me." She pulled at him. Something inside of him broke, and he grasped her waist, jerking her against him. His mouth met hers roughly, and his tongue plunged past her lips so he could kiss her with abandon. Raging need exploded in his chest, and he whirled her around. In two strides, her back hit the bookcases. He shifted so that his cock pressed against her hip, his thigh against her sex.

Hagan's reaction was so forceful it took Sophie's breath away. She'd imagined him gentle, slowly arousing her to release. Instead, his plunging kiss set her on fire instantly and his hands, curling fingers on her hips before rising to grasp her chin and tilt her head back so he could dominate her with his mouth, made the ache in her body bloom into a knot of demanding tension.

Long fingers swept beneath her shift and up her thighs. "Open," he spoke against her mouth, the vibration of that one word sending hot shivers down her spine. She widened her stance, allowing him access. His fingers parted her flesh and delved into her as he leaned away, those dark eyes boring into her own. His palm rubbed against her clit as he pushed his fingers in and out of her, creating an agonizing friction that heated her entire body.

"Talk to me, Hagan, I want to hear you." His fingers quickened their motion.

"A woman needs to be aroused. She must be stroked and brought to readiness."

His voice fed her desire, that soft baritone sound wrapping around her.

"Don't stop. Keep talking," she whispered.

He leaned closer, so that his breath caressed her ear and cheek. "Can you feel yourself readying? Growing warmer?" His voice caused her breath to quicken.

"Yes." Her voice failed her, and the word came out in a whimper.

"Do you still imagine me gentle?"

"No."

His hand jerked away from her, and he leaned back so that she could look into his eyes. "Now that you know I am not, do you now fear me?"

She shook her head, refusing to release him when he started to step backward. "I do not fear you, Doctor. You make me feel safe. I told you. I ache for you."

He must have expected a different reaction from her because for several moments he only stood there staring at her. She pulled at him, hoping he knew she meant she wanted him to continue. Those blue eyes darkened, and his nose flared slightly. In the next second, he reached down and grasped the hem of her gown and jerked it upward, over her head. It landed behind him across his desk.

She stood completely naked in front of him watching his long fingers work the buttons of his vest, then his shirt. His gaze never left hers, as intense as he'd been moments before. He reached up and pulled her arms from around him, then stepped backward so he could sit in his chair and pull off his shoes.

Sophie had never thought watching a man undress could be so arousing. The vest came off. Her breath quickened with anticipation. Then his shirt slipped over his shoulders, and her gaze swept over the dark hair of his chest, followed the narrow line that reached down his stomach and then disappeared into the waistline of his trousers. He stood and finished undressing and when he rose to his feet naked in front of her, her gaze

dropped to his cock. Thick and long, it jutted out from a nest of black hair, as bold and without shame as the man himself.

Slowly, he reached back and retrieved his shirt, and Sophie's gaze widened as he began to twist it. As it wound into a long narrow strip, she realized what he was going to do, and her chest tightened.

"Turn around," he commanded. Her body shook with excitement as she obeyed. Her arms were pulled behind her, and that shirt became a rope that bound her wrists tightly together. Once her arms were secured, he lifted his hands to her shoulder and pulled her backward, against him.

"You like being bound, Sophie?" His deep voice whispered next to her ear, and she sucked in her breath.

"Yes, Doctor."

"Hagan," he corrected.

"Hagan."

"Do you want me to manipulate your body now?"

"I...I want..." she bit her lip, her cheeks warming.

"Yes, Sophie, tell me what you want. Say the words. Whatever it is, I will do it." His fingers lifted from her hips to her breasts to play lightly against her nipples.

"I want you...in me." She closed her eyes, ashamed that she's said those words out loud but in the same breath, it felt freeing. "Please."

"Do not ask me, Sophie. Tell me."

She knew he was trying to help her somehow. "I don't know how."

His teeth grazed the lobe of her ear, and it sent a hot shiver down her spine. "I shall give you the words. You only need repeat them. *Fuck me, Hagan.*"

Her body trembled. "Fuck me, Hagan." She repeated without opening her eyes. She blew out a breath when his hands slid down her arms and dropped to her waist. He turned her to face him, and she opened her eyes to find that intense gaze waiting for her.

In one movement, he swept her off her feet and carried her to his room, kicking the door closed behind him once inside. She took a moment to look around the room, surprised at the dark but lush earth colors and soft fabrics that decorated the room. She'd expected something simple; his

room was anything but. Before she had time for closer scrutiny, he stood her next to the bed, then turned and sat on the edge.

"Straddle me." He slid back a bit, giving her room to place her knees on either side of him. His hands guided her down atop him, and his cock nudged her sex. He brought her down slowly, so the crown of his shaft pushed inside of her, then a bit more, stretching her to accommodate his size. Farther still, until he'd pushed his entire length into her. For a moment he closed his eyes, and a deep groan crawled from his throat.

Sophie gazed down at him as his hands slid around her, and he opened his eyes and leaned forward to take one nipple into his mouth. Her lips parted when he sucked. The next breath she gasped when he sucked again, fiercely. The pull of his lips veined heat from beneath his mouth to sweep over her whole body. He released the nipple with a loud *pop* and moved to the other. This time, his teeth dragged fire across the tip. He tugged slightly, and Sophie moaned.

When his fingers curled at her spine and drew downward, she sucked in her breath again and arched. Those fingers clamped around her waist, and he pushed to the core of her. Then he pulled back, almost to the point of leaving her body completely. She started to protest but when he jerked upward again, her voice lifted with a soft cry. And then he began pumping into her with fever. With each thrust, he pulled her down onto him and then up with each retraction.

Sophie tilted her head back. Arms bound behind her, she could do nothing to help him. His hands guided her as he wanted. All she could do was focus on the sensations that swept through her body. Hot aching tightened in her stomach and spilled scorching chills over her skin. A demanding need rose inside of her when he made noises deep in his throat with each thrust. The sound of him, the feel of him inside of her, his hands on her waist—everything about him aroused her. And then he lifted her from his lap and set her back to shaking legs.

"What...why did you stop?" He stood and walked around her, his hand cupping her breast, fingers pinching at her nipple.

"Lean forward, across the bed," he told her, his accent thicker. She bent forward, and he held her for balance until her shoulders touched the

satin-covered blankets. Strong hands pushed her legs apart, then wider until she felt completely exposed. She rested her cheek against the soft coverlet as his hands slid down her legs to her ankles and then up again, setting her skin on fire.

Her eyes widened when his hands slipped over her ass and then down to her cunt. His thumbs spread her flesh, and the next instant his tongue delved into her. She whimpered as that hot velvet slipped in and out before slipping over her clitoris. His tongue flicked, lapped, and circled, knotting tension in her abdomen until she cried out and shook.

"I am not gentle. I am not kind," he murmured as he rose, slipped his hands to her hips and lifted until she could rest her knees on the edge of the bed. "That is reserved for my clients. In my personal life, I *take* what I want." His cock pushed into her. In the new position when he drove into her core, it was deeper and danced on the verge of pain.

"Yes," she whispered.

He pulled back and then thrust sharply. Her voice lifted, but he rocked again with equal force. Three more deliberate thrusts before that steady rhythm broke, and his hips jerked into wild motion. Sophie's breath quickened, and she cried out with each stroke. He hammered into her forcefully until lights danced in the corners of her vision, and her body shook, readying for release. And suddenly he stilled.

Sophie didn't realize she'd been sobbing until they sounded around her words. "No, don't stop." His fingers worked the thick knot of his shirt until her arms were freed. A moment later he pulled from within her, flipped her over, and pushed her farther onto the bed. He crawled atop her and thrust his cock back into her cunt.

He spoke as he gazed down at her with dark glittering eyes. "Come for me, Sophie. Hurry."

The hot friction of him inside of her, his voice, and that intense gaze that would not release her pushed her over the edge. She lunged upward against him, her voice lifting to fill the room. One hand snaked around her and held her up, hand behind her head, and his rough kiss smothered her scream. His tongue thrust between her lips, dancing in the same wild rhythm with which his hips moved. He buried himself into her core,

mouth leaving hers when he shouted his own release.

Sophie dropped back onto the bed as he released her, realizing she'd dug her nails into his shoulders. She gasped for breath as he rocked back and plunged into her several times before he stilled. His breath was loud, ragged, as he looked down at her. His nose flared with every exhale. He looked like something wild from the night that had crawled in to the warmth from the snowy shadowed streets.

She'd not imagined so much passion in the man. He'd been so reserved, so controlled and precise during their interactions before. Now, it was as if he was something different all together.

She could not deny that she liked it.

Carefully he pulled from within her, then rolled and dropped heavily to the bed beside her. One arm rested across his forehead, the other tucked beneath his head. His eyes closed as he continued to take several deep breaths. She pushed up on her elbows and looked at him, gaze wandering down the length of him to his glistening cock.

She chuckled. "Had I known, sir, you were this intense, I would have leapt upon you that first night I arrived."

The corners of his lips lifted, and he shook his head without opening his eyes. "You would not have. You were broken by that bastard you left in Boston." His arm slid farther up his forehead so he could peer up at her. "And I am only intense because I must remain unaffected during my work. I did not hurt you?"

She lifted a hand to his chest, ran her fingertips against the coarse hair that curled across. "I feel no pain though I did think I might faint at one point. You are rather...large." Her gaze dropped again to his cock. Even when not erect, it was impressive.

"I can do nothing about the size."

The giggle bubbled up from her throat before she could stop it. "Thank goodness."

"You enjoyed me?" He reached for her and pulled her so that she rested at his side, her head on his shoulder.

"Yes."

"Then you see that there can be pleasure when a man and woman

join. Only a bastard would bring you pain always." He turned his head and nuzzled her cheek.

"You are trying to heal me, Doctor?" Sophie grinned. "I may need to make another appointment if that is the case." He chuckled against her skin, then licked at her earlobe.

"This will change our work." His voice vibrated against her, and her nipples hardened in response. "The objectivity of your opinions about my mechanisms will be compromised." He shifted so he could lick at the spot below her ear. His lips parted, and he sucked at her skin.

"Mmm. How so?"

"You are very responsive, Sophie, most certainly to my voice as well as my touch. You shall react to those things rather than the mechanisms themselves." His mouth drifted around her throat beneath her chin.

"For one so educated, you are daft." She laughed when he lifted his head to look at her. "I responded to those things before, during that first demonstration the day after I arrived. I was certain you already knew that."

"I did not." He rolled onto his side and lifted a hand to her breast, fingers squeezing slightly, caressing.

"I imagine most of your clients are reacting to you. Even when you are controlled, you are very intense." Sophie closed her eyes when he leaned forward and took a nipple between his lips. His mouth tightened as he sucked and tugged for several moments before he released her.

"Then I shall factor that into your responses so that I don't mistake them for a reaction to my designs." His hand slid down her stomach to rest on the inside of her thigh. "Do you think you can sleep now?"

"Yes." She smiled. "Is it time for me to return to my bed?"

"If you stay, I will take from you, and neither of us will get any sleep at all." He pulled at her thigh until her hip rested flush against his cock, and she found it already hardening for more.

"There is no hurry for me to rise tomorrow. I'm to assist Evan in his garden, and he shall want to sleep in anyway since he's yet to return from wherever he's been all night." She ran a hand over his shoulder.

"He shall be insanely jealous you know." Hagan grinned, exposing his even teeth. "I believe he had it in his head that if you were to be had it would be by him."

"Did he say that?" Sophie stared at Hagan.

"Something of the like a time or two," he said nodding.

"The two of you talked about me?"

"We have."

Sophie wondered exactly what they exchanged about her. "Will you tell him of what we've done tonight?"

"For the satisfaction of seeing him crushed by his disappointment." Hagan's grin widened. "Most of the women we encounter are charmed more by him than I."

"That cannot be true." Sophie wouldn't believe it.

"I am more reserved than he. Women like me once they are introduced, but he often approaches them whereas I do not." Hagan's hand slid up to her cunt, fingers playing against her clit.

"You speak like the two of you work as a team." Sophie hummed softly, closing her eyes, as he pressed a finger against her and then pushed inside.

"Sometimes we do."

Sophie's eyes opened, and she turned her head to stare at him. "You mean to say that you..." her voice wavered slightly, "*share* women?"

"Sometimes." He nodded and pushed his finger deeper.

Sophie forced herself to close her eyes again, but her mind was reeling. She'd never imagined two men before. Had the two of them talked about her in that way? Her thoughts scattered when Hagan inserted a second finger, then a third, his strokes becoming more deliberate. Cock now pressing against her hip, she reached out to touch it tentatively. Hot beneath her fingertips, still wet from their last joining, she wrapped her fingers around his width and squeezed slightly. She was rewarded with a low groan.

"Then you choose no sleep."

Chapter Five

"If he grabs your arm again—" Evan reached for Sophie's arm and jerked her forward. "—you in turn grasp his wrist with one hand, turn until his grip loosens, kick him between the legs and when he lets you go, pull his arm straight, and slam the heel of your palm into his elbow."

Hagan's gaze drifted to Sophie's figure as she mocked the defense under Evan's instruction. His attention swept down to the swell of her hips, then up to the curve of her breast when she turned.

"Good." Evan nodded and stepped back. "If you are attacked from behind, use the back of your head and slam it into his face. Turn and kick him between his legs. This will give you the time you need to escape."

"What if I'm too afraid?"

"You can't be afraid. Daughtry is the kind that thrives off a woman's fear. He hit you because he knew he could. If that were not true, he would have taken a shot at me or the doctor," Evan corrected. "Now look around you. What could you use as a weapon?"

Sophie turned, looking around; then her gaze rested on Hagan. Her lips curled as she lifted a finger and pointed at him. Evan laughed.

He stepped around her. "This chair is a weapon. Pick it up and hit your attacker with it. Turn the table over on him. Break a window and scream for help as you swipe at him with one of the broken pieces. Use what you see around you to fight back."

"I like the idea of using Hagan instead."

"You must learn to defend yourself," Evan said softly. "Not just

against Owen Daughtry, but against any that might mean you harm. There is no reason for anyone to go through life helpless to whatever bastard wants to push them around."

Sophie smiled and nodded, then glanced around her again. "The lantern. I could hit him with it."

"Good, then what?"

She picked up a mechanism near Hagan. "If I had a battery I could weaken him with pleasure."

Evan rolled his eyes as Hagan stifled a chuckle. "This is serious, Sophie."

"It's heavy enough I could knock him silly with it. It would give me enough time to get to the door." She tossed the mechanism to the worktable. "You threatened him soundly enough however that I doubt he will come back here."

"Once more," Evan prompted, but she shook her head.

"You've given me my lesson for today. I'm supposed to wash out those jars for you, and it's already two o'clock. I should get started now if I mean to break for dinner." She walked to the basin where Evan had left the jars. "You can teach me more of defending myself tomorrow."

Hagan watched the way she moved, gaze dropping to the slight sway of her hips. He recalled how they felt beneath his fingers. They'd spent most of the night in passion and had fallen asleep as the sun rose. It had been Eileen that had roused him, with teasing smile and twinkling eyes as she avoided looking at Sophie sleeping naked in his bed.

He imagined her naked now, those slender legs rising to meet her pert ass. He thought of her breasts, nipples erect and awaiting his mouth. Recalling, her voice lifted around his name, and his cock hardened. She'd been so responsive and eager.

He forced himself to look down at his sketches, but he was uninterested in his design. He could think of much more entertaining ways to spend the rest of the afternoon. Evan finally left to retrieve some herbs from his garden. The moment the door closed, Hagan turned and closed the distance between him and Sophie. He grasped her hips as soon as she was within reach, noting her slight start of surprise.

He pressed his body flush against hers and nuzzled her ear, groaning as he rubbed his cock against her ass. Snaking one hand around her, he grasped her breast and squeezed. Damn, she felt good to him. He heard her breath hitch and noticed when her hands, still holding the jars began to shake slightly.

"I thought he would never leave." He spoke against the nape of her neck and slid his hand down from her breast, across her stomach, and lower still, pressing her dress against her so he could rub at her sex through her clothes. "You were right. I am a better weapon than the oil lamp."

She chuckled and leaned back against him. "He means well. He was angry about the way Owen grabbed me yesterday and wanted me to learn to not be victim."

Hagan began slipped his hand around to her thigh and clenched his fingers in the fabric of her dress, drawing the hem slowly upward. "You smell good." He lowered his face to her shoulder and breathed in deeply though he couldn't find the spot that the minty scent was coming from.

"It's one of Evan's lubricants."

"You used one of my devices today?" He worked the hem of the dress until it finally found his fingers. Jerking it out of the way, he returned his hand to her bare thigh and ran his fingertips up to her cunt.

"Isn't that what I was hired to do? No, I was merely testing the mint lubricant. I liked the smell and asked him about it. He said it would cause no harm." She moaned as his hand pushed her undergarments aside so he could touch her. The jars dropped into the soapy water in the basin, thudding at the bottom and sloshing water over the edge. He stroked her clit lazily, smiling when she leaned against him, her head dipping back to rest on his shoulder.

"I require something else from you right now," her murmured against her cheek. "Give me your mouth." She turned her head, and he captured her lips with his, then thrust his tongue between them into the moist warmth behind her teeth. Her velvet tongue responded instantly, and he kissed her deeply, pressing his fingers into her cunt's heat.

He spoke against her mouth. "Leave these jars and come upstairs with me."

"We shall never finish the day's work if we do not show some kind of restraint. Where is that resolve and control you prided yourself about, Doctor?"

"I was reserved with the Widow Haverly this morning." He grinned when she laughed. The widow was seventy-three years old, and Sophie had been fascinated that the woman would still have it in her to come for a session with the doctor.

"She got you so worked up that you come to me now for release?" Sophie teased, then moaned as he joined a second finger with the first, stroking in and out of her. He feathered a kiss against the corner of her mouth when she hummed softly.

"Will you deny me, Sophie?" He knew she wouldn't even before she shook her head in response.

"You weaken me too much to do so."

He wanted to tell her that it was he who was weakened and seemingly bewitched by her, that he had been so the moment he opened his door and found her on the step. Instead, he kissed her deeply until she turned, causing his hands to fall away from her.

"I have a gift for you," he told her, and she stepped back to stare up at him.

"A gift?"

"Call it an early Christmas present." He'd sent Evan out for the gift that morning. Evan had given him a strange look but did as he asked. Now Sophie was staring at him with much the same expression. After a moment, she took the box and untied the ribbon from around it. When she opened and revealed the string of pearls, she lifted a hand to her mouth, her gaze darting up to his.

"It's only a small thing, but I wanted you to have something fine." He reached forward and lifted the pearls, then walked around her and lowered them over her head so he could fasten them in the back. He kissed her nape of her neck gently before stepping back around her. He smiled with approval.

"They are almost as perfect as you are."

She slipped her arms over his shoulders and around his neck, kissing him with fever. Sliding his arm around, he brought her against him, and turned so that he could walk her backward to his desk.

"What if Evan returns?" she asked against his mouth.

He pulled away from her, strode to the door, and locked it, jerking the buttons of his vest free when he hurried back to her. His gaze dropped to her fingers as she began working the clasps of her dress, and they undressed in silence. When their clothes lay in a heap at his feet, he reached forward and ran his hands along her waist, enjoying the feel of her smooth, ivory skin beneath his fingertips as he stepped closer. Lowering his head, he took one small, pink nipple between his lips and sucked at the soft skin until it pointed heavenward; then he moved to the other.

He'd been rough the night before, hungry for her. This time, he wanted to bring her to pleasure slowly. At least that had been his intention but when he straightened, she reached forward boldly and grasped his cock in her palm and brought a bolt of need scorching through him. Closing his eyes, he groaned as she began stroking her hand up and down, fingers tightening and releasing in rhythm.

"Shall I put my mouth on you as you did me?" She didn't wait for him to answer, lowering to her knees in front of him. He opened his eyes and looked down, watching her slip the crown between her lips. At first, her strokes were short and slow, then gradually they became bolder. Sliding him deep, her velvet tongue pressed firmly against the underside of his cock as she withdrew, and her cheeks sank when she pulled him in again, sucking at him so that a hot ache began to build within.

Her hands fell away and then lifted to the edge of his desk behind her. Only her mouth stroked at him. He leaned forward and covered her fingers with his own, pinning her there in front of him. He began rocking his hips forward into her obliging mouth.

"Sophie," he murmured her name as his breathing deepened. He groaned when she increased her rhythm, and his sac tightened. He was close. But then her mouth left him, and he stared down at her, surprised

she would bring him so close and then stop. A little curl in her lips let him know she'd known that's exactly what she meant to do.

Reaching down, he jerked her up to her feet and kissed her hard, his tongue plunging into her moist warmth. His hands found her breasts, squeezed and plucked, until she made a soft noise, half-moan half-whimper, against his lips. He released her mouth long enough to clear the desk of his sketchbooks and designs with one sweep of his arm. Grasping her waist, he lifted her to the surface and stepped between her knees.

"I want in," he growled as he pressed the head of his cock to her cunt. She spread her legs apart wider, welcoming him, and leaned back on her hands so that her hips were angled, allowing him easier entry. He reached down and parted the folds of her flesh, then slid his cock forward and into her pussy. As he pushed deep, burying himself in her wet heat, he rested his hand across her pubic bone so he could stroke his thumb against her clit. The walls of her cunt tightened around him in response.

She felt good. Rocking back, he watched her face, then thrust sharply, and her lips parted for the soft cry that welcomed his intrusion. When she straightened and reached for him, he pushed her flat against the surface of the desk and grasped her wrists, pinning them above her head. Leaning over her, he took a nipple in his mouth and sucked fiercely, hips rocking against hers. Her knees drew up at his sides, and she worked to meet his every thrust, making it damnably hard to keep a steady rhythm or to hold onto the control he'd meant to keep this time with her.

"It feels good, Hagan. More."

It undid him. He released her nipple and fucked her hard. Her cries came on ragged breath and lifted as she drew closer to orgasm. Her legs locked behind him so she could pull at him and as she screamed her release, he pounded into her, giving in completely to his hunger. Pleasure burst through him as he buried himself deep, shouting as he filled her. His hips jerked with every spasm.

After he came and several moments of standing there, he released her wrists, then pulled from within her, leaning his weight on his arms as he grasped the edge of the desk and took several steadying breaths. "You

take away my control completely." When he looked up, he saw the surprise on her face and realized she'd not guessed it was she that made him so wild. "I lose myself in you."

Her bottom lip caught for a moment between her teeth. "You aren't like this with the women you've been with before?"

He grunted a chuckle. "Had it felt like this always, I would find myself in the throes too often to have a successful practice." He shifted his weight to one arm and reached forward to cup her chin when she looked away, a flush coloring her cheeks. "It is you, Sophie, who weakens *me*."

"You are not weak, Hagan," she whispered. He slipped a hand beneath her and pulled her up to meet his mouth. He kissed her tenderly at first, then deepening the affection until she brought her hands to both sides of his face and leaned back to look into his eyes, her own misting.

"Don't make me love you, Hagan. It hurts too much."

Love. Was that what she was feeling? It seemed absurd to think one could feel such deep emotion for another only days having met. He could not deny it was more than lust however that burned inside of him. He could see in her gaze that she felt more than just desire for him.

"It doesn't have to. You're perception might be skewed given that you were told you were loved by the cruelest kind of man, one who could leave bruises on your flesh." He feathered his fingertips across her shoulder. "I have never struck a woman, and I certainly would not raise my hand against one I cared for."

"No, I know you would not," she agreed after a moment of silence. "I should dress and finish those jars for Evan."

He lifted her from the table and set her to her feet, then reached down and swiped up his own clothes. He noticed she wouldn't look at him and wondered if he had frightened her by admitting he cared for her. He wouldn't push his affections. He would allow her whatever space she needed to work through her own thoughts. If they came together again it would be by her choice. The last thing he wanted was to scare her away before he explored his own feelings.

Once dressed, she moved back to the basin, so he unlocked the door and then knelt to collect all that he'd swept from his desk. He'd

nearly picked it all up when the door opened and Evan returned, then stopped short in the doorway.

“What happened here?”

Hagan didn't answer, straightening and stepping to his desk. He began arranging his workspace, allowing Evan to come to his own conclusions.

Chapter Six

Owen fisted a hand as he watched the bastard help Sophie from the carriage. The doctor's apprentice, the upstart that had threatened him, followed her. Anger seethed inside of him as he watched her scoop up a handful of snow and toss it playfully at the younger of the men, who in turn took up the game until one of his snowballs landed in the middle of the doctor's chest.

As St. James quickly headed toward the building, Owen's gaze narrowed. He'd noticed over the last few weeks that while St. James was the one who'd threatened him, it was obvious he was intimidated by the doctor. A man could tell a lot about people if he just watched. And Owen had been watching. No dress. No wedding. The doctor hadn't married Sophie yet. That didn't make seeing the two together any less maddening.

Now, he watched Sophie brush away the snow from the doctor's coat as her laughter drifted on the cold air. They were intimate, more so than when he'd paid his visit. When they turned to follow St. James inside, the doctor rested his hand possessively at Sophie's hip. Before they disappeared inside, the doctor looked back as if he sensed someone watching them. Owen leaned away from the carriage window. Not yet. He would bide his time. He would wait. And the moment the doctor left her vulnerable, he would take her back to Boston with him—one way or another.

* * * * *

Sophie glanced between Hagan and Evan as they cleared away their workspaces for the day. So very different, the two of them, that she could not imagine them approaching a woman together as Hagan had told her they had. Since he'd told her of it, she'd asked him questions about it, but his answers had been elusive, and his eyes had twinkled with obvious amusement with her curiosity. He'd said that he wasn't opposed if she meant to have them both, but it had embarrassed her, and she'd not broached the subject again. But she was curious and thought of it often, especially at times like now when they were in the same room.

They finished, and all three climbed the stairs to the second floor, but Sophie could tell something was different than the nights before. Evan lingered in the library while Hagan began rearranging the pillows of the small sofa rather than slipping behind his desk.

"What are the two of you about?" she finally asked, and Evan laughed.

"You've spent most of the day staring at the both of us with a hungry look in your eyes." Hagan finally eased onto the sofa and waved her to him. "Now is your chance to take what you want from us." Sophie stared at him, and heat rushed to her cheeks. Certainly he didn't mean for her to have them both! But the thought sent a wild flurry of excitement through her.

"Hagan..." she whispered but didn't finish. She didn't want to decline but to accept...what would that make her? She and Hagan were already lovers. But to be so with two men?

"No one needs to know. If anything, the doctor and I can be discreet. He has explained you are curious, and it is natural that you would be." Evan seemed to know the reservations she had. "I would not wish to come between you and the doctor. I do not care if I am used this once." He grinned devilishly.

No, she'd learned quickly enough that Evan had many lovers. She imagined he wouldn't care if the whole of New York watched them. He was shameless and made no excuses for his behavior. But he had kept her occupation a secret, and she believed he would do nothing to shame her.

"If you don't like something, you merely have to say so. We wouldn't want you to feel uncomfortable," Hagan added.

She nodded that she understood and as if that understanding was a silent cue, Hagan stood, and he and Evan began undressing. As they stripped down, her stomach knotted with nervousness and excitement. Evan was different than Hagan. He was lean muscles and without as much hair. His cock was long but not as thick as Hagan's. Still, he was all male.

They moved toward her, but it was Hagan that touched her first to undress her. He was different than before, controlled, not as rushed to have her. It made sense that he would not be the same alone as he was if he were sharing a woman. That warmed her that his intensity was reserved for them.

Once she was naked, his hands swept over her skin. "It is different for us than before, too. It has always been women neither of us are attached to that we've shared before. We've already discussed our boundaries, but do you have any?" Did he really believe she could think when he dropped his hand down between her thighs to stroke her sex?

"I've never done this before to know any boundaries...do the two of you touch one another?" She bit her lip, when the corner of his lips lifted.

"Is that what you want?" His gaze lifted to meet hers, and she shook her head. "Then no, we will not touch one another. We'll both only touch you." Behind them, Evan chuckled. She didn't care if they were laughing at her as long as Hagan continued to do what he was doing. She sucked in her breath when Evan's hands brushed across her back and down over her ass. They guided her to the sofa and settled down, one on each side of her.

"I've got to go tomorrow and meet with some doctors." Hagan told her as if there was nothing at all wrong with the three of them sitting on the sofa naked together. "To show them the new designs. I'll be gone most of the morning."

"What of your clients?" she asked.

"I cleared his schedule," Evan supplied as he reached for her

breasts, running his fingertips over the sensitive skin. After a moment, his hands dropped to her thighs, and he pushed them apart. Then he bent forward and placed his mouth on her. She gasped as he began to lick at her. Hagan drew her back across his lap so he could kiss her mouth and jaw.

"Do you like this, Sophie? Having two men to bring you pleasure?"

"It feels divine," she admitted and then sucked in her breath when Evan pushed his finger into her, his tongue continuing to lap and tease her clit. Hagan's mouth left hers, and he bent over her so he could lick at her nipples. As Evan joined a second finger with the first, Hagan circled the tip of her breast, nibbled, and then sucked hard. Heat blasted across Sophie's skin, and need quickened her pulse. As Hagan moved to her other breast to give equal attention, Evan pushed a third finger into her and began stroking quickly, his fingers cupped so he stimulated that spot he'd once explained about, all the while licking and sucking at her. Their mouths on her set her afire, and she came quickly, her voice lifting and filling the room. Neither of them moved away as her body jerked, and she bucked beneath their attention. It wasn't until those sensations became small quivers that they left her body and gave her a chance to catch her breath.

Hagan leaned down and kissed her lips gently. "Do you like this?"

"Yes, I do." She nodded, smiling up at him.

"Do you want more?" He arched a brow.

"You know that I do." He chuckled and guided her to her feet and then stood.

While she had no doubts they would enjoy themselves, she knew this was for her. She trusted them both and was confident neither would hurt her. So she closed her eyes and enjoyed the sensations they created with each brush of their fingertips.

Evan moved closer, and she felt his cock, rigid against her ass. His hands swept around her to caress her breasts while he kissed her gently on the shoulder. When she opened her eyes, she found Hagan watching her while he continued to stroke her sex.

"Open," he murmured. She widened her stance, and a moment

later his finger plunged into her, his palm moving against her to stimulate her clitoris. He leaned forward and caught her mouth with his and kissed her deeply. She lost herself in his lips, in the way his tongue danced against hers. His finger thrust in and out of her until her body shook and then he pulled away. She moaned protest against his mouth before he released her from his kiss.

Evan's hands left her as well as Hagan guided her back to the sofa. He sat and turned her so she faced away from him and sat her down on his lap, his cock nudging before he sheathed himself inside of her with a deep groan. Sophie loved the way he fit her, how full she felt when he was inside of her. She would have begun moving atop him except Evan stepped forward, his cock positioned right at eye level.

"Will you give me your mouth, Sophie?" Evan asked and stroked his cock. She licked her lips and leaned forward. It felt scandalous and exciting to have Evan between her lips while Hagan grasped her hips and lifted her up and down on his cock. She sucked to the same rhythm of Hagan's thrusts, moaning around Evan's cock when Hagan, causing Evan's breathing to become quicker.

"Stop or I shall fill your mouth." He stepped away from her, and Hagan lifted her from atop him. He slid down the sofa to settle between the back and the arm of the piece, and then turned her so she could straddle him.

Once settled back on his cock, he reached for his shirt and as he began twisting it, Sophie shuddered knowing he was about to bind her as he'd done before. This time, her wrists were tied in front of her and then, leaning forward, he settled her arms over his head so that she was bound around him. He settled back, bringing her to him, and she was certain he could feel the excited beat of her heart against his chest where the hair tickled her nipples.

"You have a lovely ass, Sophie." Evan spoke from behind her, his hands sliding over each crescent. She realized what was about to happen. Hagan had already had her in every way a man could have a woman, but she'd never imagined having two cocks inside of her at once.

She looked back to see Evan scooping some of the salve from a jar

on Hagan's desk. He applied it to his cock. Then he wiped his hands clean on the shirt he'd discarded earlier before he returned to her and grasped her hips. He lifted her slightly so he could position his cock against her ass, and then pressed into her slowly until he filled her completely. She gasped when Hagan lifted, pushing his cock into her. It was an amazing feeling of fullness, and it caused her to tremble. Then in unison, they withdrew slightly before thrusting deep. She cried out, arms tightening around Hagan, and he brought her to his lips to kiss her again, as Evan rocked back. When he pushed forward, Hagan withdrew. When he thrust, Evan pulled back once more. It gave her little time to catch her breath. All she could do was hold onto Hagan while they rocked in and out of her like that.

"Is it too much?" Hagan asked against her lips, the sound of his voice heightening her arousal.

"No. I want more." She panted. As if they'd been waiting for her to say that very thing, they fell into the same rhythm so that she was filled with them both at once. They drove into her fully, and she moaned as tension knotted in her stomach. She could do nothing to help them with her arms around Hagan and Evan gripping her hips, holding her in place. In and out. In and out. They pumped into her, their own grunts and groans filling the silence of the room.

One of Hagan's hands slid between them to pluck at her nipples as they increased their rhythm. Her body shook as she found pleasure. It was amazing and when she came, she screamed, bucking between them.

"Good God, Sophie." Evan released into her, filling her with heat. He leaned forward and buried his face into her hair, breathing heavily. Hagan grew still beneath her while she and Evan caught their breaths. Slowly, Evan pulled from within her and stepped back.

"Are you all right?" Hagan asked, and Sophie nodded, smiling. She was more than all right. Her whole body tingled. Evan headed downstairs without covering himself. The moment he was gone, Hagan moved lightning quick, lifting her off him and settling her onto the sofa. In the next moment, he pushed her bound hands over her head and plunged deep inside of her. Gone was his reserve. She could see in his eyes, he'd

purposely been controlled before. Now it was just the two of them.

He thrust forcefully into her, and she drew her knees up around him so she could lift up to meet his movements. She could see he was close and helped him as much as she could, watching the wildness in his eyes while he pounded into her. His mouth crushed hers as he neared release, and his tongue filled her mouth as his rhythm became wild. And then he plunged deep, his muscles locking as he came, a shout pushing past their lips before he delivered several more strokes into her.

"You are so wild, like some creature..." she said, but his mouth stopped her from finishing, and he kissed her long and hard until Evan returned with a wet cloth for them to clean themselves with.

Chapter Seven

Sophie paced the floor. She was surprised at how much it mattered to her that Hagan's instruments win approval from the other doctors. He'd been gone since that morning and now with the afternoon growing closer, she prayed that meant orders were being made. The sound of the carriage rumbling to a stop outside at the street brought her across the room. She threw open the door and was down the steps before she realized it wasn't Hagan's carriage. She frowned. Evan had told her that he'd cleared the doctor's schedule.

And then her throat closed. Owen. She turned to run back inside and call out for Evan, but Owen was quicker. His arm snaked around her waist and picked her up off the ground. She screamed, but his free hand clamped over her mouth as he carried her to the carriage and tossed her inside. Before she could escape, he climbed in behind her and gave the roof a tap.

"Didn't expect me, did you?" Owen purred softly as she pressed herself against the opposite side of the carriage. "Thought I would just let you marry that doctor after what you did to me?"

"I've done nothing to you." Her voice shook.

"You left without telling me you were leaving and made me come here away from the mill for a month. I've lost money because of you." He sneered at her. "You owe me."

"I owe you nothing. Stop this carriage this minute or I swear you will regret this." Sophie forced strength into her voice. Evan would have

heard her scream and come looking for her. When he found her gone, he would turn over the entire city of New York to find her. And when he did...Owen would see that Evan was more than a pretty face.

"You think your fiancée and that dog that follows him around will save you?"

Sophie lifted her chin. "I know they will."

Owen leaned closer. "And you will send them away when they try."

"I most certainly will not."

"Oh yes you will." And then he hit her. Hard.

* * * * *

Hagan stared at Evan. "What do you mean she's gone?"

"I heard her scream and when I came down here, she was...gone."

Evan shook his head. "I went to the train station, but the train doesn't leave until the morning. No one there had seen her."

Hagan cursed under his breath. He'd been bombarded with feelings of someone watching them but had dismissed his instincts as paranoia. Now, Sophie was gone. No doubt taken by Daughtry for he was the only person who knew she was there and would want to take her away from him.

"We check the hotels and inns for Owen Daughtry. We find her tonight so that he won't take her back to Boston tomorrow."

Evan's gaze widened. "You think it was *him*. Good God, Doctor! You know what he will do to her..."

"Now," Hagan told him, and Evan nodded, turning to hasten through the door, reaching for his coat and hat as he went. Hagan followed, climbing behind him into the carriage. Yes, Hagan knew what would happen. Sophie was stronger than when she'd first come to them. She'd weathered his abuse before. She could do so again until Hagan could get to her. And he would make Daughtry rue the day he'd laid eyes on him.

"What will you do when we find them?" Evan interrupted his

fuming thoughts as the carriage lurched forward.

"Make certain that she hasn't been injured too badly," Hagan said.

"And him?" Evan pressed.

Hagan glanced at the young man. "I don't know." It was the truth.

"You love her."

Evan nodded as if he'd affirmed the accusation.

"Then you should marry her, Doctor. She would make you a good wife."

Hagan frowned. "I will not force a woman who has been so misused into marriage. She needs time to heal and become stronger." Evan looked like he might argue, but one sliced glare from Hagan and any opinions he had he stifled.

It was close to evening by the time they located the inn where Daughtry was registered. At first, the keeper didn't want to give him the room number but with a little physical persuasion on Evan's part, he finally told them that Daughtry was staying in room seven. Hagan told him to send for the police officials before he started upstairs.

Up the stairs, Hagan strode forward. He didn't knock, first trying the door handle, then stepping back and with all of his might kicked the door. The lock busted, and the door flew open, revealing Daughtry sitting near the small hearth.

Hagan entered as Daughtry jumped to his feet, his gaze darting around the room and then resting on the empty bed. "Where is she?"

"Who?" Daughtry bellowed.

"You know very well who. Where is Sophie?" Hagan heard a soft sound from the trunk at the foot of the bed. His chest tightened. Owen stepped between him and the piece before he could comprehend what the sound he'd heard actually was.

"I have made certain that she will send you away," Owen told him.

"I will not be sent away," Hagan growled as the trunk sounded again. He strode forward, pushing Owen out of the way. He quickly unbuckled the straps and shouted with outrage when he flipped open the top. Sophie curled inside the space, her face bloodied and bruised. Anger swept through him so violently that he shook when she peered up at him

from between swollen eyes and then reached up for him. Her arms were bruised as well.

Tenderly, he reached down and lifted her from the trunk. She'd been beaten; he could tell by the way she winced despite his attempts to be gentle. But her fingers curled into his coat as he cradled her in his arms.

"I knew you would find me," she whispered.

"Good God," Evan murmured when Hagan turned and he got his first glance at Sophie's battered form. Hagan said nothing, as he strode past him and from the room. Evan followed and frowned when Hagan indicated he wished him to take Sophie.

"You are safe now. I won't be but a minute. Then we'll go home, and I'll take care of you." He spoke softly, and then kissed her on the cheek. Evan took her in his arms and hurried downstairs. Once they were gone, Hagan turned to face Owen Daughtry again. He stepped forward, removing his coat. He threw it aside and then unbuttoned his cuffs as he kicked the door closed behind him.

* * * * *

Six months later...

Sophie smoothed down the skirt of the expensive dress she wore. It was fine silk material that flattered her figure with its French cut. She smiled and faced Evan when he held out his arm.

"Are you ready for this?" he whispered as they hurried through the doors in the church.

"I have never been more ready for anything my whole life," she replied. He nodded, and they both faced forward. Her gaze drew to Hagan, looking very dashing in his expensive suit. As they drew closer, he held out his hand and Evan gently placed her hand in the doctor's.

"After this, I'll never let go," Hagan warned softly.

"Nor will I," she vowed, and they faced the preacher.

"We are gathered here today to join this man and this woman..." the preacher began.

Charlotte's Brides: Sophie by Sable Grey

The End

Author Bio

Sable Grey resides in the deep south of the United States with her wonderful husband, three very spoiled dogs, and three crazy cats. She spends her time researching her genealogy, designing cover art, watching movies, and reading.

With favorite authors like Stephen King, Piers Anthony, and Iris Johansen, it's no mystery where the inspiration to write tales of love, adventure, and mystery come from. An avid reader and storyteller at a young age, Sable began writing small stories as a child for her mother. However, it wasn't until she was well in to her twenties that she realized that her calling was sharing her stories with a larger audience than just family members and friends.

Now, Sable is dedicated to her craft and to bringing her readers quality fiction with unforgettable characters. For her, writing a story means writing a story meant to touch the mind, body, heart, and soul.